

GUIDE 4

POWER IN THE SCENE

Who Holds It, Who Uses It, How It Feels

THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO:

FORMAT A 60 min
class

FORMAT B 90 min
festival

FORMAT C
dedicated event

FORMAT D teachers
+ organisers

Why not Format A?

The power mapping exercises in this session require enough time to go somewhere real. A 60-minute class slot does not allow for that. If you want to introduce the Circle of Power concept in a shorter setting, use the opening question from Format B as a standalone reflection in a class context, then direct participants to a fuller session at a future event.

ABOUT THIS SESSION

Power in the Forró scene is not only about who leads and who follows. It lives in language, dance level, who you know, how safe people feel around you, who gets booked, who gets heard, and whose comfort defines the space. Much of it goes unnamed.

This session uses the Circle of Power framework to help participants examine power from both directions: where they hold it, and where others hold it over them. The community session is participant-led. The framework gives structure; the examples come from the room. No two groups will have the same conversation.

Format D, for teachers and organisers, shifts the frame: it is a structured reflection on how power has already been exercised, where it may have caused harm without intent, and what responsibility looks like from a position of authority in the scene.

FACILITATOR NOTES

This session asks people to sit with something that most communities avoid naming directly: the unequal distribution of power among people who consider themselves peers and friends. That is uncomfortable. It is also necessary.

Your role in the community session is to hold the framework lightly and let the group fill it. Resist the urge to provide examples before participants do. The examples that come from the room carry more weight than anything written in this guide.

If you are not a trained facilitator

UNTRAINED FACILITATOR TIPS

- Read the Circle of Power framework in this guide until you can explain each power type in one sentence. You do not need to be an expert, but you do need to be fluent enough to respond when participants ask questions.
- The most important facilitation skill in this session is sitting with silence. When you ask 'where do you hold power in this scene?' people need time. Do not fill the silence too quickly.
- Some participants will feel resistant to the idea that they hold any power at all. Others will be reluctant to examine where they hold it over others. Both responses are worth noting rather than resolving: 'That hesitation is interesting. Let us hold it.'
- Power is a topic that can bring up strong feelings, particularly around race, nationality, and class. If a conversation becomes heated, slow it down rather than redirecting it: 'There is something important in what just happened. Let us stay with it for a moment.'
- You do not need to reach consensus. A session where the group leaves with more questions than answers, but better questions, is a successful session.

Before the session: what to prepare

- Read the Circle of Power framework in full.
- Print or prepare the power types reference for participants. You can write the eight types on cards laid out on the floor, or on a large sheet of paper. Bring your own materials or check if there are materials available upfront..
- Prepare the Power Mapping worksheet for Exercise 2, or use cards on the floor as an alternative.
- Set up the space in a circle on the floor. This session works best when everyone is at the same level physically.
- Decide in advance whether you will share an example from your own experience to open the mapping exercise. Having one ready helps, but do not use it unless the group needs it.

Ground rules

Set these rules at the beginning of the session:

- One voice at a time.
- Speak from your own experience.
- What is said here stays here.

- You can pass on any question.
- We are examining structures, not judging individuals.
- Power is not a moral failing. Having it is not wrong. Not examining it is.

Handling resistance

This session generates two distinct types of resistance, often in the same group at the same time:

What resistance looks like	How to respond
• 'I do not have any power here. I am just a regular dancer.' • 'This is making it sound like everything is political.' • 'We are all equal on the dance floor.' • 'I worked hard to get where I am. That is not power, that is skill.' • 'You are making people feel guilty for being good at Forró.'	• 'Let us map it together and see what we find.' • 'Power operates whether we name it or not. Naming it gives us more options.' • 'Are we? Let us look at who asks whom to dance, and who declines.' • 'Both can be true. Skill gives you cultural capital. How you use it is the question.' • 'Not guilty. Aware. Those are different things.'

THE CIRCLE OF POWER FRAMEWORK

Power in the Forró scene does not come from one source. It flows through multiple overlapping systems. Understanding it means being able to see where you sit within those systems, not just as a fixed point but as something that shifts depending on context, relationship, and setting.

The Circle of Power framework identifies eight types of power operating in social dance communities. Each type can work in your favour or against you. Most people in a Forró scene hold some types and lack others. The picture is almost never simple.

