



2023 Peer-to-Peer Meeting for LGBTQ Underserved Grantees: Follow-up Resource on Power Sharing

In May 2023, we gathered for a series of three Peer-to-Peer meetings of LGBTQ-focused Underserved Grantees. During our time together, we talked about frustrations related to and strategies for managing organizational partnerships. Our discussions of project team communication, transparency, accountability, and trust-building repeatedly led to the topic of power sharing and how it shows up—or doesn't—for both Grantees and their partners.

Power Sharing

Power sharing is a concept most often associated with political governance, and the management of the often divergent interests of key stakeholders that can, and do, lead to conflict. Within the political context, power sharing is meant to foster inclusion and reduce tensions arising from fluctuating allocations of power among parties.

Within the non-profit context, the concept has been applied in multiple ways. There has been increasing discussion of power sharing within the philanthropic community. As described in Stanford Social Innovation Review's Winter 2024 issue, "Power sharing, sometimes referred to as participatory grantmaking, democratizes philanthropy by inviting community members to become decision makers." We are also seeing power sharing within the organizational context with non-hierarchical organizational structures, or executive co-director models.

The principles reflected in these applications of the concept of power sharing - inclusion, democratization, distribution of resources and influence - can also be seen in power sharing *between* organizations. It is this version of power sharing that is addressed in this resource.

Examples of power sharing in domestic violence contexts

Power sharing has particular poignancy within the domestic violence (DV) space, given how central an understanding of power and control is to understanding the dynamics of DV. When considering the power dynamics present when comparing mainstream community-based organizations and groups focused on underserved communities, access to resources stands out as a representation of power imbalance.

So what does power sharing look like for organizations and groups serving underserved communities? First, there must be ongoing honest conversations about how power shows up in the relationship between the two (or more) organizations (a resource for beginning and continuing those conversations can be found at [Partner Power: A Technique for Building Authentic Community Partnerships](#)).

For example:

1. *Funding.* Mainstream organizations or organizations with more access to funding because of their 501c3 status, organizational capacity, access to stakeholders via board relationships, etc., can share resources with groups focused on underserved communities. This can look like subgrants, fiscal sponsorship, joint fundraising, and facilitated introductions to funders. To truly be power sharing, there should be a genuine effort to establish independent access to funding for the community-specific organization.
2. *Visibility.* Mainstream organizations may have communications staff, access to media, and an established social media presence. Power sharing can elevate and amplify the community-specific group's work, and the needs of the community served by that group.
3. *Community Trust.* One of the most important strengths of community-specific services is the relationship with the community itself, often because the group itself is made up of members of the underserved community, and is culturally and linguistically aligned. Groups that serve underserved communities often describe themselves as the only place that survivors trust, which places a significant responsibility on those groups to be nimble and resourceful. That trust can be prized, and hard-won. Mainstream organizations rely on the trust the community-specific organization has built in order to broaden and deepen their impact.

4. *Infrastructure.* More well-established organizations can be better able to weather challenges than smaller organizations that are incredibly adept at being responsive but vulnerable to unexpected losses of resources or staffing. Power sharing can mean sharing things like back office functionalities (bookkeeping, grant writing, etc.), office or event space, human resources policies, and other infrastructure.

As organizations are looking at intentional power sharing, it is critical for all parties to realize that the ways they derive and maintain their own power and influence may be points of tension. For example, perhaps a mainstream organization has built a strong relationship with local law enforcement, but the community-specific group may have experiences of being targeted by police and distrustful. These groups will have to have candid conversations about this tension, and explore what it means: can the mainstream organization build their own knowledge of civil as opposed to criminal remedies? Can they learn from the community-specific group about restorative justice approaches? Does the community-specific group need the mainstream organization that is trusted by law enforcement to intercede on behalf of survivors, while ensuring the population-specific advocacy of the community-specific group is included?

True power sharing occurs within long-term relationship-building, a mutual understanding of respective missions and definitions of success, and an ongoing commitment to collaborating honestly. While sharing resources can occur in a more transactional way, it will not fulfill the promise and potential of power sharing to broaden and deepen impact - and most importantly, ensure access to safety and agency to survivors regardless of what communities they are part of.

Further Reading on Power Sharing

[Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement | Urban Institute](#)

[Partner Power: A Technique for Building Authentic Community Partnerships](#)

[Shared Power Podcast – Freedom Lifted](#)

[8 Conversations for Shared Leadership – Freedom Lifted](#)

If you need agency or organization specific support, please request TA services from your ALSO Underserved TA Point-of-Contact. If you don't know who this person is, please contact underservedtaproject@also-chicago.org to be connected to them.

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