

How does Power Show Up in Denver PRIDE? What Community Members Had to Say

Power is not a limited resource. Every single one of us has power, and our power can be used or demonstrated in different ways. Understanding how power shows up in communities is crucial when organizing communities to implement upstream prevention efforts. Broadening and sharing power in communities advances equity for historically marginalized groups and creates an environment where all individuals thrive.

Across Colorado, 14 community members from three communities participated in interviews in early 2023 and shared their perspectives about what power is like in their communities. The Community Organizing for Prevention Evaluation team is grateful to the community members who participated in interviews and shared their candid experiences about power in their community. Most people were currently or previously involved in Community Organizing for Prevention (COFP) efforts; some were familiar with COFP but not actively involved. These individuals represent different ages, racial/ethnic groups, sectors, and identity backgrounds and spoke from their perspectives. Taken together, these people told a broader story about how power shows up in three communities in Colorado.



Across all three communities, we heard similar themes:

- Power is held by both formal leaders, or people in official or elected positions in the community, and by informal leaders, or people who are seen to have influence and ability to create change.
- People who hold privilege and represent the status quo typically have more power than people with identities that fall outside of the status quo.
- Youth have limited power but are seen as holding potential, unrealized power.
- Who you know and the relationships you have matters when it comes to power in communities.



Here is what Denver PRIDE coalition members and partners had to say:



The Denver PRIDE coalition is a youth-led group of people who are addressing risk and protective factors that impact LGBTQ+ youth in Denver. Their definition of community includes people who identify similarly and feels like belonging and being “at home,” whether within family, school, work, or community environments.





Who Has Power?

- **Formal Community Leaders.** While power exists in all of us, some people have more power than others and some are unaware of the power they hold. Those with more power tend to be people in formal roles or people who represent the status quo in society, like elected officials, directors of agencies, bosses, men, white folks, or able-bodied folks.
- **Youth.** Some youth have power, especially those who are more outspoken and want to make change.
- **Those With Social Media Presence.** Influencers on social media or people who are well known, more involved, have the loudest voice, or have more time and money to make change are also seen to have more power in the community, though their influence doesn't always benefit all in the community.



Who Has Less Power?

- **Those Outside of the Status Quo.** In general, those who have less power in the community fall outside of the traditional status quo, like BIPOC folks, youth, students or people less established in professional careers, people who speak languages other than English or who represent different cultures. These people can sometimes be seen as less important members of society, which poses a major challenge when trying to build a community where all people can thrive.



The Unique Power of Youth

- **Youth Creating Change.** Youth are leading change and shifting the norm, especially when they stand up and speak out for their needs in large numbers. More recently, youth have rallied and advocated around issues like school safety and violence prevention in actions like school walk outs. Subsequently, people and agencies seem to be building more intentionality about engaging with and listening to youth.
- **Limits of Youth Power.** While some youth are seen to have more power, so many young people are still not being heard and are left out of decision making. When youth are seen as disruptors to the status quo, they can be stripped of power by adults and intentionally excluded from decisions that impact them.



Challenges in Power Sharing

- **Disconnect Between Groups.** While some organizations are collaborating really well together, co-writing grants, supporting each other's efforts, and leaning on each other for support, other agencies are still very siloed and seem to be making their own decisions. There are broad gaps in communication across agencies and a lack of understanding of services that exist, leading to duplication of efforts.
- **Leaders May Not Be Representative.** Those who are at the table to collaborate and share power don't always represent the diversity of identities in the community and tend to be the same group of people, whether youth or adults, so the same stories, opinions, and impacts tend to be reinforced.
- **Lack of Trust.** Interpersonal relationships can make or break connections and collaboration across organizations, and sometimes mistrust in organizations is felt by the community, posing obstacles to power building and sharing.
- **Violence Towards Certain Communities.** Policies are being passed nation-wide that pose grave threats to the physical and psychological safety of the LGBTQ+ community, especially queer youth and trans BIPOC communities.



Strengths and Opportunities in the Denver PRIDE Coalition

- **They Actually Listen.** As a youth-led coalition, youth voice, opinion, and suggestion are integrated into coalition decision making and accounted for in future budgeting on a regular basis. Youth feel the coalition does an amazing job of recognizing different identities and communities, making sure that everyone's voices are equally heard.
- **Opportunities for Problem Solving.** Strong organizational structures are in place that allow space for discussion about new data or initiatives, with ample time for questions, feedback, and reflection for action.
- **Focus on Diversity and Inclusivity.** Building increased representation from diverse identities in the community is a priority of the coalition. Time, location, accommodations, and other gaps could be posing barriers to participation and should be considered when building for increased participation.



What Could the Future Look Like?

- **Safer Communities for All.** Community members from Denver PRIDE dream of more welcoming spaces where people can be their whole selves and are engaged in policy change that reduces harm for members of the LGBTQ+ community, the unhoused and substance users and brings real solutions to transportation issues and drivers of climate change.
- **Celebration of Queer History.** Schools would teach more about queer history, movements, and literature, and educate students on civic engagement and advocacy to advance LGBTQ+ rights and create a community where everyone feels they belong.