SPITFIRE
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Replenishing Trust: *Civil Society's Guide to Reversing the Trust Deficit*

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Table of Contents

We Have a Trust Deficit

AND CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS CAN HELP REVERSE IT

"Trust forms the cornerstone and foundation upon which relationships and positive societal change are built. A society built on trust reaps extensive benefits, primarily fostering greater opportunities for collaboration, transparency and open dialogue."

— GISELLE CORDERO, program manager for the Centre for Public Impact

Trust for institutions across society is declining. This is not a theory but a fact, affirmed by leading experts like the Edelman Trust Barometer, Gallup and General Social Survey by NORC at the University of Chicago.

This growing trust deficit is a serious problem. It erodes a high-functioning pluralistic democracy,[1] compromises vibrant public health and makes it impossible to solve collective problems like climate change. Trust in institutions is necessary to create and improve the social contracts that govern democracy and allow communities and the nation to strike sustainable civic bargains. Trust doesn't just happen. It is earned person by person, moving through large segments of society. It is handed down and passed on.

American civil society institutions have an important role to play in addressing this deficit in trust.

Institutions – from nonprofits advancing dignity and rights, to academia creating space to explore the issues of the day to community organizations building confidence in our elections – contribute to the expansion or decline of social trust.[2]

As leaders of civil society organizations, earning, rebuilding and maintaining trust is a complicated but essential undertaking. First you need to decide what "strong trust" means for your organization and how it helps you achieve your mission. Then you need to understand the context in which you're building trust across diverse groups of people, from your staff to your partners to the people you serve to society at large. Your job is made harder by bad actors in society who deliberately undermine trust.

Now is the time to act. Those who are pitting communities against each other and sowing misinformation are harnessing faster and fancier tools to do their worst. There is also rational mistrust among people you may need or want to be in relationships with, but barriers like systemic racism and past breaches of trust that have yet to be repaired prevent you from earning their trust.[3]

Despite innate challenges to trust-building, civil society leaders are well-positioned to take on this trust deficit. America has one of the strongest civil society sectors in the world. The U.S. has a tradition of an independent civil society holding those in power accountable and advancing the public interest.

For civil society leaders to reverse the growing trust deficit and use social trust to bridge rather than divide society, leaders need to know the most effective ways to earn trust. This may require shifting your organizational culture or refining how you are doing things now. It takes continuous effort, rigorous accountability and an understanding that earning trust – building relationships, communicating and acting in the best interests of those you seek to serve – is a dynamic force that's well worth nurturing.

Trust-building is actions aligned to values — it's not just communicating about what matters, but doing it. Organizations that want others to be more trusting need to show the way by being more trustworthy.[4] When organizations put up rainbows during Pride month but don't take other actions to walk the talk or create an inclusive world, they invite skepticism and foster distrust.

"A hallmark of an organization that gets it on trust is one that understands how fragile it is. Trust is something hard to gain and easy to lose. It needs to be constantly worked on, and constantly rebuilt and constantly reinvested in."

— SANGITA SHRESTHOVA, Director of Research and Programs and co-principal investigator at Civic Paths, University of Southern California

With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*, a team at Spitfire took a close look at the social-science research from the last 20 years about earning and rebuilding trust. The team interviewed and heard from more than 25 leaders on their work related to trust-building and explored case studies to see trust-building and rebuilding in action.

This guide was designed for everyday application by the civil society field. Spitfire's team recognizes that this isn't easy work. Organizations face a mix of challenges regarding trust: some are manageable within your people and processes, while external factors make it hard to predict when trust might be put to the test. These recommendations may also be helpful to the government and business sectors, but this guide focuses on making the recommendations relevant to civil society organizations.

What high social trust looks like might be different for different organizations. Each section includes reflections and questions to explore your organization's efforts to consistently earn trust.

* The views in this guide do not necessarily represent those of the foundation.

Reflect

How would your work be different and more effective if you enjoyed greater trust among the people you work with, partner with and serve?

Ask:

WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF TRUST YOU WANT YOUR ORGANIZATION TO EMBODY AND WHO NEEDS TO TRUST YOU?

As a leader, you need to create a spirit of trust across different communities in different segments of society. Be aware that trust is made up of both emotional and rational thinking.[5] Trust-building involves feelings, reactions and general dispositions. High social trust requires an optimistic outlook — a belief (and hope) that society is trustworthy.[6] As a leader, you are a beacon in society that can give people hope and confidence that the world can be a better place. Or you can generate more skepticism and even pessimism. Given the work you do, clearly you want to make the world a better place.

Contributing to people having higher levels of social trust requires you to figure out what role your organization can play in making that a reality. **First, find a definition you can work with.** Here is one definition of social trust as a starter:

DEFINITION

Social trust is a broad belief in the honesty, integrity and reliability of others — a justified faith in people. Importantly, trust is ultimately a leap of faith. That means it isn't entirely rational or logical.[7] Social trust requires generalized trust, which according to experts is a willingness to extend broad trust to others across groups in society.[8] This means a willingness to trust strangers.[9]

Reflect

How can you define trust so it's relevant for your organization, and present it to people you want to earn or maintain high trust with so they make that leap of faith?

"I think folks ignore the importance of building trust at their own peril. There are some nonprofits that are making assumptions about how much they are trusted by their communities. We at the Human Rights Campaign don't have that luxury. And I think it's a luxury that folks really should be wary of."

— JAY BROWN, chief of staff, Human Rights Campaign

Distilling your mission and commitment to earning trust into a simple statement will foster accountability. Develop statements that start with "we will always" and end with "you should hold us accountable for that."

Deciding what kind of trust you want to cultivate is a collaborative process.[10] Consider who you need to involve in it to create the best definition of the spirit of trust you want to convey. It has to be a definition people will get behind. Once you identify what you want people to know and believe about you to build greater trust, you can align your organization to behave in trustworthy ways. **Now you know the spirit of trust you want everyone at the organization, including yourself, to embody.**

Next, get clear about the different groups of people you want to build trusting relationships with. As an institution and as a leader, you likely want to be trusted by your staff and board, by your partners and by the communities throughout society you work with. Many of these people may not know you personally as a leader. You, and others who work with you, are a representative of an institution (and even a category of institutions) that stands for something. You want all of these people to consider your institution trustworthy. Write down all the people and segments of people you want to build trusting relationships with. This guide consistently refers to "people." Keep the list you created in mind so you know which people are important to you. Don't default to "everyone." That's too broad to create an effective strategy for how you will earn trust with the people who matter most to you.

