

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR  
DEVELOPING AND MEASURING COMMUNITY POWER  
FOR HEALTH EQUITY

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## FORWARD-LOOKING RESEARCH AGENDA

Through *Lead Local: Exploring Community Driven Change and the Power of Collective Action*, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has convened a diverse group of practitioners and research partners to delve into the complexity, multi-dimensionality, and dynamism of community power. Each partner has shed light on the question of how community power catalyzes, creates, and sustains conditions for healthy communities, and each partner, too, has offered a set of recommendations to advance the development of community power as a crucial lever for health equity. The present discussion contributes to these recommendations a focus on how to advance the field through research that can deepen understandings and practices of community organizing and base building to develop, sustain, and wield community power. In particular, this forward-looking research agenda emphasizes a need for more responsive and dynamic measurement of power, and outlines several avenues toward this goal.

This forward-looking agenda is based on an analysis of the extant literature at the intersection of community power and health equity and of scholarship on theories of social change and community power. We take away several key points from the landscape of this scholarship:

- There is substantial literature focused on calls for more work in studying power in relation to health equity, as well as conceptual and theoretical assertions urging the same focus, but there is a gap between conceptual and theoretical aspirations on the one hand, and empirical achievements on the other.
- Theories of change fall along a continuum that includes agentic, political process, structural, and post-structural theories. Understanding the range of theories of change that community power building organizations (CPBOs) use to inform their work helps to illuminate the particular sets of practices and beliefs that drive the strategies and tactics of different efforts and strengthen understandings of when and under what conditions efforts are successful.
- Measuring the impacts of community power on health equity requires systems-level approaches, assessment of the context-dependent strategies deployed, and attention to the processes, outcomes, and impacts of community power building – which can be more complex and challenging than assessing individual risk factors, behaviors, or disease outcomes.

The agenda that follows is shaped by an orientation that underscores the dynamism of communities, cities, and regions – a view that emphasizes the *relational* qualities of contexts rather than predominant views of contexts as sets of *attributes*. Second, the agenda is grounded in an understanding of the *dialectical* relationship between individuals and collective contexts in the process of cultivating power. Finally, the agenda embraces a critical distinction between models of mobilizing versus forms of organizing/base building. Whereas *mobilizing* signifies processes that presume groupings of individuals<sup>1</sup> to be cohesive building blocks that can or should be moved into action, *organizing* presumes that any existing groupings are starting points for organizing and base building that require deep developmental practices to cultivate emotional and analytic understandings that can then support

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<sup>1</sup> Scholarship on the ‘bases’ of organizing focus on the central features that bind together those who are organized (Silverman, 2001; Swarts, 2011). Organizing bases may draw on workplaces (like union organizing), geographies (neighborhood-based groups), constituencies (individual characteristics like gender identity, language, ethnicity, ability, and so on), issues (usually single-issue groups focused on things like the environment, schools, etc.), or institutions (most prominently congregational models).

sustained collective participation that is foundational to community power. We present this agenda as a series of questions, consideration of which is intended to guide research and evaluation conducted by community power building organizations, funders, and researchers in various contexts.

## Questions to Support Strengthening A Future Research Agenda

### 1. What is the operating understanding of community power and how community power can be developed?

The morphology of literature at the intersection of health equity and community power includes substantial literature focused on calls for more work in studying power in relation to health equity. Trends in the literature show increasing interest in community power, but there is a gap between conceptual and theoretical aspirations and empirical achievements. Perhaps most glaring is the substantial body of literature calling for community power with no articulation for how that power is to be developed. In contrast, another group of studies urges a focus on community power, but acknowledges that power requires accountability and confronting the conflict that emanates from change efforts. Nevertheless, within both groups of studies conceptualizations for how community power can be developed and how it is to be measured are exceedingly thin.

In *Developing Community Power: A Landscape Analysis of Current Research and Theory*, a review of interdisciplinary scholarship conducted for *Lead Local*, we review both challenges to measuring community power (Christens, 2019) and the ‘three faces of power’ framework – theorized by Lukes (2005) and operationalized by Gaventa (1980) – which has been a prevalent lens for viewing community power by grassroots organizing efforts (Healey & Hinson, 2018; Human Impact Partners & Right to the City Alliance, 2020; McClelland-Cohen, Han, & Dildine; 2020). Briefly, the three ‘faces’ delineate the mechanisms through which power is exercised: reward or punishment, defining public debate and setting agendas, and shaping ideology<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the exercise of power requires a source from which it may be expressed (individuals or organizations), and an understanding of how power operates or the nature of power (e.g., collaborative or conflictual). *Lead Local* is guided by a definition of community power as:

The ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity.

Although not every element of the three dimensions of power is captured within this definition, some elements can be discerned. For example, the ability to reward and punish is reflected in the idea of influencing decision makers. Defining debate is captured in the notion of setting agendas and shifting public discourse. The source of power is reflected in the description of people acting together through democratic structures. Guided by the multi-dimensional orientation to power, and to support the development of understanding and measuring community power, we urge the consideration of several additional characteristics about community power and how it operates:

- Community power is not a singular thing, attribute, or condition – rather, it is a term representing a dynamic, relational quality within communities;

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<sup>2</sup> The three ‘faces’ of power, a model many CPBOs are familiar with, particularly through products generated by the Grassroot Policy Project, are sometimes known as observable, hidden, and invisible faces of power.

- Although the actions taken by community power building groups are important to identify, a deepened understanding of how community power is cultivated requires measurement that captures the context-dependent aspects of base building strategies and community organizing approaches (Misra, Bamdad & Winegar, 2020; Pastor, Ito & Wander, 2020). Attention to these context-dependent features of community power building activities will be enhanced by understanding such practices as dialectic and developmental – both between individuals and collectivities as well as between processes and outcomes;
- Greater attention to base building processes within community power building efforts is important. Base building, a common practice in community power building, is a term often used synonymously with community organizing. To the contrary, base building practices represent a particular set of activities within organizing that invest in the cultivation and deepening of new and existing participants. As a further delineation, this investment is not about recruiting members to predetermined activities (what is described herein as mobilization), but about investments in listening to the concerns and needs of residents, and listening for analyses of why such needs and struggles exist. Although base building does entail expanding the number of participants, the main emphasis is on strengthening the relationality among participants and deepening the quality of engagement such that residents develop a sense of agency as they begin, or expand, their participation with community power building groups;
- Developing CPBOs requires both an organizational infrastructure capable of exercising power to alter local policies, and open participatory mechanisms for resident engagement that stimulate both a political analysis and a sense of agency to affect change (i.e., both cognitive and emotional empowerment). That is, building community power requires the development of both individual leaders and organizational capacity, and this development unfolds through a dialectic or reciprocal process;
- Community power is central to efforts at promoting health equity because it is the essential tool – the independent variable – that is necessary for catalyzing, creating, and sustaining conditions for healthy communities. Base building and community organizing are critical components for developing community power within the broader ecology of community actors, yet these groups are often underappreciated for the critical role they play in developing open, democratic, participatory processes that engage large swaths of community residents whose engagement is critical in the expression of community power;
- To enrich our understanding of how to build community power, research should attend to the dynamism within the processes, outcomes, and impacts by CPBOs.

