Session Four
Community Power Structure

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• Coordinator, Extension PRIDE Program; work with organization, planning, evaluation, and recognition of volunteer community improvement groups across the state.
• Extension Liaison, KSU Center for Engagement and Community Development; work to link campus research and outreach activities to community needs.
• Kansas Environmental Leadership Program; statewide leadership development program integrating knowledge of natural resources with public leadership skills.
• Community Coaching Academy, Public Issues Forums Facilitation, and Extension Community Development professional development.

Learning Objectives

Participants will understand:
• Ways to identify the power structure of a community.
• Key concepts of community power, authority, and Leadership.
• How power concepts have changed, yet many people and institutions have not.
• Why community issues in today’s reality call for different types of power and leadership structure.

Credit: Session is adapted from the 2006 NCRCDR Foundations of Practice Materials developed by Dr. Janet Ayres, Purdue University, Indiana.
Discussion Activity
In your community…
• Who are the people or organizations who influence major community decisions?
• Why did you identify these people or organizations?
• What gives them power?

Historical Characteristics of “Influentials”
• Majority in 40-65 age range
• Above average income
• Above average education
• Business/professional occupations
• Long-term residents
• Often do not reflect the diversity of the population
• Control key resources in the community

Types of Community Power (Competing Theories)
1. Pluralism
   • The way democracies work. No dominant source of power. Capacity for gaining power is widely distributed and held between competing interests.
   • Individually focused, with individuals making choices and exercising power through purchasing, voting, etc.
   • Often measured by event analysis technique.
Types of Community Power Structures

Pluralistic
- Individual influence
- Occasional collaborative grouping

2. Elitism
- A small group of individuals control the power, resources, and agenda of the public.
- This hierarchical structure has few at the top making decisions and rules for the rest.
- “Kings and King-makers”.
- Often based on wealth and privilege.
- Often researched by “Reputational Technique”
3. Class-based Theory of Power
   - Those that control the economy, control the political agenda.
   - Who is in charge is not as important as that they are facilitating profit-making.
   - Similar to elitism, but shared within a social class.

4. The Growth Machine
   - Variation of class-based that is a coalition of groups that perceive economic gain from community growth.
   - Tends to include a combination of interests: developers, construction companies, providers of home insurance, real estate agents, owners of commercial or rental properties, banks, or business development.
Types of Community Power Structures

- Growth Machine
  - Special Interest
  - Single-focus Cause

Importance of Understanding Community Power Dynamics
- Know who has the authority to make community decisions.
- Know who controls/influences resources.
- Know who is not part of the decision making process that should be.
- Know how to build community power from both within and outside of the community.
- Enable us to develop more inclusive, effective community programs.

Community Power Actors Determine...
- Which community issues are addressed, or not addressed.
- The outcomes of community decisions.
- Allocation of internal or external resources needed for community action.
Identifying Community Power Actors

Reputation:
Those with the reputation for community power among knowledgeable members of the community.

Positional:
People in organizational positions with authority to make decisions.

Event Analysis:
People who participate most actively in community events.

Political Capital
• Consists of organization, connections, voice and power of individuals in community.
• Is the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources within a social unit, including helping set the agenda of what resources are available.

What Does This Mean for Communities?

- Why would a community want “shared” power?

- How would a community go about creating shared power if it wanted to?

The Choice & Consequences of Power

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Consequences</th>
<th>Abandoned Agency</th>
<th>Authentic Agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Consequences</td>
<td>Ritualized Agency</td>
<td>Incomplete Agency</td>
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Agency = the capacity for local action and resilience

What Are Current Community Expectations Regarding Power?

In the 21st Century, what are the assumptions or expectations community members hold in relation to exercising community power?
Moving from Community Development “for” to “by”

How Can a Community Build Power?

• Civic involvement in identifying important issues
• Citizen voice in public prioritization and decision-making
• Developing structures or systems that allow for shared power and decision-making.
• Shared Leadership – Leadership Development programming

Resources


Looking Ahead: Session Five

Community Situational Analysis

Lori Garkovich
University of Kentucky