



Sources of Transforming Power

Overview: This activity explores participants' sources of personal and shared sources of power and introduces a JASS framework of inclusive and transformative forms of power (power to, within, with and for) as distinct from power over.

Purpose: We use this activity to help participants recognize and name our own sources of personal and collective power as activists, facilitators and organizers. Using brainstorming, living statues and discussion we enrich our understanding of our experiences and analyze sources of power with a JASS framework that names 4 kinds of transformative power.

Time Needed: 50 - 60 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Flip charts
- Paper cards
- Markers
- Masking tape
- Handout with Sources of Transformative Power (attached).

Credit: Adapted from JASS Southern Africa and JASS Mesoamerica

Process:

Facilitator Note: Ahead of time familiarize yourself with the Sources of Transformative Power concepts (see attached handout). You may want to provide the chart as a handout or up on a flipchart at end of the activity.

1. Give the participants some paper or cards. Ask them to think about and write down:
 - *What sources of personal and professional power do you draw on as an activist or community leader?*
 - *What about as a good facilitator or organizer? (if appropriate to the group)*





2. Have the participants pair up with another participant and discuss the sources of power they feel they have, and both the similarities and differences in their experiences.
 3. Ask each pair to choose one source of power and create a living statue that represents it. The statue can have moving parts.
 4. Each pair present their statues and the bigger group guesses what they mean. Once the group has guessed get the presenting group to explain what they were thinking.
 5. Record what emerges on a flip chart. Ask at the end if anything is missing from the list of sources of power, and if needed, add to the list. (You should note to yourself those that fall under power within, with, to and for).
 6. Synthesize and introduce the concepts of **transformative power** -- ideas developed by women's rights activists and feminists to describe the different categories of power people use to transform and improve their lives and their societies. Handout the sheet with the Sources of Transformative Power.
 - With help from the group, cluster the ideas on your list of sources according to *power with, within, to and for*. You can ask for other examples.
 - Stress how these forms of power interact and reinforce one another (e.g. we often discover our sense of *power within* and *power to* in the context of working with others, *power with*; *power for* grows out of a deepening sense of the other three as we get clear what it is we want to create and change in the world around us).
 - How do these definitions *resonate with our definition of power, and how are they different than power over? Anything we might add?*
- Optional additional discussion (if the group feels ready to go one level deeper. You can also come back and use these questions at a later point.)
- Brainstorm: *Reflecting on our experiences, how do we foster power within? Where do we develop power to? How do we build power with? And what gives us a sense of power for over time?*
7. Wrap Up – Ask group: *What have you learned that is new about power?*



Handout

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER AND ITS SOURCES

“Transformative power” refers to power relationships that reject the domination and exclusion of some persons by others. Transformative power grows from respect for self and equality with others - in all their diversity of identity, experience and ability. It is the power inside us (“power within”), the collective power together with others (“power with”), our ability to speak out and act (“power to”) and in the power to work for the change we want (“power for”). These alternatives offer positive ways of expressing power that enables us to create more equitable relationships and structures and to transforming power over.

Sources of Transformative Power

Power within: Refers to person’s sense of self-worth and self-knowledge, realization that they have power, their capacity to hope, imagine, think critically, question assumptions, say no or yes, respect others, collaborate; power that is grounded in values of our human rights and fundamental dignity. Sometimes referred to as “personal empowerment” -- often manifested in acts of confidence and courage.

Power to: Refers to unique potential of everyone to shape his or her life and world, the ability to speak up or take action, for instance, to join a protest, write a banner, organize a meeting, scream, remain silent or defy that which is being dictated to someone. “Power to” is about what sometimes is called *agency* – the willingness and capacity to act – and builds on power within and power with.

Power with: Refers to the power of/in numbers acting together to achieve a common goal. It is about people unified across differences by shared purpose and multiplying their individual talents, knowledge and resources to make a larger impact. It is about the collective power found in community and common ground.

Power for: Refers to the combined vision, values and agenda of change that inspires us and informs the work we do. It builds on the other forms of transformative power and encourages us to create strategies and alternative institutions, relationships and ways of living that reflect our beliefs and hold the seeds of the world we seek to create.