

# The Power Analysis Workbook

Part of The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox by Collective Threads Initiative

In The Meaningful Engagement Handbook, we note: “Social power is the capacity of different individuals or groups to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda.” This worksheet is designed to analyse a specific project, programme, or activity to determine ideas for mitigating [power](#) dynamics.

## Ways to use this workbook

This workbook can be used as a simple self-reflection before beginning a project. Alternatively, consider having the [co-creation](#) team review this worksheet as a group activity to reflect on power dynamics and strategies for mitigating them. Some questions can be used as journaling reflection questions or as weekly discussion topics for planning meetings. Remember to document the responses and develop a plan for follow up. Feel free to adapt this worksheet for your unique context in alignment with our Creative Commons licence.

## A note on power

Power dynamics are often part of the contexts in which we are operating. They are created by social dynamics that no one person can control. So, our goal for collaboration isn't to *erase* or *ignore* power dynamics (even if that is our ultimate [organising](#) goal), it is to identify them so we can make intentional plans to not allow them to dominate or overly influence our work.

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## Who sets the agenda?

*This is an essential reflection question before beginning activities and inviting people into collaboration. By “agenda” we mean the activities that will be planned and the order and structures in which we will do them, whether it is for one event or for a full programme plan. Even if the person setting the agenda has lived experience, it is important to reflect on potential power dynamics and plan for mitigation.*

**Who will set the agenda?** What are the identities and experiences that influence that person’s understanding of group needs, in terms of geographical region, gender, educational background, professional experience, activism/[organising](#) experience, and race?

**What perspectives are missing from the current agenda development?** How can we ensure those perspectives are engaged prior to the formal invitation to collaboration (on a grant, programme, or project)?

**Are there any revisions to our standard process for developing agendas and workplans that could be revised so that we have an institutionalised practice of co-creating agendas?** What is our plan for follow up? And how will we confirm if we have completed our overall policies and protocols?

## Who gets what?

*The Meaningful Engagement Handbook says: “Obviously, power dynamics can influence who gets access to resources. It also influences other things that are less tangible but equally real and significant.... Remember: This is not just about resources but is also about fundamental rights and privileges that are sometimes quite subtle, particularly to those who benefit from this kind of power.”*

**Who gets to disclose lived experiences?** Who can get into the room without having to disclose lived experience? Who is typically assumed to not have lived experience? Who might be assumed to have lived experience, whether they disclose it or not? Whose lived experiences are visible and whose cannot be readily identified by others? Who gets to have their [dignity](#) and privacy honoured and who is more likely to be asked intrusive or inappropriate questions?

**How does this power to choose whether or not to disclose influence how people and their insights are perceived or valued?** What can we do as an organisation to ensure that those who are unable to maintain privacy over whether or not they have lived experience of an issue are not “put on the spot,” expected to do additional labour, or othered?

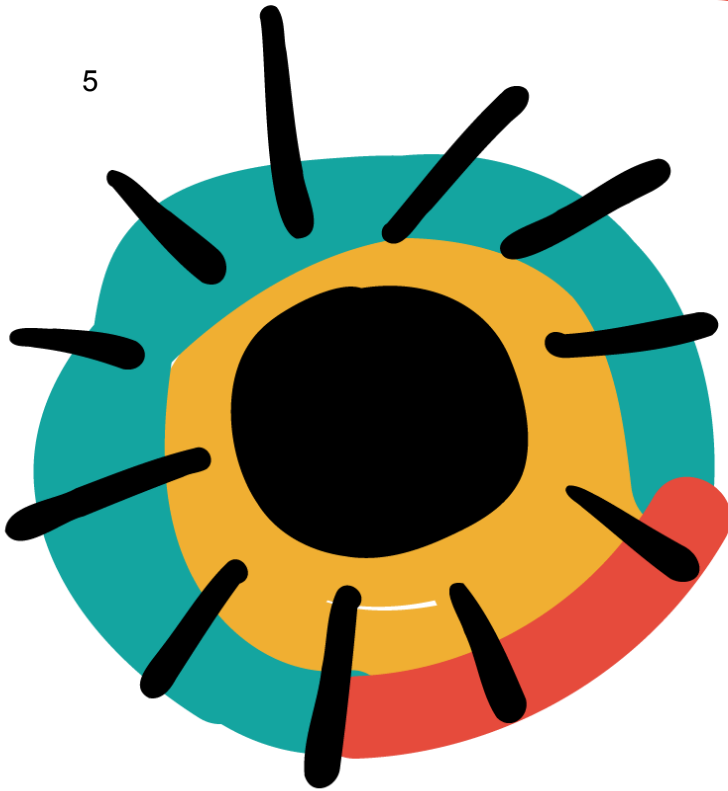
**Whose guidance and feedback are considered to come from their professional expertise? Who is more likely to have others assume that their feedback is personal?** What practices can we put into place to ensure that all input is honoured and to minimise confusion or [tokenisation](#)?

## Who does what?

*In The Meaningful Engagement Handbook, we note: “A solid power analysis will explore what is defined as valuable work and also explore how essential labour is distributed.”*

**What skills are valued in our sector?** What labour in our work may be considered by some to be “unskilled work,” and what can we do to reframe the different aspects of our work as requiring a different set of equally competent skills? How can we honour the need for relevant experience while remembering the reality that not all experience is from paid work? How can we honour that some positions require certain skills or knowledge while remembering that not all skills or knowledge are gained through formal education? And how can we balance the need for experience, skills, and knowledge with the reality that movements must plan for succession by fostering new leadership and learning?

**Who gets hired, and into what kinds of positions?** What kinds of labour are seen as “productive” and how is work time structured around “productivity”? What shifts are needed in our organisational policies and protocols to ensure that productivity never comes at the cost of wellness, mission, and values?



**Whose knowledge and expertise are deeply respected?** What kinds of expertise do we value more or less, and who gets to be seen as an “expert”? What kind of knowledge is seen as “objective,” and where and by whom do we believe knowledge is created? And what assumptions do we hold about which people are capable of learning or doing which things? Not all forms of knowledge or expertise are the same, and yet they are all valuable and essential to our work. How can we reflect our commitment to this through our policies, protocols, and compensation philosophy?

## Who decides what?

*The Meaningful Engagement Handbook notes: “Power is not shared when decisions about funding and ethical development practices are not shared.”*

**Who are our donors and how do their expectations influence our work?** How have we leveraged our relationships to educate our donors about the importance of non-tokenising meaningful engagement? How are decisions made about what kinds of donors and funding will be pursued? How can we institutionalise change to ensure our funding supports, rather than hinders, our attempts at lived experience engagement? Who determines how the organisation will define and measure success?

*For organisations that deliver funding and/or microgrants or other tangible resources:* **Who receives funding and gets approved for our resources? Who cannot access funding or would not get approved? How are these decisions made?** What barriers exist that make it difficult for individuals with lived experience, or grassroots and/or lived experience-led organisations, to receive and maintain funding? How can we shift power imbalances to ensure our resources are accessible?

## Our overall takeaways

**Based on our discussions above, what are some key areas of improvement for our organisation and work?** *Consider adapting the Basic Workplan from the Analysis Tools for the Lived Experience Inclusion Ladder Survey to develop a workplan for improvements.*

**How will we measure if we have successfully improved those areas? What is the follow up?**



Questions or ideas? Reach out to us at [meaningfulengagement@collectivethreads.org](mailto:meaningfulengagement@collectivethreads.org) or review the other documents in our Meaningful Engagement Toolbox at [collectivethreads.org/meaningfulengagement](https://collectivethreads.org/meaningfulengagement).