As you get clear on a definition for what "stronger trust" means to you and understand who you want to earn this trust with, **be honest about value and norm conflicts that exist in your organization and what will happen when they clash.**[11] Multiple values often coexist within civil society organizations. If you are in academia, you want both a free exchange of ideas and you want to ensure your students' safety. These may come into conflict. Part of being trustworthy is being as predictable as possible when this happens.[12] Is there a priority order you'll use to navigate conflicting values, e.g., one always comes before another or it depends on the context? What trusted sources will you seek guidance from when this happens? **Trust is earned when you are consistent.** You need to communicate what predictable standards you follow to all the people who are important to you.

Reflect

What spirit of trust do you have, what spirit of trust do you want to cultivate and among which sets of people?

Assess:

WHERE ARE YOU WHEN IT COMES TO BEING TRUSTED?

"The goal is not to tell people to trust more, but just to be more trustworthy. Accountability is the mechanism if you want to get from point A to B when you're looking to garner trust. It actually allows for more space and acknowledgment of your audience's healthy skepticism. Accountability requires understanding past real harms that people have in their mind and in the collective consciousness around specific kinds of institutions."

— BRANDI COLLINS-DEXTER, associate director of research at the Technology and Social Change Project, Harvard Kennedy School's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy

Now that you know the spirit of trust you want your organization to embody and who you want to build trust with, you need to know the current state of trust you have.[13] How trustworthy do both internal and external communities find your organization, and what fractures need repair to increase trust?

The Partnership for Public Service offers a model for assessing trust: a dashboard that tracks trust in government. It also tracks which agency is doing well, like the National Park Service, which has an 84% favorability rating, and which isn't, like U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is at 46%. It asks questions related to trust, namely, what individuals think of the federal government. A number of people think the government is wasteful, corrupt, incompetent, doesn't listen to the public and doesn't treat people fairly. While this may be hard for federal government leaders to hear, this dashboard provides concrete ideas to improve social trust.

Keep in mind that social trust is fluid, based on history and current context.[14] This isn't a one and done exercise. You'll need to take the pulse on trust on a regular basis. Start with what you have going for you. Look for signs of high trust you can build on.

"Genuinely valuing people should underpin any efforts to build trust."

— TRABIAN SHORTERS, CEO and founder, BMe.

11 Signs of High Trusts

From social science research, we discovered 11 signs of high trust.

1. Your organization has **clear, shared moral norms**, communicated with and demonstrated to the people you want trusting relations with. They see your organization act on those norms and hold everyone accountable for them. These are rules or expectations driven by values. If someone collapses on the sidewalk, people expect others to stop, call for help and stay until help arrives. That is a moral norm.[15] Moral norms are integrated into organizational structures. Your teams know them and contribute to upholding them. When high trust exists, there is high confidence that people will adhere to the moral norms and hope that others are worth trusting on this. (More on moral norms below.)

2. **The communities you serve are embedded in your organization** — or better yet, they lead the work. Staff reflects the composition of the communities served. Your organization shares and shifts power to those most impacted by the issues it works to address.[16] This means giving them substantial control over decision-making, not just more responsibility.

3. **People are not hunkered down in survival mode.** They are stepping out of their bubbles, seeking out others, being open to new ideas and trusting more and more people.[17] Those engaging with you do so with responsiveness and vulnerability.

4. **People engaging with your organization feel welcome, have agency and participate in ways meaningful to them.**[18]

5. **There is a spirit of optimism within and around your organization.**[19] Optimism is a broad emotional and rational outlook on the future — the judgment and belief that things will turn out for the best. Optimism is future-oriented. If hope says "a better world is possible," optimism claims "a better world is the more likely outcome." It is an antidote to that skepticism, pessimism and despair that results from low trust.

6. **There is a strong sense internally and externally that your organization places public interest over self-interest.**[20] For instance, people and planet before profit.

7. **There is a growing in-group**, i.e., more and more people who embrace and exhibit the same moral norms and trust that others will as well.[21] The choir is growing.

8. **Your organization is conflict-resilient**.[22] There is continual communication, especially when conversations get hard. It holds difficult discussions, acknowledges breaches of trust and takes steps to repair them.

9. **Communities and partners seek out your organization**, and there is measurable positive word of mouth about your organization and team.

10. **There is visible accountability,** including your organization listening and leading with empathy, taking feedback and acting on it.[23] Communities are invited to provide honest and open input. Your organization checks assumptions and responds to their needs.[24] Public accountability also includes transparency, responsibility, fairness, efficiency, responsiveness and honesty. Your organization institutes and upholds processes and practices that ensure people are accountable, including for bad outcomes regardless of intentions.[25]

11. **Your organization treats growing social trust as a valuable goal in itself.**[26] According to Human Rights Campaign's Jay Brown: "You know that trust is being built when people are moving from the mode of collecting receipts to engaging in continued conversation. There's this period when folks are just beginning to build or rebuild trust, where there's a constant watchful eye on your every step. And subtle shifts or changes in a plan are a sign that you're not who you are promising to be. You know the trust factor changes when those tiny shifts can happen without feeling like a betrayal."

Reflect *What signs of high trust are present for your organization?*

Types of fractured trust

"Don't assume you have it covered. Don't assume you know. Keep checking in with communities."

— **MEETA ANAND, senior director, Census & Data Equity, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**

There are three categories of fractured trust that may be in play, and organizations must be on the watch for them.

A LACK OF TRUST

Organizations may experience **a lack of trust** because people don't know a lot about them.[27] If the organization is new or a new person comes in to lead, the staff, partners and others may not know much. If the organization is working on a new issue, such as biomimicry, people may not understand much about what that issue is. When organizations create new campaigns every four years with new names, they may find themselves facing a lack of trust. Innovations can experience lack of trust. It isn't a negative judgment but rather a human trait to anticipate.

MISTRUST

Organizations may face **mistrust.** Mistrust reflects doubt. People are skeptical and have a lot of questions.[28] It may be a generalized mistrust not aimed at a certain institution.[29] Whole categories of organizations or fields may experience this mistrust. Artificial Intelligence might fall into this category. People don't fully understand it. Some people say it represents the end of the world; others say it will help us create a better one. Some people don't trust those who've created it or how they're deploying it. People may not mistrust any one thing specifically. Instead, mistrust may define their general outlook on the world. That mistrust is made up of feelings or hunches. People feeling mistrust are generally open to new information, while those who distrust (see below) are often resistant to new information.[30]

DISTRUST

Organizations may have communities that **distrust** them or their leaders. Distrust is more damning. It is a settled belief that an organization or category of organizations, like science organizations, is not trustworthy.[31] Distrusting communities doubt others' competence or their intentions. Social distrust is problematic because it creates negative feelings — hard ones, such as resentment, indifference, disappointment and anger.[32] This takes its toll on society and makes it much more difficult for organizations to achieve their

"There is community distrust of institutions for good reasons. [Building trust] is more about whether or not institutions are acting in good faith and in the best interest of those they serve — or not."

