

Our work of social change has a lot to do with understanding power: where it exists, how to build it, and how to wield it. This list describes the many different forms of power that we encounter – in ourselves, in our organizations and movements, and in the world.

1. **POSITIONAL POWER** comes from organizational authority or position – often overlooked by people with the power, rarely forgotten by those without it.
2. **REFERRED POWER** comes from connections to others (e.g. a staff member without formal positional power but who has known the ED for years).
3. **EXPERT POWER** comes from wisdom, knowledge, experience & skills (e.g. someone who is widely respected because of their skills as an organizer).
4. **IDEOLOGICAL POWER** comes from an idea, vision or analysis. As Victor Hugo said, *“Nothing can withstand the power of an idea whose time has come.”* It can be the original idea of an individual, an ideal such as “democracy” or “liberation,” or a developed ideology.
5. **OBSTRUCTIVE POWER** stems from the ability to coerce or block – whether implicit, threatened or demonstrated. Those without other sources of power may depend on it. Many activists are experts in its use.
6. **PERSONAL POWER.** The manifestation of a individual’s energy, vision, ability to communicate, capacity to influence, emotional intelligence, psychological savvy, etc.
7. **CO-POWERING.** A term from the Latino community that articulates the responsibility of individual leaders to mindfully work towards supporting the personal power of others through modeling, validating and giving feedback.
8. **COLLABORATIVE POWER.** Our ability to join our energies in partnership with others in pairs, teams, organizations, communities, coalitions, and movements.
9. **INSTITUTIONAL POWER.** Economic, legal, and political power directly wielded by institutions – whether a corporation, police department, or your own organization. It exists apart from the individuals who work there at any one time, i.e. brand, membership, skills, etc.
10. **CULTURAL POWER.** The cultural norms and conditioning regarding race, class, sexual orientation, gender identification and age that accrue power and privilege to the dominant group.  
**CULTURAL POWER,** from the perspective of oppressed peoples, is also a consciousness of community or culture that serves to empower.
11. **STRUCTURAL POWER.** Power covertly or implicitly exercised through the dominant institutions of society (e.g. resistance to alternative medicine from the AMA and insurance providers or racism expressed and maintained through structures like red-lining by lending institutions).
12. **TRANSCENDENT POWER** comes from our connection to something larger than ourselves: to the Creator or Spirit, the natural world, our ancestral lineage, or the arc of history.