## **2. What are the theories of social change underlying community power building practices, processes, and strategies?**

All CPBOs are guided by assumptions and beliefs about how group efforts will produce social change. Sometimes these assumptions and beliefs are explicit and sometimes not, but all groups have such beliefs. Detailed descriptions of organizing processes and their basis in a theory of change are largely missing from the health equity literature. Just as Whitehead (2007) calls for a stronger theoretical basis for health equity interventions broadly, others call for illuminating connections between, on the one hand, the theories of social change believed to elevate community engagement, with, on the other hand, methodologies for measuring community power generated by those efforts (Campbell & Murray, 2004). Indeed, the range of beliefs across different CPBOs is diverse. Clarifying CPBOs beliefs and

understandings about how community power produces social change, and the CPBO practices that emerge from those understandings, is critical to a forward-looking research agenda.

In the forementioned landscape analysis, we delineated four predominant categories of theories: agentic, political process, structural, and post-structural. Importantly, these dominant theories can explain the relative emphases employed in both processes for building community power and strategic outcomes groups seek to achieve. Community organizing initiatives rarely articulate an explicit theory of change, but this infrequency stems from several common factors such as the eclectic nature of theories used, the complexity of articulating change theories guiding organizing efforts, or a lack of clear theory in some efforts. Even among CPBOs guided by well-developed theories of change, such theories are rarely of interest to funders, policy makers, or community members. So, attention to theories of change employed by CPBOs is often obscured, but nevertheless important for understanding local practices and broad goals.

Despite the importance in identifying deeper theories of change guiding CPBOs, discernment of these theories is complicated by the fact that dominant theories of change are not applied with fidelity in any particular approach (Meyer & Whittier, 1994) and theories of change can be strategically altered in some circumstances. For example, CPBOs often alter particular strategies, or experiment with new methods and tools so as to sustain their efficacy at building and leveraging power. As groups modify and experiment with different practices and methods (i.e., direct action, canvassing, one-to-ones, power-mapping), they frequently draw from a repertoire of strategies and tactics that emanate from different theories of change. For instance, a CPBO focused on systemic change, often associated with structural theories, may work on developing alternative institutions, an approach often associated with agentic theories of change. From the perspective of most organizing practitioners, base building and organizing practices may draw from a range of approaches passed down historically (Han, 2014) or adopted from other influential power building efforts; consideration for the traditions and theories of change from which these practices emerged is less critical to organizers than impactful change<sup>3</sup>. Beyond health equity efforts, theories of change<sup>4</sup> that undergird different approaches to developing community power receive relatively little attention in the literature, nevertheless they are critical to advancing deeper understandings for how community power can enhance health equity. Although most CPBOs are eclectic rather than ‘pure’ in their alignment with theories of change, they are important to consider because most groups have a conceptual adherence to a particular theory of change, and that conceptual adherence tempers and shapes the varied practices actually employed.

### **3. What are the underlying values of participation espoused, and how are values of base building, community organizing, and community power reflected through multiple dimensions of practices?**

In the landscape of scholarship, community based processes that have been convened to address health inequity exhibit a range of orientations toward ‘participation.’ While some rigorous evidence points to

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<sup>3</sup> For example, many organizing efforts are labelled the ‘Alinsky model’ despite great variability between them. Furthermore, Alinsky was most influenced by labor organizing, yet there exist common threads between practices attributed to Alinsky and deeper traditions of base building for community power including the work of A. Philip Randolph, Ella Baker, Paulo Freire, Septima Clark, Fred Hampton, Jane Addams or Bayard Rustin, to name but a few.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the phrase ‘theories of change’ is used as a concept describing something akin to a logic model for how a specific social intervention achieves a goal; in contrast, the focus here is on social science theories about how social change can be achieved.

deeply participatory processes for developing community power, many studies embrace strategies that engage residents in cursory ways for limited goals. Indeed, discussions about community power within this literature demonstrate a diversity of understandings, from studies that range from descriptions of community engagement, community-based research, community capacity building, or health-focused social movements, to studies that call for in-depth outreach, base building, and organizing practices that invest in the *development of individuals as vibrant participants in community power processes*. As an example, active engagement with local physical environments and face-to-face interactions with residents still have a great bearing on individual and collective efforts in relation to power building, but social environments now also include a range of digital interactions (e.g. Landzelius, 2006; Stoecker, 2002) that can be both supportive and harmful (Bogar et al., 2018). We are now seeing a new era of digital processes where it may be easy to craft the appearance of base building (Speer & Han, 2018) without the sustained activity required for exercising community power. To advance the field of research and practice around community power in relation to health equity, we urge greater attention to the subtle and more direct ways that participatory processes are distinct<sup>5</sup> so as to lend specificity to base building and organizing practices, in particular.

Within base building and organizing approaches there are critical differences, but the field of research suffers from the lack of a clear taxonomy to help distinguish these differences (Speer & Han, 2018). Existing taxonomies of organizing tend to be antiquated, partial, or aspirational (e.g. Rothman, 2007; Silverman, 2001; Swarts, 2011). Additionally, while there exists an abundance of terms or labels used to describe different models, approaches, or methods, these terms are employed in inconsistent ways. The variability in applications effectively obscures the very distinctions the terms are intended to describe.<sup>6</sup>

To counteract these taxonomical deficits, we identify several dimensions of practice upon which base building and community organizing approaches are built, regardless of labels (Caring Across Generations, 2020; Rothman, 2007). Table 1 shows these dimensions, which reflect different conceptual framings, philosophies, and core practices that are critical to advancing the measurement and understanding of community power.

As an example of these dimensions, the lens through which the *source of community problems* is understood varies across base building efforts and can help distinguish how different groups build community power. For example, DeFilippis (2008) articulates the view that unequal power is the source of community problems, and only by building power to close the gap in this differential can the potential for change be leveraged. In contrast, the consensus organizing approach presumes that power differentials can be bridged, rather than needing to be altered, and that the source of community problems is a cultural dependency on institutions. In this view change can occur with a focus on the inherent skills and assets within communities. For consensus organizing then, collaboration, partnerships, and power-sharing are a key to resolving community challenges (Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009). Another dimension that supports an understanding of the variability in how power is developed relates to *change strategies*. Whereas some strategies seek to alter the functioning and responsiveness of public institutions (e.g., police, public health, schools) to align with community values and needs

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<sup>5</sup> One common understanding of these differences is offered by Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation."

<sup>6</sup> Some examples of organizing labels meant to capture distinct typologies include: power-based, constituency, youth, democratic, neighborhood, relational, electoral, pressure group, congregational, identity-based, civic, transformative, women-centered, community-building, Marxist, participatory, faith-based, labor, consensus, school-based, progressive, social-action, Alinskyite, and internationalist, among others.