'Power is not only about who leads, teaches, or organises. It is also about who feels safe, who gets heard, and whose comfort defines the vibe.'

TYPE	WHAT IT IS	IN THE FORRÓ SCENE
Positional power	Formal authority or role within the community.	Organisers control event programming. Teachers control

		<i>what gets taught and how. DJs and bands control the atmosphere.</i>
Cultural power	The ability to define what is authentic, high quality, or 'real' Forró.	<i>Native Brazilians or fluent Portuguese speakers may be treated as cultural authorities. This carries a layer of complexity around cultural appropriation.</i>
Social capital	Networks, friendships, access to insider information.	<i>Popular dancers get invited more often. Visibility in the scene translates into influence over who is welcomed and who is peripheral.</i>
Cultural capital	Dance technique, language fluency, musical knowledge, travel experience.	<i>Advanced dancers or bilingual participants often dominate conversations and visibility, including in discussions about safety and community norms.</i>
Symbolic capital	Prestige, respect, or moral authority.	<i>Artists who tour internationally or have large online followings are treated as the standard. Their behaviour shapes what the community considers acceptable.</i>
Affective power	Emotional tone-setting: who gets to decide what is fun, what is drama, what is safe.	<i>A teacher dismissing safety discussions as 'killing the vibe' is exercising affective power. So is romanticising Brazilian warmth without examining colonial dynamics.</i>
Access	Economic, linguistic, or geographic barriers that shape who can participate.	<i>Ability to afford festivals or travel. Knowing Portuguese and English for networking. These are not neutral: they determine who is present and who is not.</i>
Gatekeeping	Unwritten norms that define who belongs, shaped by race, class, gender, and language.	<i>Teaching personal preferences as universal standards. Preference for lighter-skinned or Euro-featured dancers. Disabled and neurodivergent dancers overlooked in event design.</i>

Facilitator note: intersectionality

These eight types do not operate independently. They compound. A Black Brazilian woman teacher may hold high positional and cultural power and low symbolic capital in a scene dominated by European dancers. A white European man with no dance skill may hold low cultural capital and high social capital by virtue of his network. The Circle is always intersecting with gender, race, class, nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation, and language.

SESSION FORMATS

Format B: 90 Minutes (Festival Community Exchange)

	Format B at a glance
Duration	90 minutes
Group size	15 to 40 participants
Setting	Festival workshop space. Participants sit on the floor in a circle.
Facilitator	Two facilitators strongly recommended for this session
Materials	Eight power types written on cards or paper on the floor. Power Mapping cards for Exercise 2 (one per person). Pens.
Goal	Help participants locate themselves within the Circle of Power, in both directions: where they hold power and where it is held over them.

SESSION FLOW

1. Welcome and ground rules (10 min). Take care with the ground rule about structures not individuals: this session makes it easy for the conversation to become about specific people. Redirect if it does.
2. Opening question (10 min). Ask the full group: 'Think of a moment in this scene when you felt powerful. Now think of a moment when you felt powerless. You do not need to share either yet. Just hold both.' Pause. 'What was different between those two moments?' Take 5 or 6 responses. Write them on paper or cards without commenting.
3. Introducing the Circle of Power (15 min). Walk through the eight power types using the reference table. Keep it brief: one sentence per type, one question to the group for each. 'Where have you seen this operating in this scene?' Do not supply examples yourself unless the group is stuck. The examples from the opening question will often map onto the types naturally.
4. Exercise 1: Personal Power Mapping (25 min). See Exercise 1 below. The core exercise for Format B.
5. Small group debrief (15 min). Groups of 4 to 5. Discussion prompts from Exercise 1.
6. Full group closing (15 min). See Closing Options below.

Tip for Format B: two directions matter equally

The framing of this session is deliberately two-directional. Participants are mapping where they hold power and where power is held over them. Keep both in focus throughout. A session that only examines privilege leaves out the experience of being subject to others' power, which is where the emotional reality of this topic lives for most people in the room.

