

POWER SHARING DISCUSSION GUIDE

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What is this guide for?

This guide will help you hold a conversation with your colleagues to discuss what POWER SHARING means to you and your social change work. It will pose questions such as:

What power do you have? What power do you share in pursuit of social change? What power would you like others to share with you?

It has been designed based on workshops we have run with various civil society groups. There has been more appetite for these workshops than there is time for our team to deliver them! So we hope you will want to host a conversation yourself.

On our website you will also find accompanying slides and a template for taking notes from the session. We'd love to see your notes and to hear what you made of the session so [let us know how you get on.](#)

Why should we talk about power & change?

Your time is precious, so why should you invest your time having a conversation about power?

Many in civil society are working towards a fairer, more equal society, in which people do not experience poverty and deprivation. At SMK, we believe that to have a truly transformative impact on the issues we care about, we must share power better – particularly with people and communities who have direct experience of poverty and inequality.

This session is all about reflecting on our power as an organisation, and as individuals, and how power can be better shared in pursuit of change. We aren't often given the opportunity to think about power, and we think this is a really meaningful and valuable conversation to have.



Who is this session for?

By 'civil society' we mean people acting together in pursuit of social good. It includes organisations (like charities or social enterprises) and this part is sometimes described as the 'social sector'. But civil society is much broader. It includes informal organising, faith groups, trade unions and more. Its actions range from simple acts of neighborliness, to campaigning, to providing support services, to organising a community network.

This session will be useful to anyone in civil society. The Power Sharing Project focuses on tackling poverty and socio-economic inequality, so this guide is tailored towards anyone working around those broad goals. You might work in an organisation and want to bring together your colleagues, the clients or beneficiaries you serve, your volunteers or your trustees to discuss the questions in this pack. Or you might be part of an informal network of change-makers who care about a particular issue and want to delve into the question of power in more depth.

What is the Power Sharing Project?

The Power Sharing Project has one central question: *What would it look like if civil society in London was better at sharing power in pursuit of social change, and how would we get there?*

Much of civil society in London addresses issues around poverty and inequality. But how often is that social change work shaped by people with their own experience of poverty and inequality?

Our vision is that power is shared more equitably in civil society so that anyone – particularly those with experience of poverty and socio-economic inequality – can drive change.

The project is made up of a diverse, inclusive and growing Community of Practice (COP). It currently has around 200 campaigners, activists, and civil society leaders. [Sign up here if you'd like to join the COP.](#) Sitting at the centre of the project is a [Core Learning Group \(CLG\)](#) who influence the direction of the project.



Nuts & Bolts

The session can be as long or as short as you like – you could tailor it to an hour, or stretch it to fit a day or more. It is a guide to steer an open and fluid conversation, rather than a strictly timed schedule.

You don't need anything other than your brain, some paper and a pen, and your usual way of convening, such as Zoom or skype.

We recommend keeping numbers in the session below 15, and using break-out sessions if you are using Zoom. On our website you can also find a PowerPoint presentation to use in the session.

Code of conduct: Discussing power can be a difficult or triggering conversation for some. To help create a safe and productive space for everyone, we recommend establishing a code of conduct, which participants may want to build on. You'll find our suggested code on the next page.



Our suggested Code of Conduct

- **Everything said is confidential.** We might share parts of the discussion, but you'll never be identifiable.
- **Invite and celebrate different points of view** rather than pushing for consensus.
- **Everyone is free to change their minds.** This is a space to explore ideas, so remain curious. Listen in order to hear rather than to respond.
- **Respect each others' boundaries.** No one is required to speak from personal experience but you are welcome to. We will move at the 'speed of trust' with one another.
- **Never use offensive language.** Challenge each other if we hear language which offends or stereotypes. Act in good faith and assume good faith in others, and agree a willingness to challenge and be challenged on language.
- **We recognise and honour what is going on in the world and each others' lives,** whether that's the impact of COVID-19 or any other external pressures on participants.
- ***Add your own as you see fit...***



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Section 1: Exploring Power

Discussion 1: What does the word 'power' mean to us?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- a) What does the word power mean to you?
- b) Who has power in our community?
- c) What is the power of community itself?
- d) What would you like to have power over?
- e) What does it feel like when you have power over issues you care about?

