

Sharing Power with Community

It is important that all community-based climate justice is co-created in partnership with organisations, and community members are experts in their own contexts and lived experiences. Climate justice is not simply a matter of empowering communities. The assumption that communities need to be empowered can sometimes be paternalistic and done in a way that entrenches social hierarchies and inequalities or undermines self-determination. When we are talking about empowerment, we need to talk about sharing power and giving up power.

Power affects how we interact with each other and how our communities function. Traditionally, power has been seen as "power over," where some people control and dominate others. However, to build better, fairer communities and achieve climate justice, we need to understand and use other forms of power: "power with," "power to," and "power within." These types of power help create a more inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can thrive, and they are essential for addressing the shared challenges of climate change.

Definitions of Types of Power

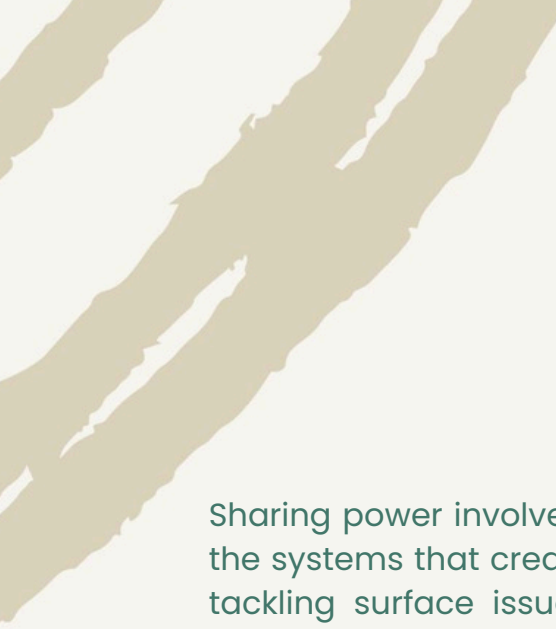
(Source: [Sustaining Community](#))

Power over: This is the type of power where people control and dominate others. It is based on the idea that power is limited and can be owned by individuals, so some people have power while others do not. Power over often uses fear and can involve physical force or control over things like money, food, and information.

Power with: This type of power comes from working together and building relationships. It is based on respect, support, and solidarity, encouraging group action and shared decision-making among equals. Power with helps to unite people within and across different groups, promoting cooperation and mutual influence.

Power to: This is the power to create change and achieve goals. It focuses on the unique abilities of each person to shape their life and contribute to the world without needing to dominate others.

Power within: This type of power relates to a person's self-worth and self-awareness. It involves recognising one's own abilities and valuing oneself while respecting others' differences. Power within helps people to believe in their capacity to make a difference and to work well with others.



Sharing power involves looking at the bigger picture and understanding the systems that create and maintain inequality and oppression. Simply tackling surface issues won't bring lasting change; we must work to dismantle the systems that cause disempowerment in the first place, as C. V. Tchida and M. Stout (2023) point out.

“A necessary factor in empowerment is going to the root cause of external disempowerment; it requires a systemic level of analysis and the active dismantling of oppression. Anything short of this will bring limited results.”

[\(C. V. Tchida and M. Stout, 2023\).](#)

Community service organisations can review their internal structures to see if and moreover, “how” the community is engaged in decision-making. E.g. Does your organisation have a Lived Experience Advisory group? Does a Lived Experience Advisory member sit on your board or steering committee? Does your organisation have an Aboriginal Governance group? Does an Aboriginal representative sit on your board or steering committee? How does your organisation engage with their clients, community, and staff? How is all this work valued and remunerated?