Format C: Dedicated Safer Space Event

Format C follows the same flow as Format B with the following additions:

- After Exercise 1, add Exercise 2: The Circle in Practice (30 min). This moves from personal mapping to examining specific relationship dynamics that the group identifies, not ones named in this guide.
- Add a 20-minute storytelling or panel component: invite two or three community members to speak about a moment when they became aware of the power they held, or of the power being held over them. Specific moments, not general statements.
- Allow 25 minutes for the closing, with space for longer reflection and a collective commitment.

	Format C at a glance
Duration	2.5 to 3 hours within a longer day
Group size	20 to 60 participants
Setting	Dedicated event space with room for small groups on the floor
Facilitator	Two facilitators plus panel moderator if using panel option
Goal	Deep examination of the Circle of Power in this specific community. Collective reflection on the relationship dynamics participants want to change.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Personal Power Mapping

Purpose: help each participant locate themselves within the Circle of Power, from both directions.

Before running this exercise: prepare the power types visual

Participants cannot map themselves across eight power types they have just heard listed once. Before the session, write the eight types on cards and lay them out on the floor in the centre of the circle, or on a large sheet of paper on the wall, or use the printable Power Cards in the annex at the end of this guide. The visual needs to stay visible throughout the entire mapping exercise. Without it, participants will map against whichever types they can remember, which is usually two or three.

Give each participant a blank card or sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a simple grid with two columns: 'I hold this' and 'This is held over me.' The eight power types go down the left side.

Ask participants to work through each type and mark where they sit. This is personal and does not need to be shared in full. Allow 10 minutes for individual mapping, then move to pairs for 5 minutes, then small groups for the debrief.

Guiding prompts for individual mapping:

- For each power type: do you hold this in the Forró scene? Does someone else hold it over you? Can both be true at the same time?
- Think about different contexts: in a class, at a social, at a festival, in a group chat, in a one-to-one conversation with a teacher or student.
- Does your map change depending on who is in the room with you?
- Is there a type of power you hold that you rarely think about? Is there one you feel acutely?

Small group debrief prompts:

- What surprised you in your own map?
- Which power type is most present in your everyday experience of this scene?
- Is there a type of power you hold that you had not thought of as power before this session?
- What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of the types where you marked 'held over me'? What would change if that shifted?
- Where do you see the Circle operating most visibly in this community? Where is it most invisible?

Facilitator note: the mapping is not a confession

Some participants will be uncomfortable marking 'I hold this' for power types they associate with privilege. Reassure them that acknowledging power is the beginning of using it well, not an indictment. The goal is awareness, not self-punishment. Others will resist marking anything in the 'held over me' column. Give space for that discomfort too: it is also data.

Exercise 2: The Circle in Practice (Format C only)

Purpose: move from individual mapping to examining specific relationship dynamics in the community, using examples the group generates rather than scenarios provided by this guide.

In small groups of 5 to 6, ask participants to identify one relationship dynamic in the Forró scene that they want to examine using the Circle of Power. It can be a type of relationship (teacher and student, organiser and volunteer, experienced dancer and newcomer) rather than a specific named relationship. The group chooses together.

For the chosen dynamic, the group maps:

- Which power types are active in this relationship?
- Who typically holds more power, and through which types?
- Is this dynamic visible to the people inside it? To people outside it?
- What would it look like for the person with more power to use it differently?
- What structures, norms, or community habits keep this dynamic in place?

Groups report back in 3 minutes each. The facilitator listens for the relationship dynamics that come up across groups and names them: 'We have heard about teacher and student, about nationality and belonging, about who gets booked and who does not. These are not separate conversations. They are the same conversation about how power moves in this scene.'

Note on the star teacher dynamic

Groups in Format C may identify the dynamic around well-known teachers: how proximity to a respected teacher grants social power to those around them, how that power goes largely unexamined, and how it shapes who feels able to raise concerns. If this comes up from the group, it is worth slowing down on it. The question is not whether the teacher is good or bad. The question is how symbolic capital operates in their orbit, and what accountability looks like when that capital is large.

CLOSING OPTIONS

Option 1: Four questions (Formats B and C)

Return to the self-reflection questions from the Women in Forró Understanding Power post. Read them aloud, one at a time. After each one, allow 30 seconds of silence before moving to the next. No discussion. Just sitting with them.

Whose comfort do I prioritise?
Who do I listen to first?
When do I stay silent?
Where can I share space better?