(Gecan, 2004), other strategies focus on local communities resolving their own problems – whether labeling that process self-help, strengths-based, or asset-based models (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996).

Table 1: Key Dimensions of Base Building Practices and Organizing Approaches

DIMENSIONS	DESCRIPTIONS / COMMON ALTERNATIVES
Source of problems	Problems arise from deficits of people or lack of skills and/or motivation
	Problems arise from conditions of environment
	Problems arise from systems of exploitation and the powerlessness that they produce
Change strategies	People solve their own problems rather than looking to institutions to solve their problems for them (e.g., rather than demanding better policing, neighbors set up their own patrols and watch groups)
	Communities seek experts to address problems – need for technocratic solutions
	People form collective power and demand changes
Change tactics	Consensus-building, better communication, educate people, social marketing
	Seek others – experts, elected officials, hierarchical figures – and through respect, kindness, and appreciation relinquish community responsibility to these elites to address problems
	Confront those with power about hypocrisy on values, stated claims, democratic principles; conflict and direct action when community claims are marginalized or ignored; negotiation with power to achieve outcomes benefitting constituents
Orientation to power structure	Collaborators and partners in common goals
	Employers, sponsors, meritorious elites
	Oppressors external to community with divergent interests from residents
Boundary definitions	Target geographic area
	Target relational communities
	Target identity-based alignments (gender, race, ability, class)
	Target existing membership groups (school, faith group, workplace)
Role of Organizer	Teacher, catalyst, booster, problem-solver, broker, planner, analyst, expert, program implementer, activist, advocate, agitator, partisan, negotiator
Locus of Intervention	Point of Production - site of exploitation (strikes, pickets, slow-downs)
	Point of Consumption - visible endpoint of exploitation (boycotts, demonstrations)
	Point of Destruction - where there is harm (strip mine, land fill)
	Point of Decision - site where elites determine injustice (board meeting, slumlord office)
	Point of Assumption - challenges unreflected upon beliefs (Occupy Wall Street - 1% hold wealth)
Outcomes valued	Expressive actions that focus on communicating values, culture, or emotions
	Instrumental actions that focus on tangible change and achieving goals

#### 4. How are these common dimensions of base building and organizing *applied* through the practices, processes, and strategies of community power building organizations?

Base building and community organizing are challenging for many reasons; understanding these challenges requires an appreciation for how strategy and development reflect nuanced and context-dependent applications of organizing approaches. The dimensions outlined in Table 1 (above) manifest through many practices, processes, and strategies, but in day-to-day activities the application of these dimensions is best understood to fall along continua – four examples of which are shown below (Figure 1). Community organizers and practitioners engage in practices at both ends of the continua shown – the challenge is understanding the internal logics driving the choices for practices engaged in, and the

timing of those practices. Beyond the logic driving on-the-ground activities, when examined over time different power building groups possess preferences for one practice or another and these behavioral propensities reflect philosophical stances in relation to theories of change. Discerning the logic driving choices in given circumstances, and proclivities for specific practices over time, will help discern the conditions and approaches that most successfully develop community power.

For each continuum, there is no clear right or wrong ratio to emphasizing one or the other polarity described. Rather, attentiveness to relative emphases can help discern groups' underlying theories of change, even if those theories are not explicitly stated. For example, groups aligned with agentic theories of change will tend to invest a great proportion of time on developmental aspects of leadership whereas groups aligned with structural theories will invest greater time on strategy for objectives like shaping governing agendas. It is better still to consider organizing practices on each end of the continuum to be in *dialectic* relationship (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). In other words, different community power building groups can be characterized by practices that lie along a continuum, yet groups are not static or fixed as to their practices. Base building and community organizing practices can be understood as reciprocal – with the emphasis on different polarities along each continuum based on different phases of organizing efforts. As Figure 1 shows, these practice continua are applicable simultaneously; we describe each in more depth.

FIGURE 1: CONTINUA OF ORGANIZING PRACTICES EMPHASIZED



### *Organizational Emphasis*

All base building and organizing efforts engage in practices that both *develop* individual leaders and collective structures, but also work to *strategically* deploy organized power (Francescato & Aber, 2015; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Over time, groups develop cultures that tend to emphasize one or the other. In the extreme, when groups focus on strategy over development, they may be said to be designing a plan of attack without the proverbial army. At the other extreme, when groups focus on development over strategy, they can become more of a self-help group than a change agent. Negotiating the balance between these practices is a central challenge to base building and organizing, and understanding decisions about when to invest in development versus strategy is key to understanding how community power is developed. A common challenge in base building is that initial investments in developmental work are often unable to be sustained when groups move into action. Although groups may experience a boost in participation during phases of action, participation over the long term can atrophy if groups do not then return to cultivating leadership skills, political analyses, and other investments in individual and organizational development. This can lead to attrition of participants such that organizing groups become whittled away into smaller groups of committed activists rather than



robust participatory bases of community power. Finally, external pressures from funders or sudden changes in the political landscape are factors that may influence organizational priorities. Although developmental versus strategic emphases do not simply reflect theories of change intrinsic to CPBOs, over time the deeper philosophies and theories motivating particular CPBO decisions tend to be revealed and those anchoring theories of change are important for understanding the conditions and philosophies driving effective community power building.

#### *How to Work with Participants*

Community power building groups also navigate organizational phases that emphasize *organizing* (developmental investments in leadership and organizational strengthening) and those that emphasize *mobilization* (strategic actions taken to improve health equity) (Collura & Christens, 2015; Han, 2014; Stein, 1986). Mobilization represents a phase in the organizing process where community power is wielded to affect change, whereas base building represents a phase when individual and organizational capacity is developed (Speer et al., 1995). As with the organizational emphasis continuum described above, groups will develop cultures of practice that tend to emphasize one or the other. In the process of building community power, many considerations about how to work with participants are required. Developing power must consider the experience of CPBO participants. For example, learning about the community one lives in, expanding meaningful relationships with others, and deepening understanding of oneself in the broader world are concrete experiences of CPBO participants, but so are negotiating family responsibilities to participate, arranging transportation to events, and following through on organizational commitments. The challenge in building community power is that the excitement and appeal of action and mobilization means less investment in organizational development, yet an overemphasis on leadership and organizational developmental can evolve into few accomplishments and waning interest among participants. Research attuned to the *balance* of time that groups invest in mobilization versus development, and the *contexts* that trigger particular logics as to when to invest in one or the other, will illuminate critical aspects of community power building.