— ADOLPH P. FALCÓN, M.P.P., executive vice president, National Alliance for Hispanic Health

objectives. Resentment is a particularly powerful emotion to pay attention to when building or rebuilding trust. It is a sign that moral norms are broken and that people feel unable to uphold moral norms. According to experts, distrust self-reinforces in a way that trust does not — meaning once you fall into distrust, it becomes a cycle that perpetuates itself.[33] In the face of distrust, organizations must work harder to earn trust, knowing that once distrust exists, every action an organization takes may cause that distrust to cement itself in people's minds. In a state of distrust, an individual is unlikely to seek information that may rebuild their trust, instead standing firm and resolute in their distrust.

Levels of trust are intertwined with history, context and collective memory. For any groups facing discrimination, from LGBTQ+ people to Black people to Indigenous people to women, trust requires greater risk and vulnerability.[34] Derek Griffith, Ph.D., former professor of Medicine, Health and Society at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and his colleagues wrote about how this manifests in health care settings. They noted that "distrust places facts and beliefs in historical, social, or political context." They added: "To address distrust, it is critical to recognize that the suspicions, fears, and roots of distrust are logical responses to a history of inequity. It is essential to consider, understand, and address why the suspicion that underlies distrust exists." In short: know the communities you want to earn and maintain trust with and their experiences.

Distrust may be a protective factor for people who have had to shield themselves from harmful institutions their whole lives.[35] Don't treat distrust as a bad behavior that needs to be corrected. Treat it as a result of real or perceived experiences that need to change to make way for trust-building.

Ways that distrust manifests

"[Human] brains prefer a simple lie to a complex truth."

— GENE W. MATTHEWS, J.D., principal investigator, Network for Public Health Law

SOCIAL TRAPS

Distrust can manifest as **social traps.** Social traps may occur when, despite a common interest in achieving a particular outcome, people don't believe others will do what's right. The result: They won't do the "right thing" because of a fear that others will let them down.[36] People want fair and accurate elections. But people may not trust an election's outcome unless "their" people are watching. Lately, poll watchers from both sides "watch." Rather than ensuring fair outcomes, this creates a sense of suspicion that

can delegitimize the electoral process. These social traps happen at the community, national and international level. Locally, people may know they all need to conserve water but see their neighbors watering their lawns and decide they too will take more water. Nationally, people may know that public transit solves congestion and mitigates climate-change consequences, but don't believe others will ride the bus or train so they stay in their own cars. Internationally, people know developed countries contribute more to greenhouse gasses than developing countries, but rather than push for doing everything each country can do, people rationalize inaction by pointing out that other countries aren't doing their part. Organizations can assess whether they're experiencing this phenomenon and strategize about how to overcome this stalemate.

HYPOCRISY

Another way distrust manifests is when **people inside the organization point out hypocrisy of what the organization says and does**. Organizations are made up of people, and these individuals can extend or destabilize organizational trust.[37] If a staff person or board member questions the organization's integrity, the people who trust this staff person may give their opinion more credibility than the overall organization's. An organization may face misalignment between what it says it prioritizes or how it makes decisions and what people close to the organization report is true.

ACCESS POINTS

M. Anthony Mills. Ph.D., a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute wrote "Why So Many Americans Are Losing Trust in Science." He highlights the role of **"access points."** Anthony Giddens, an English sociologist and professor emeritus at the London School of Economics and Political Science, says access points are:

"Interactions between lay citizens and individual members (or representatives) of abstract systems; think of experts such as Dr. Anthony Fauci or even your family physician. Such interactions provide opportunities for experts vested with authority not only to exemplify the requisite skills but also to exhibit the character traits — rectitude, professionalism, disinterestedness — needed to generate and sustain the trust of those lay individuals who depend on them. If your doctors lie to you or put their financial interests ahead of yours, you will probably stop trusting them. If their behavior appears egregious enough, it might shake your confidence in the entire medical establishment. Access points are where trust is established and sustained or broken and lost; they are vulnerabilities in abstract systems."

Reflect

Think about your "access points" and whether they are building or eroding trust.

"Trust is faith that people are going to do what they say they're going to do and going to be who they truly are. If people do neither of those things, don't do what they say they will or aren't authentic with who they are, that creates distrust."

— LORETTA J. ROSS, author, activist and visiting professor at Smith College

Organizational change can also spark mistrust and distrust. When changes happen within an organization — from electing new trustees to hiring or firing staff, to what work is getting resourced and what work is getting cut — this can impact trust. Expect it. Consider what trust-building you'll need to do before, during and after changes. This is a time to engage more and show that people's opinions matter. If those in relationship with the organization feel their opinion isn't valued or respected, this can sow dissent that leads to lasting distrust.

Context matters. As Professor Janet Coats, the managing director of the Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology at the University of Florida, noted: "Organizations need to understand and take into account trust issues related to the very media/platforms they rely on (at least in part) to share their work and, by extension, attempt to build trust. **These communications pipelines are filthy with trust issues.** You have to understand that even if you are following the recommendations to build trust, you are doing so within a broader atmosphere of distrust, mistrust, and lack of trust. That cannot be ignored."

Always remember: Actions speak louder than words.

Reflect

What fractures of mistrust might your organization be facing that you need to address?

QUESTIONS TO ASSESS YOUR STATE OF TRUST

When considering your organization's state of trust, go to the source. Let people speak for themselves. Ask people who genuinely represent the communities you want high trust with about what their experience has been with the organization.[38]

- Who is it important for your organization to have high trust with?
- Who do you have high trust with?
- What signs of high trust are present and which are missing? How do you know?
- How is your organization delivering on what it says it will do? How is your organization sharing that in a way that lands with those who need to know about it? Is there consistency in delivering on promises across all levels of the organization, with partners and with communities?
- What structures, processes and incentives (positive and negative) does your organization have in place that hold it accountable to make sure people and the organization are being trustworthy?
- What feedback loops and measurements does your organization have in place to keep an eye on this, and which ones does it need?
- What are signs that your communities feel empowered to have challenging discussions with your organization and provide meaningful feedback?
- In what ways do partners seek out your organization? Why are they interested in partnering with you? Is there positive word of mouth about your organization? What have you heard?
- Does your organization's reputation as a trustworthy partner outweigh negative perceptions? Who are the people or groups that see you as trustworthy?
- How does your organization actively work to repair trust when it falls short of its stated values?