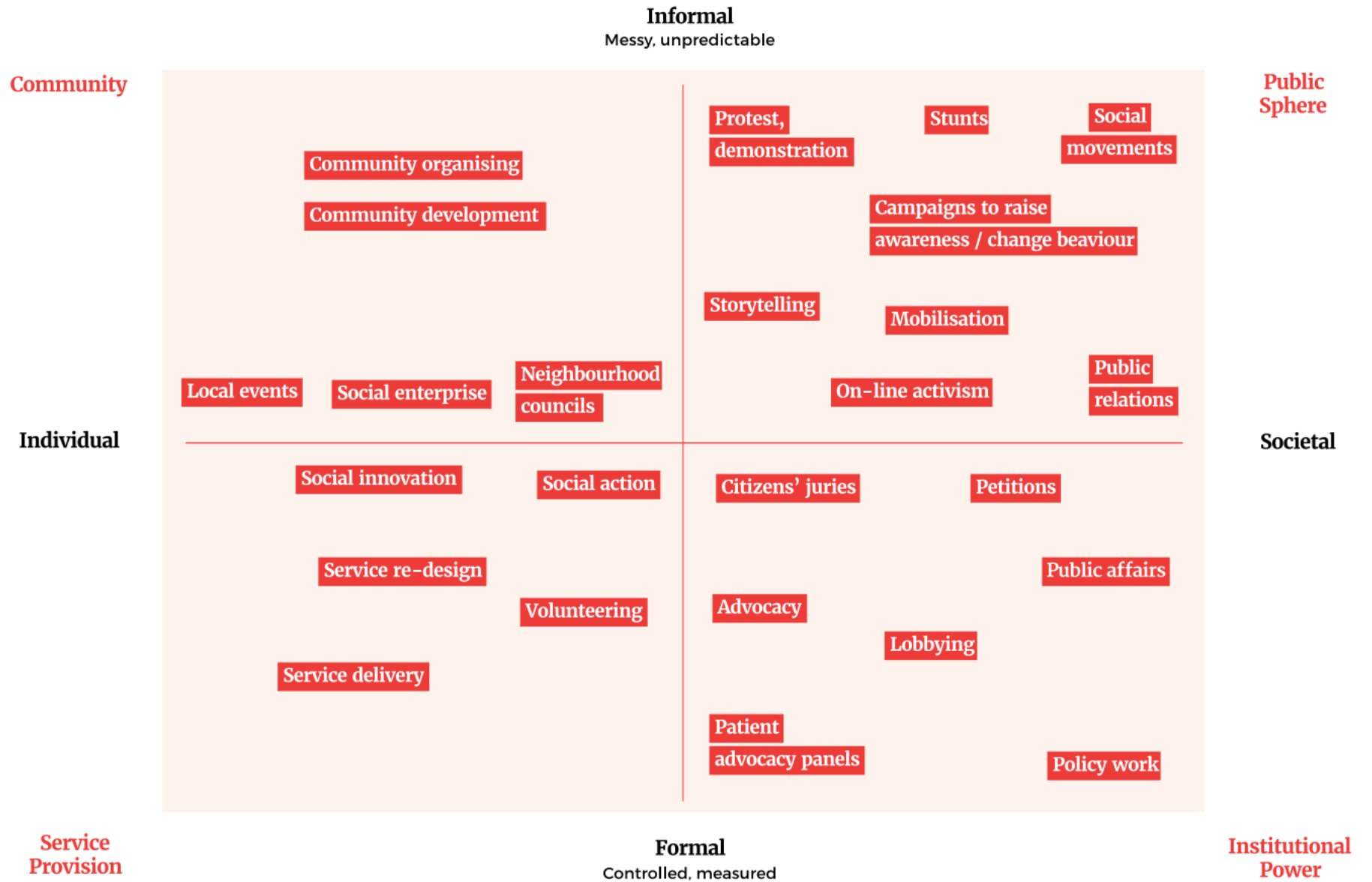
Section 2: Social Change

Learning Section: How do we work towards social change?

Civil society engages in social change in many different ways. To help make sense of this complexity, we developed the Social Change Grid to map the different kinds of activity we encountered. The grid helps to explore what we do in pursuit of change. It does not offer hard and fast answers but instead prompts us to interrogate our plans, to spot gaps and challenge our decisions.

This section of the discussion guide explains the Social Change Grid and asks some questions for you and your team to explore. You can read the Social Power report, including full versions of new tools, the Social Change Grid and the 12 Habits of Successful Change-Makers, at www.smk.org.uk/social-power-report

The Axes move from 'formal' to 'informal' vertically, and from 'individual' to 'societal' horizontally. The further to the left, the smaller the number of people involved. It moves from interaction with just one citizen to population-wide on the right. The further down it is, the more planned and measurable it is (e.g. a direct service, or creating a policy). Towards the top, activity becomes messier, more unpredictable, not in the control of one actor, and harder to measure (e.g. social movements).



The Quadrants of the Grid

Community (top left) This quadrant is where individuals come together. It includes the activity of community groups and networks, community organising, community development, local businesses and social enterprises. It is the realm of community spaces and facilities, including faith organisations. This quadrant is where grassroots movements begin.

Service Provision (bottom left) This quadrant largely encompasses the provision of support. Prior to the foundation of the welfare state, this would be solely the realm of traditional charity, of the giving of alms. Today, it is a mixed economy based increasingly around commissioning. Civil society organisations and private businesses tender on a competitive basis to deliver services. It also includes the work of small, local social enterprises and entirely voluntary entities – local people just helping each other out.

