

How does Power Show Up in Creede? What Community Members Had to Say

Power is not a limited resource. Every single one of us has power, and our power can be used or demonstrated in different ways. Understanding how power shows up in communities is crucial when organizing communities to implement upstream prevention efforts. Broadening and sharing power in communities advances equity for historically marginalized groups and creates an environment where all individuals thrive.

Across Colorado, 14 community members from three communities participated in interviews in early 2023 and shared their perspectives about what power is like in their communities. The Community Organizing for Prevention Evaluation team is grateful to the community members who participated in interviews and shared their candid experiences about power in their community. Most people were currently or previously involved in Community Organizing for Prevention (COFP) efforts; some were familiar with COFP but not actively involved. These individuals represent different ages, racial/ethnic groups, sectors, and identity backgrounds and spoke from their perspectives. Taken together, these people told a broader story about how power shows up in three communities in Colorado.



Across all three communities, we heard similar themes:

- Power is held by both formal leaders, or people in official or elected positions in the community, and by informal leaders, or people who are seen to have influence and ability to create change.
- People who hold privilege and represent the status quo typically have more power than people with identities that fall outside of the status quo.
- Youth have limited power but are seen as holding potential, unrealized power.
- Who you know and the relationships you have matters when it comes to power in communities.



Here is what community members said specifically about Creede:



Creede is a rural, remote community where everyone knows everyone. Some families have lived in town for multiple generations, some live in town year-round, and others spend summers in town. This community has strong social cohesion: people are connected, get along, and care about each other. If someone is in need or experiencing hardship, community members in Creede are quick to help each other out.





Who Has Power?

- **Formal Community Leaders.** Power is most often held by formal community leaders, like the sheriff, school board, commissioners, or directors of organizations. In roles that are elected, the community has more opportunity to choose who has power in the community. But sometimes people in power (elected or not) can bring others to formal positions of power based on their personal relationships instead of who might be best for the job.
- **Those Able to Advocate and Influence.** Power is tied to people who have the ability to advocate for changes and influence decisions in the community. Money, time, privilege, and relationships all factor into the ability to influence decisions.
- **Families Living in Community for Generations.** Individuals with families who have lived in the community for generations tend to have more say than folks newer to the community. This could be because of the relationships, historical knowledge, or ties to the community that cause them to be seen as having more power.



Who Has Less Power?

- **Those Experiencing Social Marginalization.** Individuals with identities that face societal marginalization, including the LGBTQ+ community, different religious groups, or the elderly, are seen to have less power in the community, and can often feel voiceless or shut out of decision making.
- **Those Misperceived as Taking Advantage of Society.** Some people in the community are seen as taking advantage of society or not trying hard enough, and subsequently less worthy or deserving of power.
- **Youth.** Youth have limited power if any, and limited ability to choose who is in power or have a say in decisions that impact them, unless they are an all-star in academics or sports. Adults tend to tokenize youth without authentically appreciating and integrating youth voice in community decisions.



Challenges to Broadening and Sharing Power

- **Different Mindsets.** People in the community hold very different mindsets and ways of thinking about the world, including major differences in political views and ideologies. These differences make collaboration and working together to reach common goals very difficult and was cited as one of the biggest challenges the community faces.
- **Conflict and Fear of the Unknown.** People typically avoid conflict because it can be easier to not talk about hard things, and fear of difference or change can get in the way of building authentic relationships. Without trust-based relationships, sharing power is challenging.



The Future of Creede:

- **Safe Spaces and Common Ground.** Community members in Creede dream of a community with more safe spaces where people can be heard and express themselves. They also desire more opportunities to come together and find common ground, like through community dinners or events that offer food to the community, with platforms for youth to share their voice and opinions.
- **Compassion and Community Engagement.** There would be stronger engagement with people most impacted by decisions, with more compassion and deep listening, and more emphasis on seeing the humanity in people, not just the categories or groups they belong to.