After the four questions, the facilitator closes: 'Power is not only about who leads or teaches or organises. It is also about who feels safe, who gets heard, and whose comfort defines the space. We all have a role in that.'

Option 2: Commitment circle (Format C)

Each participant names one thing they will do differently: one place where they will use power they hold to open rather than close the circle. Specific and actionable. The facilitator closes by reading back two or three of the commitments as a collective statement.

FORMAT D

FOR TEACHERS AND ORGANISERS

Closed session | 75 minutes | Peer-to-peer

This session is built differently from the community formats. It does not introduce the Circle of Power as new information. It assumes that the people in the room already hold significant power in the scene and that they know it, at least partly. The work here is introspection: looking back at specific moments and asking honest questions about what happened.

There are no scenarios in this session. There are no examples from this guide. The material is the participants' own experience. The facilitator's job is to hold the space and keep the questions honest.

The framing for Format D

This is not a session about guilt. It is a session about clarity. Most harm that comes from power in the Forró scene is not intentional. It comes from habits, from blind spots, from a scene culture that has normalised certain dynamics without ever examining them. Clarity about where you hold power and how you have used it is the beginning of using it better.

	Format D at a glance
Duration	75 minutes
Group size	4 to 15 people
Setting	Private. Closed to general participants. Chatham House rule. Sitting on the floor in a circle.
Facilitator	One person with peer authority. Should also do the exercises, not just facilitate them.
Materials	None required. The reflection is the exercise.
Goal	Honest introspection about where power has been held and how it has been used. Not performance. Not resolution. Clarity.

Session flow

OPENING (5 MIN)

Establish Chatham House rule. The facilitator opens: 'We are here because we hold more power in this scene than most of the people who come to our classes and events. This session is about looking at that honestly. Not performing awareness. Just looking.'

One sentence from each person: one word for how they are arriving today. No explanation needed.

ROUND 1: THE MAP (15 MIN)

Each person works through the Circle of Power privately for 5 minutes, mapping their own position across the eight types in the context of their role in the scene. Then, going around the circle, each person shares one type where they hold power that they rarely think about. No discussion yet.

Facilitator note: model it yourself

If you are the facilitator and you also hold a position of authority in the scene, share your own answer first. Name something real, not something comfortable. This sets the tone for the rest of the round.

ROUND 2: LOOKING BACK (30 MIN)

This is the core of Format D. The following questions are offered as prompts, not a checklist. The facilitator chooses which ones to use based on the group and the conversation. Not all of them need to be asked.

Reflection questions for Format D

- Think of a specific moment in the past year where you used your positional power. It does not have to be dramatic: a decision about programming, a correction in class, a choice about who to invite or not invite. What did you decide? Whose comfort did you prioritise in that moment?
- Think of a student, a volunteer, or a regular participant who stopped coming to your class or event. Do you know why? Did you ask?
- Have you ever had someone tell you, directly or indirectly, that they felt less safe or less welcome because of something you did or did not do? What happened? What did you do with that information?
- Think about the cultural power you hold in this scene, whether through nationality, language, or how long you have been dancing. Have you ever used it to define what 'real' Forró is, or who belongs? What was the effect of that?
- Think about your social capital in this scene: the people you know, the events you are invited to, the networks you are part of. Who is not in those networks? Is their absence related to any of the power dynamics in the Circle?
- Think about affective power: the ability to set the emotional tone of a space. Have you ever dismissed a safety concern, a complaint, or a difficult conversation by framing it as drama, oversensitivity, or 'not the right time'? What were you protecting when you did that?
- Is there someone in your community whose behaviour you have noticed and not addressed? What has stopped you? What would addressing it cost you in terms of social capital or relationships?

- When you look at your own power map, where do you feel most comfortable? Where do you feel most uncomfortable? What does that discomfort tell you?

ROUND 3: ONE THING (15 MIN)

Each person names one thing they are taking from this conversation. Not a commitment to change everything. One specific thing they are now more aware of, or one specific thing they will do differently.

The facilitator closes without summarising. Instead, read the four questions from the Women in Forró Understanding Power post aloud:

Whose comfort do I prioritise?
Who do I listen to first?
When do I stay silent?
Where can I share space better?

Then close: 'Awareness is the first step toward care. Because connection, real Forró connection, starts with respect.'