#### *Source of Decision-Making*

The degree to which participants identify issues and develop strategies from concerns and processes emanating from local contexts (emergent decision-making), versus the influence and direction deriving from organizing staff, centralized offices, or external funders (staff-driven decision-making), is another feature that differentiates power building practices. Base building – where, again, the emphasis is on deepening relationships with and among participants, as well as developing skills and political analyses among these individuals – prioritizes emergent processes, but there will always be some degree of influence by staff, consultants, and experts. Contextual pressures in the political, social, cultural, and economic arenas, however, influence the decision-making of all community power building efforts. In the current era, CPBOs across the country are increasingly confronting the pressures of neoliberalism and our new gilded age; concentrations of wealth have resulted in the need for base building efforts to operate at larger scales in order to derive sufficient power to impact upstream causes of health equity issues (Rusch, 2012). Operating at greater scales (neighborhood, municipality, state, region, etc.) or targets (labor markets, capital flows) increases the pressure for staff-driven processes. How base building efforts mediate such pressures is critical to scrutinize in ongoing research (Kleidman, 2004).

#### *View of Participants*

The fourth continuum to consider is one that captures differences in how base building efforts view participants. We differentiate organizing approaches that invest in participants so as to develop

collective power, sometimes termed developing ‘leaders’ or ‘organic leaders’ (McAlevey, 2016), from approaches that prioritize a sense of personal identity and the fulfillment of individual needs, sometimes termed developing ‘activists’ (Schutz & Sandy, 2011). Leaders represent those emphasizing the development of deeper understandings about how power functions and the need to find others open to participating in affecting change. Leadership is associated with personal qualities that align with a deep anger at injustice, an alignment of values and identity with organizing goals (Oyakawa, 2015), and a commitment to finding others who will commit and sustain themselves to building power (Chambers & Cowan, 2006). In contrast, activists are those motivated to lead, to speak the loudest, to pull people into the insights and understandings they already possess (Han, 2014). Activists are no less committed to most of the same ultimate goals, but they might be said to lack the patience to develop other leaders – and often the ego and identity of the activists are prioritized over the development of new participants, at the expense of building the power required to affect change.

## **5. What are the relational qualities of dynamic power building processes and community power outcomes?**

Community power is not an attribute or condition, but a dynamic relational quality. While there are different ways to capture relational qualities of social change efforts [see Box 1 for an example], we offer the concept of *social regularities* (Seidman, 1988, 1990), which represents a promising metric to pursue in future research around community power building. Social regularities are based on the notion that communities are always dynamic and in flux, but within that dynamism there are enduring patterns based on relational qualities that drive particular phenomena.

### *Social Regularities*

Social regularities are defined by four components: units, social systems, social nature, and temporal patterning. *Units* represent the level of analysis at which a measure is focused. Seidman (1988) identifies four units of analysis: individuals, populations, settings, and mesosystems. Individual units are focused on a person, generally a psychological or behavioral attribute of a person. Population units study an aggregate of individuals. In contrast, settings focus on a relationship among persons over time in a particular context, while mesosystem units of analysis focus on transactions between such settings. Individual and population units, then, are based on trait- or attribute-based worldviews, while setting and mesosystem units of analysis are based on transactional worldviews, or the relations among elements of a whole (Altman & Rogoff, 1987). Social regularities represent an extremely promising method of measuring community power for base building and organizing efforts, because CPBOs represent settings, and these settings exercise power to impact the mesosystems in which they are embedded; altering mesosystems, then, is the target in their exercise of power.

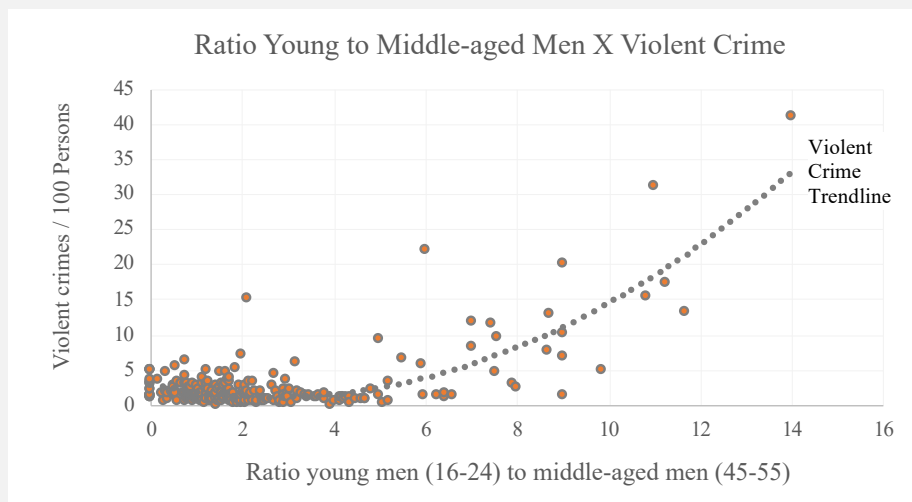
*Social systems*, the second component of Seidman’s construct, refers to the system within a setting or mesosystem that is the focus of study. A social system must, at a minimum, be a dyad that would reflect some relational quality (i.e., parent-child, worker-boss, tenant-landlord, resident-city council). In the context of community power building, the focus would be a question about how the system of individuals within an organizing group operates, and how differences across race, ethnicity, gender, or social class are reflected in a group’s functioning.

*Social nature* refers to the content or quality of regularities under study in specific settings, such as power relations, communication patterns, or participatory behavior. Critically, a social regularity affects important consequences to the functioning of organizations. As an example, in some organizing efforts,

### Box 1. Measuring a Relational Quality: An Example of Measuring Violent Crime in a Community

Traditional sociological studies commonly predict violent crime rates based on additive models composed of attributes of communities: poverty rate + education level + family structure + minority populations + low incomes = violent crime. These models are based on viewing attributes of populations as the cause of violent crime.

Some models, however, do contain elements of relational dynamics that are critical to understanding and affecting community change. For example, there are some violent crime models that include the *ratio* of young men (age 16-24) to middle-aged men (age 45-55). The greater that ratio (i.e., the more young men for every middle-aged man), the more violent crime. In contrast to attribute-based measures that tie community phenomena to inherent qualities of individuals (and fueling racist ideologies), the premise here is that the presence of middle-aged men suppresses violence in young men. Importantly, this relationship holds across race, income level, and other demographic characteristics.



This is a simple example demonstrating that a factor impacting violent crime, the outcome in this instance, is better understood as a relational quality of a community (ratio of young men to middle-aged men), than the more traditional conceptualizations of factors shaping community outcomes as combinations of attributions – a perspective that is based on an essentialist understanding of human behavior.

As related to violent crime, US incarceration rates have had the consequence of pulling large numbers of men out of low-income communities of color (largely for victimless or drug crimes) – a trend that is associated with increases in violent crimes. Ignoring relational qualities (like the ratio of young men to middle-aged men) feeds attributions of blame that identify aggregations of individual characteristics, like race and poverty, thus perpetuating racism and classism in local communities, as well as within our larger political narratives. Of course, crime rates must be considered in relation to multiple factors, such as policing practices, but there too, relational qualities between, say, ratios of younger to middle-aged men, may relate to disproportionate fear and more aggressive enforcement practices by police.

leadership is static (i.e., the same individual serves the role of president over a great length of time) whereas in other groups, leadership is rotated. Previous scholarship on the functioning of community groups has found that fixed leadership is associated with weaker engagement among members (Speer & Zippay, 2005), whereas rotating leadership is associated with greater levels of empowerment among members as well as more active and sustained participation over time (Maton, 2008; Peterson & Speer,

2000; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Similarly, power is the social nature most often of interest to organizing groups at the mesosystem level, where the interest is to alter regularities in broader community, regional or state systems capable of impacting issues like affordable housing, criminal legal systems, or public education.