Implement:

10 CONCRETE WAYS TO EARN TRUST

> *"Don't assume you're the expert. Don't come up with a solution before even talking to communities. Let them guide you instead. Sometimes organizations design a solution and then tack on community feedback at the very end. The community is just a checkbox. How might we bring them in at the very beginning and embed them throughout the process instead?"*
>
> **— GISELLE CORDERO, program manager, Centre for Public Impact**

Now that you know the state of trust your organization has, you can decide what to do to improve it where needed. While there is plenty written about building and rebuilding trust, this guide focuses on 10 high-impact recommendations and cites the science behind each.

This guide divides the 10 recommendations into three buckets. The first set is **Walk Your Talk**. This addresses behaving with integrity, knowing and following moral norms and elevating moral norms to show they are alive and well. The second is **Put Your Best Foot Forward.** These are practices and behaviors that will increase trust, like proving competency, showing you trust constituencies and welcoming participation. The last is **Don't Step in It.** These are behaviors and practices to avoid because they erode trust. Ultimately, you want to address all of these, but it takes time. Consider how to put these in play in the way that will work best for your organization.

Walk Your Talk

- **Behave with integrity toward your organization's stated intentions.** Never lose sight of this.[39]
- **Prioritize knowing, following and modeling moral norms**.[40] You need to know the rules to follow them.
- **Practice moral elevation,** which is a fancy way of saying show these norms happening in the real world.[41]

Behave with integrity toward your organization's stated intentions

This seems obvious, but some organizations lose sight of this or don't realize how some of their actions actively undermine their integrity. **Integrity in action is consistency and fidelity between stated values, moral norms and organizational practices – from individual staff to the organizational level**.[42] A foundational way organizations can build trust is to show they are governed by the public good, not merely self-interest.[43] As Professor Loretta J. Ross said, "I believe that the relationship that most matters is the one with your own integrity."

How this plays out in the real world is that organizations walk their talk and employees, leadership and board members understand that they contribute to this with their everyday actions.

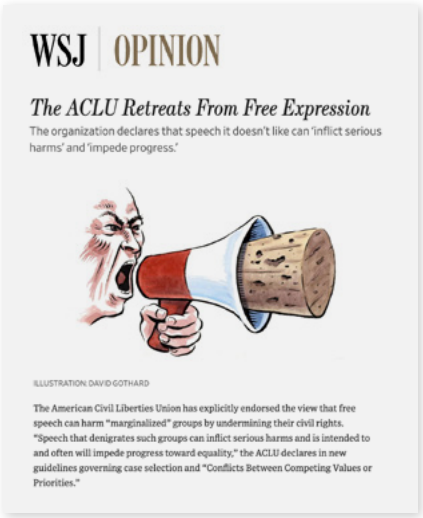
patagonia®

According to a 2023 Axios Harris poll, Patagonia is the most trusted brand in the U.S. When asked why this might be, K. Corley Kenna, Patagonia's head of communications and policy, said the organization made a commitment to high quality and works relentlessly never to waver from it. The company began when its founder, Yvon Chouinard, started making climbing equipment for his friends. This equipment meant life or death. If it failed, it put his friends in danger. There is high quality in everything Patagonia does, from repairing gear to its workplace that has in-house, high-quality child care. In addition to delivering on its top commitment of quality, Patagonia is also honest about its challenges. Supply chains have been a major area of concern for working conditions. The organization shares what the issues are and how it is investigating them. Notably, it tends to send press releases after the fact — not before. This means the company doesn't just announce that it is going to do something; it shares that it has done it. It is everyone's job at the company to build high trust for the organization. Everyone contributes to this, which is a company core value.[44]

It helps to be clear about what acting with integrity means when working on a multi-organization effort like a coalition. Codifying the working relationship builds trust. For example, the same-sex marriage movement developed from a combination of state groups working on the issue and individual couples who wanted to marry. The national groups — including Freedom to Marry, Human Rights Campaign, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), National Center for Lesbian Rights and GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) — stepped up to help. In 2011, the first state-national coalition for marriage, New Yorkers United for Marriage, was created at the behest of Freedom to Marry. Early in the coalition, the members, which included Freedom to Marry, Empire State Pride Agenda and Human Rights Campaign, developed a memo of understanding that outlined everything from how the groups would work together to who would speak to the media to how joint fundraising would happen. The clear outlining of expectations and decision-making helped create and increase trust among the coalition partners and resulted in more effective collaboration. This model proved successful and Freedom to Marry later used it in more than two dozen states.

A more cautionary take is TIME'S UP. Founded to increase safety and equity in workplaces by making them free of harassment, sexual assault and discrimination, TIME'S UP asserted that it believes victims first. The organization faltered in upholding that key moral norm when it faced a number of conflict-of-interest accusations, including the fact that prominent TIME'S UP leaders were counseling then-Governor Andrew Cuomo, who had been accused of sexual harassment.

While this may seem like an extreme example, organizations need to consider how they might be signaling that they have not acted with integrity and are prioritizing self-preservation or self-interest over public interest.[45] Is your organization asking for payment before it discusses what brings someone in for care? Is it exhibiting mistrust in its audiences by asking people to prove they need waivers from fees for their kids to participate in after-school programs? Is the action or position you are taking adding to or detracting from the trust bank? As Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation said at the 2023 Aspen Ideas Festival, "We must interrogate our contributions to problems we now want to fix." This interrogation helps keep organizations honest and operating with high integrity.



WSJ | OPINION

The ACLU Retreats From Free Expression

The organization declares that speech it doesn't like can 'inflict serious harms' and 'impede progress.'

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID GOTHARD

The American Civil Liberties Union has explicitly endorsed the view that free speech can harm "marginalized" groups by undermining their civil rights. "Speech that denigrates such groups can inflict serious harms and is intended to and often will impede progress toward equality," the ACLU declares in new guidelines governing case selection and "Conflicts Between Competing Values or Priorities."

Civil society organizations' values may come into conflict. For example, an organization may value racial justice and free speech and may be tested when having to prioritize one over the other. When this happens, it's important to be transparent about the struggle, the process to resolve it and the implications for the organization and its people. Above all, don't add further confusion with conflicting messaging and obfuscations. The ACLU found itself in this position after its affiliate in Virginia took a case to defend white supremacists' right to march after a permit was denied. A former board member called out the ACLU publicly, requiring a clear response about the guidance it offers when affiliates are choosing cases. Anthony D. Romero, the executive director of the ACLU, is always willing to lean into difficult conversations (as befits his organization) and held town hall meetings with staff. "Reliability is our superpower for trustworthiness," Romero noted. "Live the values even when it hurts."

Reflect

Can you easily name where your organization is acting with integrity? Can you name where you may have misalignment? What mechanisms does your organization have to assess whether your staff behaves with integrity? How does your organization ensure that it is not contributing to or reinforcing problems you are trying to solve?

