Community Catalyst
Libraries · Museums · Communities

POWER LADDERS

Where are **RESIDENTS** & **ASSOCIATIONS** in our work?

In Control

Advisors / Advocates

Information Sources

Recipients

When it comes to creating lasting community change, who do we see as powerful?

Who do we see as the "leaders" we most need?

If we're honest, we might admit that too often we look to organizations and traditional leaders to create the change we need. But in reality, everyone has the power to improve their community and make an impact around important local issues - especially the residents of that community!

Every neighborhood has people with the gifts and assets to create the change that is needed. Yet too often, community members don't see themselves as powerful and buy into the myth that help must always come from outside. Organizations and their staff who initiate or invest in local change efforts are often accustomed to seeing other professionals, staffed programs or elected officials as key drivers and problem-solvers, with residents playing more passive roles such as recipients or information sources for others' work.

Alternately, a resident-centered, asset-based approach to community change begins with and builds upon the irreplaceable local resources and momentum of what ordinary residents can and want to do themselves. This can take countless forms: the passion and skills of "block Moms" finding ways to protect neighbor kids, residents working together to plant trees and educate others about environmental issues, skill-shares, mutual support groups, or a neighbor-led effort to restore important rights to ex-offenders. When the existing skills and will for change among neighbors are connected and activated, the possibilities are endless!

This approach is valuable for many reasons, not least of which is that those who are directly experiencing an issue and living within a community are the best equipped to lead its transformation. From a social justice perspective, marginalized communities are often sidelined in major decision-making processes regarding their lives and communities, which marginalization and disinvestment as funding and control flows to externally-controlled agents who are assigned

to address such communities' challenges. Therefore, a focus on resident agency is also a focus on restoring equity, power, and justice.

For local organizations like museums or libraries seeking to help solve complex community issues or realize local aspirations, one key ingredient to success is their willingness to step outside of the traditional path of institutional solutions, to "lead by stepping back" in ways that make space for resident leadership, and to make a commitment "come alongside" residents and neighbors in ways that help them unlock their capacities to lead the change they wish to see.

The art of sharing and shifting power toward a community-driven approach is rarely easy or straightforward. For this reason, tools like the Power Ladder are invaluable for providing anyone aspiring to build resident power with a way to clearly visualize actual power dynamics while also discussing with their communities opportunities for supporting increasing resident control that best match all participants' capacities and motivations.

Residents in Control
Residents control goal setting, planning and implementation.

Residents as Advisors / Advocates
Residents participate in goal setting, planning & implementation. Residents may serve on governing body, advisory group, or as advocates for the organization.

Residents as Information Sources
Residents participate as part of focus groups. Staff consults with residents. Residents fill out surveys.

Residents as Recipients
Residents receive services or information.

TOOL OVERVIEW

As you think about the first steps in embracing resident leadership and enlisting other organizations in partnership, it helps to first look clearly at the power individuals and groups in the community actually hold in relation to your work.

The **Resident Power Ladder** tool can serve several purposes for those seeking to mobilize community capacities around any given issue:

- **Create clarity** for you and for others working on your project around the current role of residents and resident-led associations in your project(s)

- **Reveal strategic opportunities** for strengthening their role in ways that make sense for your project, organization and community capacities & context, and

- **Surface insights and data** around how this role has shifted from the beginning of your project. Has community members' power grown through your work? If so, how?

While each of the following tools can be utilized as best fits your project or community, we have found them to be most useful in the following sequence:

1. Resident Power Ladder – Desk Review   *15–30 minutes*

For people who work for or lead an organization (board members, key volunteers), group or coalition to look at what their organization is engaged in and how it might work to support residents and/or their target population move up the ladder. This can be a good way to prepare for a "community review" session (below).   **Worksheet:** Resident Power Ladder "Desk Review"

2. Resident Power Ladder – In-Person Community Review
40–60 minutes

This participatory, in-person exercise can be done in a community meeting to reveal where the community has power and where it wants to and might focus on expanding its power. This raises the question and requires discussion of, "How can the agencies/institutions that are often charged with running a program lead by stepping back?" (See exercise in next section.)

NOTE: If you don't yet have relationships with residents who can join a "Community Review," you can hold this exercise with project and organizational staff and organizational stakeholders. Once you have engaged more deeply with residents, we recommend holding this process again with them.

Another way to visualize approaches to engaging with residents and community:

|	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and solutions.	To obtain stakeholder feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood.	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision from development to solution.	Shared leadership of community-led projects with final decision-making at the community level.
STYLE	"Here's what's happening."	"Here are some options, what do you think?"	"Here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"	"Let's work together to solve this problem."	"You care about this issue and are leading an initiative, how can we support you?"

Source: Tamarack Institute. Adapted from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

POWER LADDER: IN-PERSON EXERCISE

1. Prepare

Materials needed:

- *index cards or large sticky notes*
- *markers*
- *painter's/masking tape*
- *a clear floor/wall space where tape, cards/notes can be placed*
- *Powerpoint/display of Power Ladder image and definitions (see previous page)*
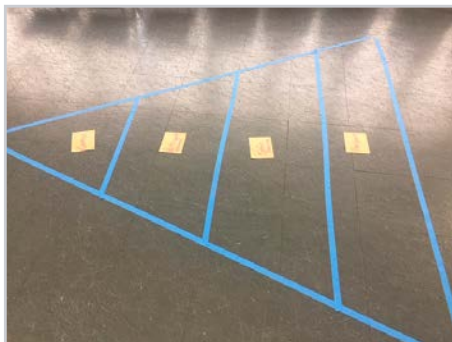
1. Put index cards on each table. (3–4 per participant)
2. Prepare 4 'role of residents' index cards by writing "Receive'' on one, "Inform" on one, "Advise / Advocate" on one and "Control" on one.
3. On the floor or wall, use tape to make a pyramid with four levels (see photo).
4. Place 1 of the 4 index cards describing the roles in each level in the same order as the power ladder. "Receive" on the bottom, then "Inform," then "Advise," and then "Control" on top.