Finally, *temporal patterning* is represented in the pattern or rhythm of the phenomena studied (or social nature) over time. In sum, social regularities measure the pattern of relationships within settings or mesosystems (units) in a specific context (social system) over time (temporal patterning) for a particular phenomenon (social nature). Operationally, social regularities can be thought of as differences or ratios occurring *within* social units or *between* social units (Seidman, 1990).

## **6. How can we measure critical community power building processes?**

It is critical to develop measures that capture power building *processes* and intermediate stages in the development of community power. Though limited, previous research capturing intermediate steps and processes for building community power include things like measuring incentive management among participants (Prestby et al., 1990), examining the potential participatory roles within organizations that members can fill (Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Speer, 2000), and methods of cultivating group-based belief systems among members (Maton & Salem, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995). We can advance our understandings of community power by building on this past research to promote measurements with greater sensitivity to the dynamic qualities of community contexts and change processes. One such method is the measurement of social regularities, as introduced above. Here we offer two indicators of base building processes that can profoundly illuminate community power building: the distribution of one-to-ones, and the network analysis metric of betweenness scores.

Distributions of one-to-one conversations and betweenness scores within CPBO contexts are examples of process measures of base building. These measures can provide critical feedback to organizers as they work to develop community power. These measurement methods are both anchored in the social regularity construct – a construct that is grounded in an appreciation for the dynamism of community contexts. Utilizing social regularity measures for community power building processes can support future research on community power.

### *Distribution of one-to-ones*

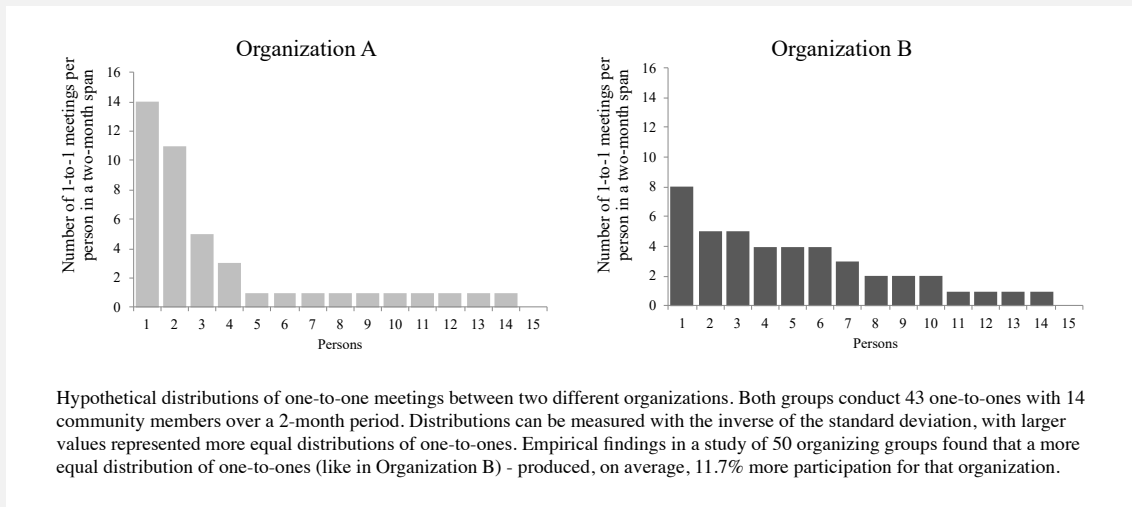
A critical power building process includes growing the base of participating community members within organizing efforts. One-to-ones (face-to-face conversations between organizers or leaders and community residents) represent one organizing method for growing the base (Christens, 2010; Han, McKenna & Oyakawa, 2020; Oyakawa, 2015). This form of outreach is key to increasing participation and expanding the breadth of participants – a critical metric for developing community power (Han, 2014).

A measure for capturing the breadth of outreach in one-to-one conversations could focus on a distributional metric of residents receiving one-to-ones within a community or organization over periods of time [See Box 2]; this represents an important social regularity. Many organizations, once developed, tend to expend less time on growing their base, unlike the early stages of base building when organizations tend to be welcoming and invest more time in expanding membership. Over time, increasing issue work establishes different organizational patterns; these patterns can become entrenched, and subtle cues may signal, often in unintentional ways, that organizational leaders are somewhat fixed and that some members are more valuable than others. These patterns in established

groups diminish the welcoming nature that groups often start off with (Conway & Hachen, 2005; Foster-Fishman et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2003). By measuring who a group’s organizers and leaders are doing one-to-ones with over time, an important process for developing community power is captured. Thus, a meaningful social regularity is the distribution of these one-to-ones among members – many conversations with a few residents versus a few conversations with many residents.<sup>7</sup> As this distribution broadens so that there is more equality among community residents contacted for one-to-one conversations, the organization may signal a more welcoming quality and the feeling of being valued may stimulate residents to sustain or increase their participation in the organization.

**Box 2. Measuring a Distributional Regularity:  
An Example of Measuring One-to-One Conversations**

The graph below shows a distribution of one-to-ones in two organizing groups. These are hypothetical organizations, but these illustrations are based on empirical findings by Tesdahl & Speer (2015) who examined longitudinal patterns of organizational-level participation with 50 community organizing groups over four years. Findings from those 50 organizing groups revealed that organizing groups with greater equality in the distribution of one-to-one conversations had significantly elevated levels of participation. Extrapolating their results to this hypothetical illustration of two organizations, Organization B would have 12% more participation than Organization A – even with exactly the same number of individual members and the same number of one-to-one conversations. The distribution of conversations, rather than simply the number, is a regularity that significantly impacts participation over time. Critically, for a future research agenda, this distributional pattern of conversations represents a meaningful regularity in predicting participation in organizations – a central factor in building community power.



***Analysis of relational networks***

Another measure to capture the process of developing community power can be found utilizing network analysis to understand the pattern of relationships among individuals in an organizing group. Network analysis is a measurement tool that aligns strongly with the social regularity construct, and several

<sup>7</sup> A slightly different social regularity might examine the ratio of conversations with new residents versus existing members.

network measures reflect critical regularities in the process of developing organizations capable of exercising community power. *Betweenness* is one network index that offers a powerful measure of organizational development:

Betweenness measures the extent to which a few individuals within the setting are the only connection among large numbers of other individuals in the setting. If a setting has individual actors possessing a high level of betweenness, this would mean that the setting is dependent upon a small number of individuals who are brokers throughout the setting. Betweenness measures the number of individuals who are in positions to be brokers within a setting – there may be a few or many in such a position. The organizing process values those individuals with high betweenness, but at the same time the process seeks to connect people in a setting who are unconnected, thus reducing the influence of those valued brokers. So, over time, successful organizing within a setting will reduce the level of betweenness in the setting (Speer, 2008, pp. 223–224).

