How does Power Show Up in the I-70 Corridor?
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's what community members had to say about the I-70 Corridor:

"The I-70 Corridor is made up of several small communities within about 20 miles of each other. The communities are made up of members new to town and families that go back generations. Relationships are key and can lead to strong collaboration within and across the communities, though sometimes relationships are difficult to build and maintain. Although the communities are separated geographically, community members support and take care of one another."

Who Has Power?

- **Formal Community Leaders.** Power is most often held by the formal leaders in the community. People or groups who have the ability to make changes include larger employers and organizations, law enforcement, school superintendents, city councils, those who manage local budgets, and larger landowners.

- **Community Boards.** Local boards, including the town board, school board, water board, parks and recreation board, are seen to hold power in the community.

- **Generational Ties to the Community.** Individuals who have been in the community for generations are well known by community members and often hold local board positions or other formal positions of power.

Who Has Less Power?

- **Those Experiencing Social Marginalization.** Individuals with identities that face societal marginalization, including people of color, the elderly, or folks from the LGBTQ+ community, are seen to have less power and have not been provided the opportunity to feel welcome and use their strengths within the community.

- **Small Organizations.** Smaller organizations tend not to have much say in decision making and are also seen to have less power in the community.

Challenges to Broadening and Sharing Power

- **Everyone Is Not Included.** Community voice is not always represented or taken into account by those who hold formal positions of power and make decisions in the community, leading community members to feel that decisions are pre-set and community members have little influence.

- **Different Identities and Views.** Tensions exist between community members who have lived in town for generations who are generally white folks with homesteading backgrounds, and members who are new to the community who often represent more diverse identities, leading to power struggles and a shift in community culture that is wanted by some and unwanted by others.

- **Geography.** Challenges to collaboration exist because of geography, as these are different communities along the I-70 corridor and the communities belong to two different counties with some communities being incorporated and others are unincorporated. These geographic factors pose obstacles to resource and service allocation and coalition participation.

- **Different Language Needs.** Language and lack of translation or interpretation services limits engagement of Spanish-speaking and non-English speaking communities, who are seen by many as vital members of the community despite limited inclusion. With less participation and voice within the community, non-English speakers are left out of decision making and ability to create change.

- **Untapped Power of Youth.** Youth are seen by many adults as having untapped power. Youth are the central focus of communities, yet youth do not often use their voice to create change in the community or realize the power they hold.

Opportunities for the I-70 Corridor Coalition:

- **More Participation.** The coalition would benefit from increased participation by those seen as formal leaders in the community. Involvement by people with the ability to create change with community members already involved in the coalition would increase power sharing across the I-70 corridor communities.

- **Decentralization.** Given each community in the I-70 Corridor is unique, the I-70 Corridor coalition could be decentralized, and individual community coalitions could be formed, to better address and meet the specific needs of each community.

The Future of the I-70 Corridor:

- **More Language Inclusivity.** Community members in the I-70 Corridor dream of a community that creates more access and pathways for inclusion of the Spanish-speaking community by leveraging translation and interpretation services to form and maintain relationships and connections.

- **Increased Communication and Collaboration.** Communication across communities would be more effective and could lead to better representation from diverse groups in the communities. Tapping into unrealized strengths within the communities can lead to changes that improve the lives of all community members.

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