2. Identify Activities / Programs

Before you show the power ladder slide, ask participants to identify 3-4 programs, initiatives or, if you are focusing on one program in particular, activities within a program that they conduct with residents or with your target population.

Participants then write down the name of the programs, initiatives, or activities on the index cards at their table – one program or activity per card. Use thick markers so cards can be read from a short distance.

3. Tour the Ladder

Next, show the power ladder slide and review the variable roles residents play in different areas of our community life. Sometimes we are in the ER or at a restaurant and are happy to be recipients of someone else's service! At other times, residents are in control of all aspects of an activity, project or organization.

Invite participants to call out places in their communities, ***"Where are most residents <u>recipients</u>** – garbage pick up, water and sewer, schools, etc.?"*

Then describe and do the same for the other levels...

- ***Where are residents <u>information sources</u>?** – surveys, public comment at government meetings, etc.?*
- ***Where are residents <u>advisors / advocates</u>?** – advisory committees, PTAs, neighborhood councils to city government, etc.?*

- ***Where are residents <u>in control</u>** and/ or make decisions - most associations, some participatory budgeting processes, voting, block parties, mini-grant programs, tool sharing, community gardens, etc.?*

4. Assess: *"Where are we NOW?"*

After everyone understands the differences between these roles, have the group walk over to the floor pyramid you have made and place their role / program cards in the pyramid according to the role residents play in that program.

After everyone has placed their cards, stand around the pyramid. Pick a couple cards from each level and ask the person who wrote it to describe that role or program and why they put it at that level.

Discuss a couple at each level, then ask the group for their impressions of how the cards are distributed. The group may choose to redistribute based on discussion.

*TIP: **Take photos!** Document each stage of the ladder's formation, making sure all cards are legible. Take close-ups if necessary, so that anyone who was not present can understand the pyramid.*

5. Reflect: *"Where were we BEFORE?"*

Once everyone is satisfied with how the cards are distributed, ask what is different now from when they began the project or program.

Have the group then discuss where the cards/ roles would have been when the project began, and re-position cards accordingly. Check in to make sure everyone is in agreement about card placement.

NOTE: If you are working on a new project or program, you could either skip this step, or discuss past dynamics within your community related to your organization, coalition or group.

6. Look Forward: *"How can we help people move UP the ladder?"*

Now, ask where would residents ideally be on the ladder, and what it would take to move some of the cards UP the ladder. Participants then re-organize the power ladder to its "ideal," placing cards where they'd like to see them while discussing ways to make this happen. Work with the group as needed to reach consensus on the ideal ladder placement.

It's valuable to recognize here that not all roles or programs should move up – if I need an ambulance, I don't want to gather my neighbors to discuss; I want some experts to take over.

NOTES ON STEP 6:

- **Context & Variation:** It is important to recognize context. In many rural areas, fire and ambulance service are voluntary and are appropriately in the resident control level. In urban areas, that is usually not feasible / desirable.

- **Filters:** One of the filters you can apply to this exercise is **"resident engagement."** People tend to engage where they have agency. So if I am looking for engagement, there are two 'hot spots' on this ladder:
    1. *Where people are already in the upper levels of the power ladder, and*
    2. *Where a program or project is moving up from a level*

In both cases, the issue of agency is alive and therefore those involved are more likely to meaningfully engage.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *for growing resident power*

"When People Care Enough to Act" (book),
Strategies for Institutions as Servants (handout) (Mike Green)

"From Input to Ownership: How Nonprofits Can Engage with the People They Serve to Carry Out Their Missions"
(Bridgespan Group)

"Bridging the Gap: Expert to Alongsider" (Nurture Development)

"The Shift: Participant-Centered Rubric" (Denver Foundation)

Index of Community Engagement Techniques (Tamarack Institute)

www.abcdinstitute.org (Asset-Based Community Development Institute)

BACKGROUND

In 2016, an IMLS town hall and report focused on "Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change" revealed a demand among libraries and museums for tools and approaches that could increased their capacity in community engagement. In October 2017, the first cohort of organizations was awarded IMLS Community Catalyst funding and launched projects with the goal was to become catalysts of change in their communities.

Funding recipients varied widely in their organization type and size, community, and the issues upon which they focused. Though diverse, the grant recipients shared a common goal of catalyzing communities by forging and/or supporting powerful partnerships, discovering and complementing existing momentum among residents, and supporting community leadership.

CCI grant recipients also received training, coaching and peer learning facilitated by DePaul University (DPU) and consultants from the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to community engagement that promotes existing local assets and the capacities and leadership of local citizens and associations as the starting point for creating sustainable community development. The approach focuses on improving community wellbeing by fostering resident-driven action with the support of local organizations and agencies through identifying the skills, talents and knowledge of local residents.

Developmental Evaluation (DE) is founded on the notion that evaluation and evaluators should function primarily to support learning and innovation of program decision-makers-- those "doing the work." The approach is ideal for dynamic environments involving uncertainty, nonlinear paths of action and development, that is, the types of diverse spaces where the IMLS grant recipients work. DE utilizes trained consultants to provide continual reflection, sense-making, and assistance with producing measurements that innovators can use immediately for decision-making.

AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

The power ladders and reflections featured in the accompanying documents were developed by **CCI Grantee Teams** in collaboration with the DPU Team and ABCD Evaluation Team composed of Faculty of the Asset Based Community Development Institute.