Flattening the distribution of betweenness in an organizing context is one process measure that indicates positive development toward building community power.

## **7. How are critical processes of community power building linked to outcomes?**

To support a deeper understanding for how community power is developed, research must attend to the activities and processes of CPBOs and the corresponding community power outcomes such activities produce – at multiple levels of analysis. A critical gap in the literature is understanding community power outcomes at an organizational level of analysis. Research at the intersection of community power and health equity often describes organizing processes with a focus on organizational outcomes at the community level of analysis (i.e., policy change), without understanding what CPBOs actually do to exercise community power in pursuit of a particular policy change (i.e., outcome at the organizational level of analysis). To understand what community power is for CPBOs, we can look at how groups operationalize the mechanisms of power (Lukes, 2005). In other words, organizational level outcomes are represented in *how* groups reward or punish or the *magnitude* of the rewards or punishments they leverage, for example. Organization power outcomes might include delivering votes, shifting narratives, altering public debate, or challenging deeper ideologies (see Appendix A for more detailed examples of existing measures of outcomes as expressions of community power). Additionally, it is critically important to attend to the measurement of outcomes in ways that capture the dynamic qualities of community contexts such as those using the social regularity construct. For example, if a CPBO expresses organizational power by mobilizing several hundred voters for an upcoming district election, it is important to measure whether those are voters who haven't voted in the past, or if this mobilization has simply captured those who vote in every election.

Another important arena for study are processes at the community level of analysis, particularly dynamics among local community institutions due to the influence and resources they wield. Take, for example, the role of institutions in addressing domestic violence. If a local police department prioritizes issues of domestic violence, this can impact prevention and enforcement efforts. However, regardless of the effort and resources of the police, altering domestic violence patterns over time is likely to be inadequate if only police are involved. Single institutions are limited, because social problems, like domestic violence, impact many institutions – hospitals see injuries, schools experience behaviors ranging from acting out to withdrawal by children witnessing this violence, and neighbors indirectly exposed to domestic violence often have a decline in neighboring and greater avoidance among residents. Responses to community problems of any nature, then, require CPBOs to have an accurate

understanding of local institutional interests to determine, strategically, how to advance CPBO interests. Such analyses may determine allies to work with, or, alternatively, the need to strategize ways to align diverse institutional actors into multi-sectoral coordination across local, regional, and state institutions.

Institutional cohesion, then, captures the status of dynamic community contexts – specifically this measure assesses the magnitude of agreement across multiple institutions on specific community issues. Thus, if measured over time, institutional cohesion represents a method for measuring a social regularity. Furthermore, while it measures a relational dynamic at a community level of analysis, it may also represent a community level outcome of CPBO efforts. As CPBOs exercise their power, they often target alteration in the alignment of community, civic, faith, educational, health, and business institutions with regard to common community issues. Changing the magnitude of agreement across institutions – agreement about what concerns are judged as priorities, concurrence about strategies for addressing particular problems, or shared understandings of causality – represents a community level outcome for CPBOs, and an intermediate step in efforts to affect change in ultimate health equity impacts. When institutional cohesion is low, organizing efforts often focus their community power on changing institutional understandings – rather than attempting policy change that would likely be partial or unsuccessful. In this sense, the measurement of institutional cohesion is both a metric of relational community contexts, and CPBOs altering those contexts over time (i.e., changing the social regularity within institutional dynamics) would reflect a community level outcome of CPBO efforts.

Cooper & Christens (2019) recently published a study on criminal and legal system reform in Chicago where they used network analysis for measuring community power to achieve health equity that was akin to institutional cohesion and was consistent with the conceptualization of a social regularity. In describing the conceptualization of their study they state:

For coalitions to change social determinants of health they must push for deep reforms to large systems, like criminal justice. There are very real challenges in navigating the many differences that may exist across institutions in a given area, including differences in organizations’ philosophical approach, preferred targets of action, and methods for engaging residents and sharing power. (Cooper & Christens, 2019, p. 635)

Importantly, their study examines both power building processes and community power outcomes at community levels of analysis to advance an understanding of how to achieve greater health equity. Additional research is needed that attends to the impacts these processes and outcomes ultimately produce to assure that the exercise of power is resulting in the types of changes sought.

## **8. How are processes and outcomes linked to impacts and forms of change?**

To deepen the understanding of how to develop community power, future research should expand analyses of the impacts that processes and outcomes of base building and organizing ultimately produce. We frame the ultimate impacts that emanate from the exercise of community power to a conceptualization of three types of change (Seidman, 1988): tuning, incremental change, and restructuring. *Tuning* change involves adaptation and adjustment by individuals and groups to existing systems, rather than altering the standards, relationships, or mechanics within systems that are producing inequities. Often, tuning forms of change can be understood as symbolic – appearances change, but not meaningful relationships. *Incremental* change produces an increase in a valued resource – for example, knowledge, wealth, safety, health – but the increase is in absolute terms, whereas the relative distribution of the valued resource is maintained or only mildly altered at best, such that distributional disparities in how that resource is allocated or apportioned in society remain.

*Restructuring* involves changing the relative proportions of attributes or resources for subgroups in relation to the wider society [see Box 3 for an example of how to relate these types of change to community power building].

All types of change might potentially contribute to achieving health equity, but in order for everyone to have a “fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible,” restructuring forms of change are required. Tuning and incremental forms of change can be combined to leverage restructuring changes, but if impacts are not measured, ultimate health equity goals cannot be assumed. Restructuring involves changing the relative proportion of the burdens of poverty, discrimination, powerlessness, and unemployment, so that the distribution of access to fair pay, quality education, housing, safe environments, and health care move toward greater parity across different populations in society. Targeting such change is always a challenge. For example, the mortgage interest tax deduction can be considered a subsidy for homeowners not available to renters. Renters, who on average are lower income households, therefore pay more in taxes – a tax burden that contributes to health inequity. This is not to say homeowners support health inequity, but that systemic advantages that are the source of inequities are often opaque to those who are advantaged, and even when illuminated can be fiercely resisted. Furthermore, when CPBOs achieve success in promoting health equity, it is important to understand that there are many organizations, corporations, and interests who will then exercise their power to re-establish advantage. Therefore, a focus on positive CPBO outcomes, such as policy changes or positioning to shape governing agendas, is not sufficient for producing health equity – only by examining impacts longitudinally to determine if restructuring changes have been established can we establish success at improving health equity. In other words, an agenda for future research must prioritize work that *links measures of community power processes and outcomes to the forms of change that power produces*.