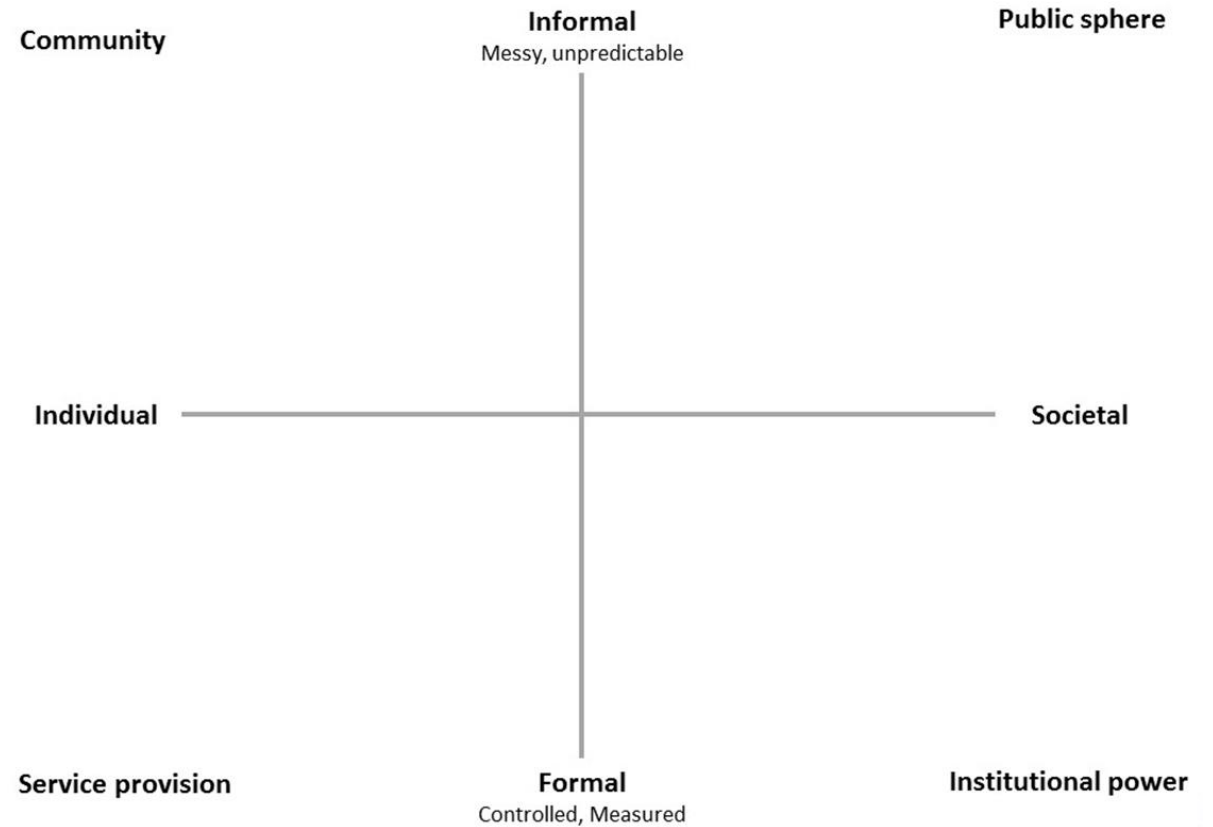
Public Space (top right) This is the realm of public debate and opinion, of social and cultural norms, of civic action. It is heavily influenced by all forms of media, marketing and advertising, the arts, popular culture, celebrity and influencers. It is investigated by market researchers for commercial purposes and pollsters for party political ones.

Institutional Power (bottom right) This is the quadrant we might label 'formal power'. It includes government (national and local), international institutions, the legal system, big business, and big civil society organisations too (such as very large charities). These are all entities that have either formal powers to do things and/or resources which give them significant influence and responsibility.

Discussion 2: How do we work towards social change?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- a) Where do different things we do that contribute to social change belong on the grid?
- b) Where is our power on the grid? Are we more powerful in one section or another?
- c) Is there somewhere on the grid we should work more to achieve our mission? Is there anyone else already working in that area who we could collaborate with?



SECTION 3: Sharing Power

Discussion 3: What power do we share in pursuit of social change?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- a) What does 'lived experience' mean to us in the context of the social change goals we are trying to achieve?
- b) How do we share power with people who have personal experience of the social change issue we are tackling? What does this mean practically, emotionally, and culturally?
- c) Do we share power with other groups? Or do they with us?

SECTION 4: SHARING MORE POWER

Discussion 4: What more could we do to share power in pursuit of social change?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- a) What more could we do practically, emotionally and culturally, to share power in pursuit of our social change goal?
- b) What value would this bring to what we do and the people we serve?
- c) What issues, if any, would arise if we were share power in those ways?
- d) What benefits would it bring to our social change goals?

We hope you had a good discussion. We'd love to hear about it. Send us your notes and let us know how it went!

Or contact us at:
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