Prioritize knowing, following and modeling moral norms

The difference between moral norms and values is that moral norms are expectations for how people will behave and values are the underlying beliefs that result in those rules.

An organization's expressed moral norms establish a shared expectation for behavior between people and are foundational for trustworthiness.[46] Moral norms constitute norms of how individuals ought to live and treat others.[47] Moral norms are anchored in social concepts of right and wrong. Author and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt created the Moral Foundations Theory, which highlights moral norms like fairness, purity and loyalty, among others. Because moral norms are tied to fundamental social concepts like justice, moral norms function as demands we place on one another and expect people to comply with. Organizations must listen to communities they are engaged with so they can learn and understand the moral norms to uphold.[48]

Ethical organizations build trust by walking the talk and talking the walk — by expressing and applying moral norms. Gene W. Matthews of the Network for Public Health Law applied moral foundations theory to encourage people to prevent the spread of COVID-19. See graphic on next page.

Six Intuitive Foundational Moral Values

CORONAVIRUS WORKSHEET

MORAL FOUNDATION	YOUR PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGE
1. Care (pairs with Harm) » Reflects the base of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs » (Security, Shelter, Food, Water, Warmth)	» **Protect yourself and others** » **Help those most vulnerable** » **Public health can assist you** » **Stay healthy and safe**
2. Liberty (pairs with Oppression) » Physical and Mental Freedom » Social Intolerance of Bullies	» **Coronavirus can threaten our safety and freedom** » **We want our community to be free from fear of contagion** » **The quicker we beat this, the quicker we recover and return to normal**
3. Fairness (pairs with Cheating) » Equality of Opportunities » Social Intolerance to "Free-Riders"	» **Everyone has an interest in beating this outbreak** » **Those at home all need to have resources to stay there** » **Infection does not discriminate** » **We have an interest in everyone getting appropriate care**
4. Loyalty (pairs with Betrayal) » Personal Trust, Group Identity, Patriotism » Social isolation of those who betray	» **Do your part, wash your hands and don't be a risk to others** » **We need to protect our community** » **Limited resources should go first to responders, HCW's and those caring for us.** » **I'm loyal to you and want to keep you safe**
5. Authority (pairs with Subversion) » Competitive advantage of organized groups » Deference to "good" leaders (Alexander the Great) » Social intolerance of those who subvert the system	» **Scientific evidence and common sense show that protective measures really work** » **Listen to your local public health official** » **Respect HCW's and the risks they are taking** » **Quarantine and social distancing may be necessary** » **Be a good role model for others**
6. Sanctity (pairs with Degradation) » Not simply a religious value » Respect for the human spirit » Social aversion of personal degradation	» **Public health does not run, it stands by your community** » **Support those taking risks to care for your loved ones** » **Look for ways to serve others** » **Help nurture the spirits of those needing comfort** » **Be willing to sacrifice your wants for community needs**

(From Gene W. Matthews, Network for Public Health Law)

The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRC) showed how to back a moral norm when under threat. FRRC, which is dedicated to ending disenfranchisement of formerly incarcerated people, believes everyone has a right to vote and should be encouraged to exercise it, and that everyone should follow the law. This upholds moral norms both around forgiveness (getting second chances) and fairness (getting rights back after serving a sentence). After winning Amendment 4 in Florida, which allowed those with felony convictions to vote again, a number of Floridians got their voting cards. In 2022, the state arrested some people carrying state-issued voting cards, saying they had voted fraudulently and it was a mistake for the state to have sent them voting cards. Doubling down on the moral norm that the state said it was legal for them to vote at the time (fairness), FRRC sprang into action, setting up bail funds and connecting those arrested with pro-bono attorneys. By showing up and fighting for the right to vote that was state-sanctioned, FRRC showed that it lives its moral norms and behaved with integrity, and even love, in support of its communities.

"Explain Your Process" Box

Example of one of the boxes used in the experiments. This box references an article about Amazon selecting a new headquarters. Readers either saw this box displayed alongside the article, or they saw the story without the box.

Why we're doing this story:

The decision of where Amazon put its new headquarters is big economic news for both the two cities that were named and the 18 that had wanted but didn't get it. We wanted to explain what Amazon had decided, why the 18 other cities most likely didn't get the nod (Amazon wasn't saying) and why some people were saying the entire process was a scam on Amazon's part.

How we reported this story:

Our reporting team has been covering this story since 2017. We knew by August of 2018 that Amazon had done at least the first round of visits to the 20 finalists, so we started interviewing officials in the most likely cities, talking to economic development experts about the potential impact of having Amazon settle in your town and looking into the amount of tax incentives each area had offered.

How we took steps to be fair:

Neither Amazon nor any of the 20 finalist cities would talk about the process. In fact, Amazon required that cities not release information. In addition, most of the cities did not reveal anything about how much money they were offering Amazon in tax and other incentives. Because of that, we had to rely on experts who were offering their opinions without having access to all the facts. We talked with economic development experts who thought having Amazon come to a city would be positive for the area as well as groups that felt the economic incentives being offered were so much that many people currently living in those cities would have suffered if Amazon set up shop there. Those concerns were mostly about gentrification, rising housing prices and congestion.

News organizations are also finding ways to reinforce moral norms. University of Texas (UT) at Austin's Center for Media Engagement ran experiments in two newspapers. Rather than just saying the coverage was "fair," the UT center introduced an "Explain Your Process" box that shares specific efforts an outlet takes to cover the story fairly. According to the study, people who viewed an article that included the process box rated USA Today and The Tennessean significantly higher on 11 of the 12 attributes of trust compared to people who saw the same story without the box. Two important takeaways for trust-building: One, show how you went about your work. In this case, that meant showing steps the newspaper took to provide fair coverage. Two, measure whether sharing your processes generates trust. For these two media companies, it did.

Reflect ***What moral norms are at the heart of your work and how are you following and modeling them?***

Replenishing Trust: Civil Society's Guide to Reversing the Trust Deficit | 18

Practice moral elevation

Moral elevation is moral norms in action — and is the best way to prove moral norms are alive and well. When organizations showcase and advance others' good deeds this taps into the emotional element of social trust.[49] When people see others living their moral norms, it increases cooperation and prosocial behaviors, which help to benefit society.[50] As Andrea Levere, founder of the Enterprise Capital Institute, said, "Organizations can have processes in place, have clarity on values and moral norms, but if the board or organizational leaders do not live up to these practices, everything else can simply fade away." This is where moral elevation comes in.

Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., the former longtime director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), offers a good example of moral elevation. Research has shown and confirmed that a more diverse workforce strengthens the health field and improves health outcomes.[51] Yet, despite progress in recent decades, women are still significantly underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and continue facing multiple biases and barriers to participation. Under his leadership, Collins championed initiatives to advance participation of scientists from underrepresented backgrounds. Following the report release the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's report, "Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequence in Academic Science, Engineering, and Medicine," Collins demonstrated one of the immediate and actionable ways he and others in prominent leadership positions could help: Get rid of "manels."

"It is not enough to give lip service to equality; leaders must demonstrate their commitment through their actions."

— FRANCIS COLLINS, M.D., PHD., former director of National Institutes of Health (NIH)

The prevalence of male-only panels is so common that there are multiple nicknames for it, from "manferences" to "himposiums" to "manels."[52] Collins used his influence to put an end to manels. In a public announcement, Collins pledged to no longer speak on panels at scientific meetings or conferences that did not show a commitment to include scientists of all backgrounds and challenged other scientific leaders to do the same. "It is not enough to give lip service to equality; leaders must demonstrate their commitment through their actions," Collins said. Due to his high profile as NIH Director and as the inaugurator of the Human Genome Project, Collins' pronouncement garnered national attention. Since then, Collins has said that he believes his announcement caused more people to reconsider who they invite to appear on speaking panels.[53] "It's been impressive to see how that had ripples," Collins said. "A lot of other folks decided, 'I should probably take the same stance.'"

It is important to note that moral elevation isn't only communication about a moral norm — it is practicing the norm in visible ways. In fall 2023, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Mandy Cohen, wrote an op-ed titled "As a Doctor, a Mother and the Head of the C.D.C., I Recommend That You Get the Latest Covid Booster." In it, she talked about getting her own family vaccinated. "A part of trust building is making sure people know I wouldn't recommend something for the American people I wouldn't recommend to my own family," she

told POLITICO. As a respected leader, her walking the talk elevated the moral foundation of safety and fostered trust. The CDC's communications then helped further elevate her action which was amplified by other respected leaders, noting the CDC head was walking her talk, further boosting the moral elevation.

Reflect ***How and how often has your organization practiced moral elevation this year?***

Put Your Best Foot Forward

- **Prioritize the trust trio: practice equality, prove competency and instill hope.** Research suggests these actions do more to build strong trust than other behaviors.
- **Signal and show that your organization trusts its communities.**
- **Encourage participation so people feel included and heard.** Participation includes both learning and tapping expertise and insights.
- **Extend the in-group. It's important to do this ethically.**[54]

Prioritize the trust trio: practice equality, demonstrate competency and instill hope

Research flags a trio of trust-building behaviors that are especially powerful: **equality, competency and hope**.[55] This doesn't mean these are the only ones, but these are three that leaders may want to prioritize.

EQUALITY

Equality, according to the research, focuses on fair treatment: justly applying shared rules and norms. Discrimination, real and perceived, erodes trust.[56] No one wants to feel like a second-class citizen. With equality present, everyone who has a relationship with your organization can participate in, create and reinforce norms — doing so ***with*** each other not to one another.[57] When considering how this might play out in your organization, ask how your constituencies, members, partners and beneficiaries feel you treat them.

COMPETENCE

As Margaret Levi, professor of political science at Stanford University noted, **competence is the capacity to deliver what you've promised**.[58] Organizations must demonstrate confidence in their own competency.[59] It increases predictability. Inefficiency and unreliability compromise social trust. Trust-building is hindered when a community believes that an organization lacks the skill or power to function effectively.[60] Organizations can self-sabotage by signaling that they are losing, or that they're in dire financial straits or inadvertently suggesting they are not doing a good job. Consider the email headlines of many civil society organizations from recent months stating these very things. Over time these appeals erode an organization's reputation for competence.

HOPE

Hope is the idea that organizations and people can make life better. It sustains trust even in the face of extreme threats and setbacks.[61] For there to be high social trust, people need a positive outlook about the future. Organizations need to cultivate hope that represents trust in the meaningfulness of life and a fair social order, the benevolence of the world or a higher power. Organizations can't just say things will get better — they need to offer some justification. This may mean putting things in context. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. modeled this when he used Minister Theodore Parker's idea and said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." It may mean reminding people of a shared destiny like an America living up to its ideals. Justified hope must walk a fine line between two extremes: unjustified hope and guaranteed outcomes. Otherwise, hope becomes impotent. Ultimately, there is power in believing in the possibility of a better world and hope for an inclusive society. This deep hope offers motivation to extend generalized trust in spite of reasons to distrust.

These three elements of the trust trio are powerful accelerators to build confidence that your organization is trustworthy. Sometimes, however, to gain legitimacy, expand their scope or attract more resources, organizations will emphasize their efficacy, transparency or specialized knowledge. While such efforts may result in short-term gains for an organization, they are not nearly as powerful over the long term as practicing and emphasizing equality, competency and hope. And short-term thinking and actions can undermine trust. Here is how that plays out.

- Efficacy can suggest it is more important to get an outcome no matter the means.[62] For example, charter schools often report high achievement outcomes, but when the data reveals that they have removed or rejected students who would negatively impact achievement rankings, they have failed to uphold their stated social norms of fairness and honesty, creating distrust as a result.

- Transparency can be well-meaning but can drown people in information they neither need nor necessarily understand.[63] According to trust expert Rachel Botsman, efforts to be transparent can also backfire, making people wonder what an organization is not sharing and how it decides what to share. She noted, "In some instances, the more organizations share, the more people ask questions

about what they're hiding." She added that there is good and bad transparency. Bad transparency is done solely for brand or reputational gain. Organizations need to have a clearer understanding of what type and level of transparency they need to be accountable. That understanding includes making meaning of the information the organization is trying to convey, offering to share the underlying data, and giving communities a chance to ask questions and offer feedback. Botsman shared, "When you're given 20 pages of terms and conditions that are in six-point type full of acronyms you don't understand, that is not intentional transparency! Accessibility comes down to intentionally designing information so that it can be clearly understood and easily reached."

- When an organization uses specialized knowledge to replace rather than complement community expertise, they can usurp a legitimate community's or group's voice. This is visible when big policies pass in Washington that are "shovel-ready." That means money is going to move fast. For communities that have lived this before, this is how highways bisect vibrant communities, new amenities go to neighborhoods that least need them and the same patterns of inequity repeat themselves. According to experts, when civil society organizations claim on-the-ground knowledge that they got through studying as opposed to listening to those with lived experience, they miss an invaluable opportunity to build trust with communities by learning from their wisdom. If the organizations fail to authentically represent these communities, trust is damaged because the community is disempowered and excluded from co-creating solutions.[64]

Reflect

How does your organization practice equality, competency and hope as organizational behaviors?