Critically, when the impacts of community power move beyond individual behavior and a disease focus, they are often evaluated in terms of policy change. Policy change is often an absolute necessity, but policy change is not equivalent to restructuring forms of change. Policy change is an attribute or singular thing; a policy may alter a deeper relational quality of a community, or it may not. In the example below [Box 3], the changes to housing policy were successful, but they were not sufficient for achieving structural change. What the example demonstrates is that CPBO organizational outcomes – shaping the public debate, shifts to the dominant narrative of criminality, and changes to housing policies – led to a restructuring type of change.

Research reveals challenges to measuring the impacts produced from processes to alter social and structural determinants of health, like the exercise of community power in relation to health equity. Shiell & Hawe (1996) note that assessing efforts to intervene in the social determinants of health or in changing risk conditions (e.g. unemployment, poverty) is much more difficult than assessing individual risk factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption. Measuring change at meso- and systems-levels of analysis pose deep challenges due to the dynamism of community indicators and challenges of causal attributions to groups exercising community power in a sea of organizations pursuing multiple and diverse interests. Even when studies focus on broader social determinants, there is often an individual-behavior and disease-focused approach to evaluating outcomes (e.g. Anderson et al., 2002; Merzel et al., 2008; Parker et al., 2010). However, these challenges also represent the opportunity – for scholars, practitioners, and funders – to invest in the study of CPBO strategies and processes so as to deepen our collective understanding of how, and under what conditions, community power can be developed. Promising methods for measuring the effects of community power building exist, and investments in

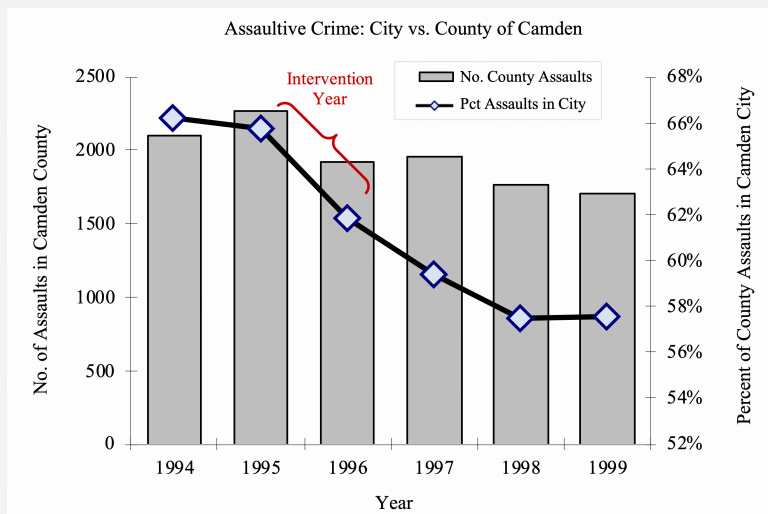


studying the short, medium, and long-term goals of CPBOs, both in terms of outcomes and impacts, can advance efforts to advance health equity.

### Box 3. Measuring Impacts from the Exercise of Community Power: An Example of Vacant Housing and Crime

One example of measuring the impact from the exercise of community power is found in Camden, New Jersey. There, a community organizing group, CCOP, responded to a surge of violent crime in the mid-1990's. Through over 600 one-to-one conversations with members and residents, they heard repeated stories about the role of vacant houses in the elevation of violent crime incidents. Through their organizing process, CCOP membership determined that vacant housing was a catalyst for violent crime. To explore their hypothesis, CCOP leaders met with over 20 public officials, housing experts, bankers, and others to understand if and how vacant housing was, indeed, a driver of violent crime. Bolstered in their view after conducting this research, they met with the mayor to share their understanding. The mayor, however, dismissed the group's assertions and declared that criminals, not vacant housing, were the source of violent crime. Ultimately, CCOP leaders held a public meeting to pressure the mayor to alter the city's policies in relation to vacant houses. CCOP exercised power by turning out 1,100 resident to pressure the mayor, by shifting public debate from criminals to housing policy with coverage in multiple print and TV media, and by pushing against the dominant narrative of Camden's criminality with a lens, instead, on disinvestment and neglect of local communities as a major contributor to struggling environments where crime could thrive. These approaches to exercising power resulted in the mayor changing the City's housing policies.

This graph shows the number of assaults in Camden County over a 6-year period. Camden City is the largest city in Camden



County, representing just less than 20% of the county population. Also shown in this graph is that Camden City accounts for about 60% of the county's assaults despite being less than 20% of the population. One year after the changes in vacant housing policies, overall crime dropped 8.4% in Camden – a drop that was consistent with regional and national trends. However, violent crime dropped 56% on blocks where direct interventions took place (housing rehabilitation, boarding up, or demolition) and 25% citywide (Speer et al., 2003). Critically, the graph shows that the community power leveraged by CCOP led to a reduction of assaults, but, importantly, it also led to a reduction in the proportion of assaults in the city relative to the county – thus representing a restructuring form of change. Furthermore, this reduction, through ongoing efforts of CCOP, was sustained over several years. In contrast to the dominant narrative and the view of the mayor that criminals were the source of the problem and would continue to commit crimes until they were incarcerated, CCOP's exercise of power yielded a dramatic and sustained reduction on violent crime – the kind of public health impact that is sought through the development of community power.

## CONCLUSION

This forward-looking research agenda seeks to articulate the most promising conceptualizations and measurements in relationship to base building, community organizing, and community power, and to suggest approaches that can advance community power building. The work of base building, and the work of community organizing to develop community power, is extraordinarily complex. Often, base building and organizing practices are characterized as rather straightforward, and they are represented as formulaic practices that should be executed with fidelity. To the contrary, organizing practices are complex and are applied in very dynamic contexts – a point that we have elucidated elsewhere (see *Developing Community Power: A Landscape Analysis of Current Research and Theory*). Future research must attend to this dynamism and develop methodologies that capture the nuance and strategies of practitioners.

In addition to greater investment in research that captures the nuance and dynamism between organizing practices and local contexts, future research must invest in deeper understandings of how community power can be developed, how that community power is then expressed or deployed, and what community impacts are then associated with those expressions of power. As emphasized at each step of this forward-looking research agenda, to advance scholarship and knowledge that will ultimately support greater health equity, it is essential that efforts to develop and exercise community power target the deeper relational qualities that are embedded in all contexts, and that represent the most fundamental aspects of community power.

