

The Importance of Community Power in Building a Culture of Health

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is working alongside others to build a Culture of Health where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to live the healthiest life possible. Yet, today, the gaps in opportunities for health and well-being across neighborhoods and communities are large, persistent, and increasing.

We know that health is influenced by the community conditions where a person lives, learns, works, and plays, and by the level of *engagement* individuals have in their community. But as a nation, we won't close inequitable gaps in health without grassroots organizing strategies to break down existing social and economic barriers, such as poverty and discrimination and their consequences, *including powerlessness*.

Building power is particularly critical for underserved, underrepresented, and historically marginalized communities who have been excluded from decision-making on the policies and practices that impact their health and the health of their communities.

“Power is the voice, ownership, and ability for a neighborhood to say what it wants and to work together to drive the change they seek.”

The connection between community-led strategies, place, and health is strong and [research](#) has shown that the people most directly affected by systemic barriers and inequities are the best positioned to drive change in their communities. With this in mind, RWJF has prioritized supporting community power-building efforts that increase local capacity and authentically engage in influencing community health-related policy decisions.

Introducing Lead Local

Lead Local: Exploring Community-Driven Change and the Power of Collective Action is a collaborative project that brings together well-respected local power-building efforts and leaders in the fields of community organizing, advocacy, public health and science. Collectively they are working to answer the question: *How does community power catalyze, create, and sustain conditions for healthy communities?*

In answering this question, Lead Local will identify innovations in community power-building that create comprehensive, system-wide change and demonstrate how these efforts support residents to better understand and shape the conditions that impact their health.

Specifically, Lead Local is working to lift up how power is built in low-income communities and communities of color, how it shifts over time and with what influential factors, and how grassroots organizations build community power to improve social and economic conditions that advance health, equity, and well-being.

Lead Local Goals

- Deepen understanding of how power and power building operates in place;
- Build greater understanding of how to measure and track the impacts of base building, as a core aspect of community power building;
- Create shared understanding amongst collaborative members of how community power informs the conditions for health equity.

Lead Local Grantees



CARING
ACROSS
GENERATIONS

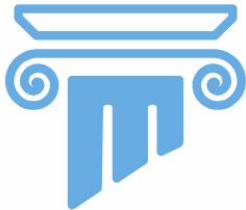
Caring Across
Generations



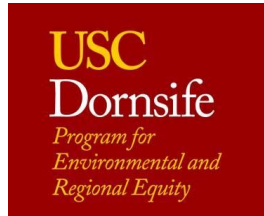
Change Elemental



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