CLOSING (10 MIN)

Sit in silence for one minute. Then each person says one word. That is the close.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER GUIDES IN THIS KIT

Guide	Connection
Guide 1: What Is Gender?	The Box exercise in Guide 1 introduces gender norms as constructed. This session extends that into how those norms translate into power. Format D of Guide 1 is a natural precursor to Format D of this session.
Guide 2: Naming Harm in Dance Spaces	Positional power and affective power are two of the mechanisms that enable harm to go unnamed. The continuum of harm becomes clearer when participants can see the power dynamics that normalise it.
Guide 3: Bystander to Ally	Who feels able to intervene is directly shaped by their position in the Circle of Power. This session gives participants the vocabulary for why bystander action is harder for some than others.
Guide 5: The Box We Dance In	Guide 5 extends the intersectionality dimension introduced here. The cultural clash between Brazilian and European Forró

	norms is inseparable from the power dynamics around cultural capital and gatekeeping.
Guide 6: Free Labour, Visibility and Who Gets the Credit	The volunteer hierarchy and the question of who does free labour connects directly to the access and gatekeeping power types examined in this session.

SOURCE MATERIAL AND FURTHER READING

This session draws on the following sources:

- Pierre Bourdieu: Forms of Capital. The origin of social, cultural, and symbolic capital as analytical concepts.
- Kimberle Crenshaw: Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. The foundational text on intersectionality.
- HeForShe Barbershop Toolkit 2.0 (2025), UN Women. Module 1: Accountability and Power Sharing; Module 7: Intersectionality and Inclusive Masculinities.
- bell hooks: Teaching to Transgress. On power in educational relationships.
- Sara Ahmed: Living a Feminist Life. On the affective dimensions of institutional power.

Additional reading suggested in the Women in Forró Understanding Power post: Angela Davis (Women, Race and Class), Tressie McMillan Cottom (Thick), Michael Kimmel (Angry White Men), On Being (Transforming White Fragility into Courageous Imperfection).

ANNEX

PRINTABLE POWER CARDS

Print this page and cut along the dotted lines. How many sets you need depends on the format you are running. For Formats B and C, one set laid out in the centre of the group is enough for the full-group visual reference during Exercise 1. For Format D, print one set per person: each participant works with their own cards individually during Round 1. For Format C Exercise 2, one set per small group works well.

POSITIONAL POWER

Formal authority or role within the community.

Organisers, teachers, DJs and band members. Who controls programming, pedagogy, and atmosphere.

CULTURAL POWER

The ability to define what is authentic or 'real' Forró.

Who gets treated as a cultural authority. Includes complexity around cultural appropriation.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Networks, friendships, access to insider information.

Popular dancers get invited more often. Visibility translates into influence over who belongs.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Dance technique, language fluency, musical knowledge, travel.

Advanced dancers or bilingual participants often dominate conversations and visibility.

SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

Prestige, respect, or moral authority.

Artists who tour internationally or have large online followings set the standard.

AFFECTIVE POWER

Emotional tone-setting: who decides what is fun, drama, or safe.

Dismissing safety concerns as 'killing the vibe.' Romanticising cultural warmth without examining dynamics.

ACCESS

Economic, linguistic, or geographic barriers to participation.

Ability to afford festivals and travel. Language fluency (Portuguese, English) for networking.

GATEKEEPING

Unwritten norms that define who belongs.

Preferences taught as universal standards. Economic, racial, and ability barriers built into event design.

How to use these cards

- For Exercise 1: lay all eight cards out in the centre of the circle before the session starts. Leave them visible throughout the mapping exercise.

- For Format D Round 1: each person has their own set. They can pick up and arrange the cards for the types they hold most strongly in front of them as a physical representation of their map, and set aside the ones that feel less present. The physical act of sorting matters.
- For Format C Exercise 2: groups can select the cards relevant to the relationship dynamic they are examining and place them in the centre of their small group to anchor the discussion.
- Cards can also be used as a conversation opener at a social or class: place them face-down, ask each person to turn one over and say where they have seen that type of power operating in the scene.

Women in Forró | womeninforro.com | contact@womeninforro.com
Community Workshop Kit: Guide 4: Power in the Scene