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## Appendix A

### Existing Measures of Community Power

Table 1. Measures for Mechanisms of Community Power

MECHANISM	EXPRESSION OF POWER	COMMUNITY POWER MEASURE	SAMPLE CITATIONS
Reward / Punishment	Protest march	# of marchers	Warren (2009)
	Public meeting to hold public official accountable	# attendees at meetings	Wood (2002)
	Boycott of commercial enterprise	\$ amount economic benefit or damage from boycott	Sewell (2004)
	Turnout supporters for elected official / ballot initiative	# voters # signatures	Freudenberg (2004)
Defining Debate	Outreach to media about base building <i>events</i> (as listed above)	# media stories / social media outcomes (tweets, views, likes) of base building events	Graeff, Stempeck & Zuckerman (2014)
	Meet with newspaper editorial board to advocate <i>attention</i> to organizing issue	# of editorials on base building issues # reported stories about issues	Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer & Adams-Leavitt (1995)
	Base building <i>issues</i> reported on in media	# news stories/social media outcomes on issues targeted by base building groups	Allsop et al, (2004)
	Base building issues <i>absorbed</i> by influential community actors (institutional leaders in government, for profit, and nonprofit sectors)	# base building ideas represented by institutional actors in media stories	Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, Adams-Leavitt (1995)
Shaping Ideology	Frame issues to challenge existing policies or appeal to institutions who may become allies	# organizing group themes stated by officials after introduced by group	Speer & Christens (2012)
	Articulate narratives or interpretive lenses that undermine dominant worldviews	# intentional ideas advanced by base building groups that are absorbed in media stories	Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer & Adams-Leavitt (1995)
	Advance beliefs, ideas, symbols, interpretations through language, images, or actions that challenge unstated assumptions or unexamined aspects of community	# intentional ideas advanced by base building groups that are articulated by key institutional actors	Freudenberg (2004)



Table 2. Process, Outcome and Impact Measures of Mechanisms of Community Power

	PROCESS	OUTCOME	IMPACT
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentive management (Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, &amp; Chavis, 1990)</li> <li>• Subgroup linkages (Bond &amp; Keys, 1993)</li> <li>• Opportunity role structure (Maton &amp; Salem, 1995; Minkler et al., 2001; Peterson &amp; Hughey, 2002; Peterson &amp; Speer, 2000; Speer Hughey, Gersheimer, &amp; Adams-Lavitt, 1995)</li> <li>• Leadership (Maton &amp; Salem, 1995; Minkler et al., 2001)</li> <li>• Social support (Gutierrez et al., 1995; Kieffer, 1984; Maton, 1988; Maton &amp; Salem, 1995; Minkler et al., 2001; Peterson &amp; Hughey, 2002)</li> <li>• Group-based belief system (Maton &amp; Salem, 1995; Minkler et al., 2001; Rappaport, 1993; Spreitzer, 1995)</li> <li>• Relationship building, Organizational memberships (Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995)</li> <li>• Diversity of community members participating (race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, community tenure) (Rusch, 2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viability (Perkins, Brown &amp; Taylor, 1996; Prestby et al., 1990)</li> <li>• Underpopulated settings (Zimmerman et al., 1991)</li> <li>• Collaboration of coempowered subgroups (Bond &amp; Keys, 1993; Gruber &amp; Trickett, 1987)</li> <li>• Resolved ideological conflict (Riger, 1984)</li> <li>• Resource identification (Zimmerman et al., 1991)</li> <li>• Knowledge of the functioning of power (Speer &amp; Peterson, 2000)</li> <li>• Political subjectivity – sense of empowerment / agency (Gupta, 2019)</li> <li>• Emotional connectedness to others / group cohesion (Peterson &amp; Hughey, 2004)</li> <li>• Degree of sustained participation (Howat et al., 2001)</li> </ul>	RESTRUCTURING
	INCREMENTAL		
ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing social networks of other organizations (Gulati &amp; Gargiulo, 1999; Snow, Zurcher, &amp; Elkind-Olson, 1980)</li> <li>• Participating in alliance-building activities with other organizations (Foster-Fishman, Salem, Allen, &amp; Fahrback, 2001; Itzhaky &amp; York, 2002)</li> <li>• Participatory niches; Inter-organizational relationships; Organizational actions (Han, 2016; Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995; Teshdahl &amp; Speer, 2015)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration (Bartle et al., 2002; Baum &amp; Oliver, 1991; Checkoway, 1982; Checkoway &amp; Doyle, 1980; Orians, Liebow, &amp; Branch, 1995)</li> <li>• Resource procurement (Zimmerman et al., 1991)</li> <li>• Reward &amp; punishment; define topics and extent of public debate; Shaping community ideologies (Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995)</li> </ul>	TUNING
COMMUNITY LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing community actions (Speer et al., 1995; Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995)</li> <li>• Disseminating information (Bonal, 2000; Burstein, 1999; Stevenson &amp; Greenberg, 2000)</li> <li>• Multisector development; Institutional linkages; Target community issues (Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of public policy and practice (Fawcett et al., 1995; Speer &amp; Hughey, 1996)</li> <li>• Creation of alternative community programs and settings (Cherniss &amp; Deegan, 2000; Minkler et al., 2001; Sarason, 1972)</li> <li>• Deployment of resources in the community (Zimmerman et al., 1991)</li> <li>• Multiple empowered organizations, Cross-sector collaborative efforts (Speer &amp; Hughey, 1995)</li> </ul>	FORMS OF CHANGE PRODUCED FOR TARGET IMPACT:

## Appendix B

### Glossary of Terms

**Community Power:** Community power is the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity. (USC Equity Research Institute)

**Community Power Building:** Community power building is the set of strategies used by communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity. Community power building 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. (USC Equity Research Institute)

**Health Equity:** Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care. (<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/05/what-is-health-equity-.html>)

**Social Determinants of Health:** Commonly referred to as the social determinants of health, these are the “conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age” that influence health. ([https://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/sdh\\_definition/en/](https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/)) Such conditions include “economic stability, education, social and community context, health and health care, and neighborhood and built environment” (Definition from [Healthy People 2020](#)). Political and economic factors, power imbalances (for example, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and ableism), and systemic injustice also constitute the conditions that determine health inequity. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425845/>)

**Base Building:** A diverse set of strategies and methods to support community members to: be in relationship with one another; invest in each other’s leadership; share a common identity shaped by similar experiences and an understanding of the root causes of their conditions; and to use their collective analysis to create solutions and strategize to achieve them. (USC Equity Research Institute)

**Community Power Building Organizations (CPBOs) Groups:** Organizations that may be identified by geography (local, state, regional, national), demography (e.g. youth, workers, multi-racial) or issue(s) (e.g. workers’ rights, environmental justice, multi-issue) who conduct a range of activities including base-building. Other terms sometimes used to

describe CPBOs include but are not limited to: grassroots organizing groups, social movement groups, movement-building organizations, community-based organizations, community organizing groups, base building groups.

Community Organizer: Community organizers, one type of staff person working at CPBOs, bring the most impacted communities together—through door knocking in neighborhoods and apartment buildings and through institutions like schools and churches—to learn and strategize about how to make, as multiple interviewees described, “material changes in their living conditions.” While organizers across place and issue employ diverse ranges of tactics and strategies—from leadership development trainings to political education curricula to healing circles—it’s about bringing people together to help them make connections across their lived experiences and conditions. (USC Equity Research Institute)