Signal that you trust your communities to increase the chance they will trust you

Trust requires and engenders reciprocity.[65] If I trust you, you are more likely to trust me. If you trust me, I am more likely to trust you. When your child walks into school, do they go through metal detectors? When you need help, do you have to "prove" you need help by filling out duplicative forms? There are a lot of rules, regulations and processes based on an assumption that people are going to cheat or misuse resources or benefits, i.e., that they shouldn't or can't be trusted. Such suspicion or expectation of mistrust can fester and become an open or even a permanent wound for your organization.

In the Pioneer Press, St. Paul, Minnesota, Mayor and Aspen Ascend Fellow Melvin Carter addressed how so many of the programs meant to help families escape poverty reiterate how much the government and society doesn't trust parents to know what's best for them and their families.

"Q: … you're quoted saying that the reason people don't trust the government is because the government doesn't trust them. What does trust have to do with guaranteed income?

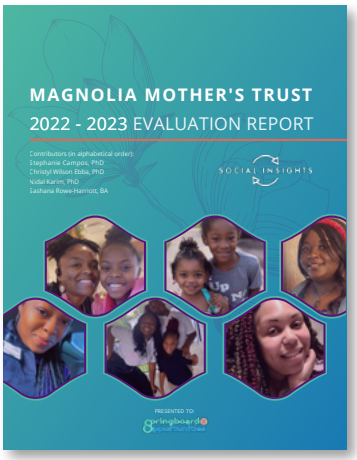
"That's what happens when a city tries to tell you that they know what is best for you and your family. Not only is it not helping, but it's actually causing harm. But if you trust someone, you can put the money and the decisions in their hands."

— **MELVIN CARTER, St. Paul, MN Mayor and Aspen Ascend Fellow**

"A: When my daughter was born, we were on WIC (the state supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants & Children), and we could use the WIC program to get specific things from the store, like milk, eggs and peanut butter. But my daughter was allergic to milk, eggs and peanut butter. And I remember feeling so frustrated, because I would go to the grocery store with this public money but I couldn't get what I really needed, because those foods weren't part of the program. And that's what happens when a city tries to tell you that they know what is best for you and your family. Not only is it not helping, but it's actually causing harm. But if you trust someone, you can put the money and the decisions in their hands.

"There are so many ways in which the way we distribute public resources really demonstrates our lack of faith in people. We're constantly backing families in the corner in a way that communicates that we don't think they know what their kids need or how they should spend their money. When in fact, there is no one in this country that is a better money manager than a low-income, single mom."

If you trust and respect your colleagues, clients or customers – and it shows – they are more likely to trust you and your organization. In Jackson, Mississippi, The Magnolia Mother's Trust (MMT) treats its program participants with dignity, and the organization has built trusting relationships with them. MMT, launched by Springboard To Opportunities, is the longest-running guaranteed income program in the country and the only one that specifically supports Black mothers facing economic insecurity. Participants receive monthly cash transfers for one year with no strings attached. MMT trusts participants to be the experts in their lives who know how and when to use the money for their families. The 2022-2023 evaluation shows growing trust with participants: Overwhelmingly, moms reported that the compassion and empathy from Springboard To Opportunities staff was a defining feature of their positive experiences. Mothers detailed the elaborate effort staff took to communicate with them, adapt in response to their needs, consistently treat them with respect and positivity and offer encouragement.



Funders can also signal trust with grantee partners to build relationships that go beyond the transactional. Practices such as offering unrestricted, flexible funding can signal trust, reduce unintended barriers to progress and lean into organizations' lived experiences to find lasting solutions for their communities. The Democracy Frontlines Fund exemplifies this. They fund the country's most impactful racial justice groups led by and for Black communities with unrestricted dollars and less red tape. At the National Alliance for Hispanic Health, Executive Vice President Adolph P. Falcón refers to flexible funding as "glue money" — money needed to deal with categorical funding and glue it together in a way that makes sense for those the alliance serves.

Reflect

How are you signaling to your communities that you trust them?

Provide opportunities for people to participate effectively and make sure they feel heard and included

"I actually think folks who are in the business of building trust, if they're not finding ways to break bread and celebrate things together and find shared joy, then trust is going to be really hard to establish."

— JAY BROWN, chief of staff, Human Rights Campaign

It may seem counterintuitive to complicate rather than simplify your story and how you've crafted it, but it's important for building and extending trust. As Amanda Ripley, co-founder of Good Conflict, said when talking about why we need to complicate narratives, "When people feel heard, they open up." This is a gateway to trust. With the advent of the internet and social media platforms, people have an expectation that they can participate in the organizations in their lives. Giselle Cordero, program manager at the Centre for Public Impact said, "Encourage inclusive engagement to empower communities. This entails actively involving those you're serving in the decision-making process, effectively sharing power, and profoundly validating their experiences."

Many civil society organizations are grappling with the big issues of the day and putting forth solutions to tough, seemingly intractable, problems. But organizations often position themselves to speak for rather than listen to and co-create with the communities they serve.[66] As organizations develop analysis of what problems to solve and the best solutions to advance, people want to be part of that and not just have the results announced to them. Many organizations have missions to do just that. But too many people are left out of the conversation or opt out because they don't believe their voice will be heard.

Providing opportunities to participate means that organizations respect relationships, seek input and are responsive to groups' and individuals' needs, concerns and aspirations. As noted, technology provides ample ways to encourage participation. But due to digital exclusion, language barriers and similar inequities, technology isn't always the most effective means of communication. Sometimes, there is no substitute for face-to-face, retail communication – such as going door to door, distributing leaflets.[67]

reddit

Ethan Zuckerman, author of Mistrust: Why Losing Faith in Institutions Provides the Tools to Transform Them, offers Reddit as a good example of effective participation. Reddit is a highly participatory platform, made up of thousands of subreddits moderated by volunteer moderators who set and apply community rules. According to Zuckerman, participants and moderators gain civic experience from their use of the medium. Users can engage with moderators directly, and moderators often poll and take the pulse of the community to set, revise and reiterate rules of engagement and resolve conflicts. Community members have a chance to shape the community norms and express concerns about them as well. According to Zuckerman research "suggests that frequent users of Reddit rated the platform more positively on questions of promoting inclusion, thoughtful conversations and sense of belonging than heavy users of other platforms."[68]

REAL TALK FOR CHANGE

The MIT Center for Constructive Communication (MIT CCC) is innovating ways to participate effectively and at scale. Leading up to the local elections in November 2021, MIT CCC, Cortico and a network of local community organizations launched a citywide effort called Real Talk for Change to introduce a new civic infrastructure to engage Boston residents in community-led, constructive conversations. Partnering with community organizations, trusted community leaders served as facilitators to invite people who usually don't vote in municipal elections into conversation circles, both in person and virtually, to surface their hopes and concerns about living in Boston. Using a human-led, technology-assisted process, MIT researchers and community fellows analyzed 69 conversations across 21 Boston neighborhoods to identify consistent patterns and themes from community members' own voices to share insights from those dialogues. With community participation and consent, the MIT CCC designed and launched a public-facing conversation portal that was shared with a diverse group of local stakeholders: participating community members, local community-based organizations, policymakers, journalists, mayoral candidates, city council and the public at large. The media used these voices and perspectives as it covered the election, and candidates addressed the themes in the debates. In this way, Real Talk for Change created meaningful ways for voters and all interested parties to participate in **shaping** what the top issues in the elections were.

