Building and Unleashing Community Power

Course Description
Communities experiencing the greatest health inequities are often less likely to exert their power to influence the institutions, decisions, and resource allocations that significantly impact health outcomes. Health equity approaches should consider power and community leadership, especially by those most affected by inequities, in the co-creation of conditions in which people can reach their full health potential. This training situates power in a health equity framework, describes authentic community engagement and community power building practices, and provides examples of how partnerships grounded in a health equity approach can advance policy and systems changes to promote health. Participants will also be introduced to community power mapping tools to help inform partnership development and strategies for building and shifting power.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this module, participants will be able to:
• Define power and explain how power fits into a health equity framework;
• Distinguish various approaches to community engagement, including asset-based and community power building;
• Identify the role of power building and partnerships with power building organizations among strategies for advancing health equity; and
• Interpret a power map and how it informs strategies to shift power and advance health equity.
Module Outline

Unit 1: Health Equity and Power

I. Defining health equity
II. Connecting health equity, powerlessness, and power
III. Applying the BARHII health equity framework
IV. Shifting conditions of power

Reflection Questions: Think about a health or community issue you are working on or is important to you…
1. Does it focus on health behavior, access and quality of clinical care, social & economic factors or physical environment?
2. What aspects of institutional power, social inequities, and historical contexts do you think affect it most?
3. How do you think institutional power, social inequities, and historical contexts shape the ways the issue is commonly addressed?
4. Through what mechanisms and at what level do you want to impact the issue?

[Insert Slide 20 (BARHII framework)]

References and Suggested Readings
• Expanding the Boundaries: Health Equity and Public Health Practice, National Association of County & City Officials, May 2014
• Exploring the Roots of Health Inequity: Essays for Reflection, National Association of County & City Officials, May 2014

Unit 2: Community Engagement and Power

I. Community engagement frameworks
II. Asset-based and deficit-based approaches to engagement
III. Empowerment and community power
IV. Community power building organizations
V. Examples of Ex-Prisoners Organizing

Reflection Questions: Think about a health or community issue you are working on or is
important to you…

1. Who is the core constituency or constituencies?
2. How is this constituency currently defining or addressing the issue?
3. What power does this constituency have to impact this issue?
4. Are you familiar with any power building organizations or activities associated with this constituency?

References and Suggested Readings

• Christens, B.D. (2013). In search of powerful empowerment. Health Education Research, 28(3).
• Wellstone. The Organizers Guide to the Galaxy: Strategic Planning.

Unit 3: Putting it Together: Partnerships that Shift Power

I. Public health and powerful partnerships
II. Treatment alternatives to prison health impact assessment example
III. Collaborative power mapping
IV. Constituencies, allies, targets

Reflection Questions: Think about a health or community issue you are working on or is important to you…

1. Who can give you what you want?
2. Who are the targets?
3. Where do interests align and collide among players?
4. How will you shift power?
   a. What would it take to move powerful players to the right and allies up?
   b. What would it take to neutralize the influence of opponents?
   c. How does your strategy move your core constituency up in a sustainable way and intervene on broader decision-making processes?
[Insert Slide 61 (the power map grid)]

References and Suggested Readings