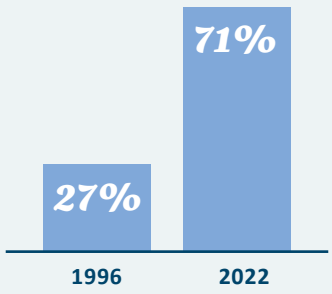
Scott Simpson, managing director of campaigns and programs at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which released a "Roadmap to the 2030 Census" report for community-based organizations, shared that there are significant opportunities to build trust at the local and chapter levels. "Local work has a lot of opportunity to build and rebuild trust around issues that are much closer to folks' communities," Simpson said. "It's important for national groups to think about how they're showing up in the communities that they are in. How are you connecting communities to their issues and making them feel empowered to have more agency over their own lives? I see great work happening when folks really go local, really listen to what folks need and figure out ways to plug in there."

Reflect

How are you offering people you want deep trusting relationships with to participate in your organization, including offering and responding to input and feedback?

Extend the in-group ethically

IN-GROUP EXTENSION EXAMPLE: **PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY**



For a moral norm to have maximum impact, a large number of people need to believe in it, practice it and hold others accountable to it. This necessitates extending the in-group – those who identify with an issue, cause or perspective. Marriage equality is a prime example of in-group extension. Back in 1996, public support for marriage for same-sex couples was at 27%. As of 2022, it was at 71%.[69]

To extend the in-group, consider three strategies to build trust across the divide between the "ins" and those who may be outside but can be brought in.

First, expand the number of people you can engage by avoiding othering.

Othering breaks trust. Finding ways to make a "we" rather than an "us vs. them" extends broad social trust. Although othering might be used strategically to get people to abide by a moral norm, doing so could have the opposite effect, by creating greater alienation between groups. Peter T. Coleman, Ph.D., professor of psychology and education at Columbia University, speaking at the 2023 Aspen Ideas Festival, noted that if your organization's strategy includes treating others with contempt, then the organization is part of the problem. Consider presidential nominee Hillary Clinton saying, "To just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right?"

Second, reduce intergroup hostility. Identifying with one group doesn't have to mean you don't like those who don't identify the same way.

If an in-group perceives itself as set against an out-group, then differences between groups are perceived as intractable and demands from groups are presented as nonnegotiable.[70] Presumably, your civil society organization is about the business of making your community and your world more fair, free and one where people have a deeper sense of connection and belonging. Stoking in-group/out-group hostilities is anathema to your ultimate goals.

Eric Eugène Murangwa is a former Rwandan international football player. In 1994, he and his immediate family survived the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Rwanda offers a poignant example of the use of "third spaces" to bridge in- and out-groups (more on third spaces below). In April 1994, Eric Eugène Murangwa was a 19-year-old Tutsi goalie for the popular soccer team Rayon Sports Football Club when the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi began. During the 100-day genocide, neighbors turned on neighbors and Hutu extremists murdered an estimated 800,000 Tutsis. Known as "Toto" on the field, Murwangwa's life was saved by Hutus, because they were fans of soccer.

After the war, Murangwa went on to establish the organization Football for Hope, Peace and Unity, which is now part of the Ishami Foundation. The Rwandan genocide left people on all sides devastated and divided. Yet, a shared love of soccer created a way to bring people together for rebuilding trust and reconciliation. Having a neutral, popular activity like soccer created a third space for healing and bonding between the Hutus and the Tutsis, regardless of background. The Ishami Foundation brings together young boys and girls, Hutu and Tutsi, to play on the same team. "We use football to challenge perceptions that are centered around traditional and cultural beliefs. It's a way of breaking down all those discrimination barriers that we tend to have because of how society has shaped us," Murangwa said.

The foundation holds annual tournaments called Play2Remember to honor genocide survivors and create a space to come together and share their stories. Throughout Rwanda, the Ishami Foundation has trained more than 600 football coaches focused on community impact throughout Rwanda. The annual tournament has also brought together survivors who, based on their 2018 report, said the event had a positive effect on the well-being of the community. This is a strong example of how extending the in-group ethically can build trust. As a welcoming third space focused on sports rather than politics, soccer helps bridge divides between the Hutu and the Tutsi. It provides common ground for Rwandans to relate as teammates working toward shared goals, rather than defined by their ethnic identities. Playing together fosters an inclusive "we" mentality over divisive "us versus them" thinking, especially among Rwanda's younger generations.

Third, engage in bridging. Bridging generates generalized trust.[71]

"We need to engage civilly with each other. Principles of democracy are a precursor to trust."

— MARGARET LEVI, Stanford University

Both bridging and bonding are necessary for social identity and trust; however, organizations often emphasize bonding at the expense of bridging. Bridging is key to extending the in-group and reducing intergroup hostility.[72] Margaret Levi of Stanford University said, "We need to engage civilly with each other. Principles of democracy are a precursor to trust: Being able to tolerate dissent, argue civilly and comply with a collectively approved outcome, knowing you can continue to fight for changes you want."

Bridging requires working across lines of difference and establishing commonality. Contact hypothesis says that divergent groups having contact with one another, under appropriate conditions, can effectively reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members.[73] Getting people together who think differently and have different perspectives and backgrounds decreases out-group hostility. Greater social trust results from bridging between and among diverse groups. Social psychologists Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp noted, "Intergroup contact effects typically generalize beyond participants in the immediate contact situation. … Not only do attitudes toward the immediate participants usually become more favorable, but so do attitudes toward the entire outgroup, outgroup members in other situations, and even outgroups not involved in the contact."[74]

THIRD SPACES

One of the best ways to activate bridging and employ contact hypothesis is to create or invest in third spaces. As demonstrated by the story above about Rwanda, third spaces provide safe places where people from different groups and identities can develop closer relationships and talk to each other about difficult topics.[75]

When people get to know others through personal contact, they are less likely to view others as members of an out-group or the "other." Diverse social networks foster social trust by expanding an individual's conception of the in-group and reducing anxiety and fear regarding intergroup interactions.[76] Peter T. Coleman of Columbia University encourages people and organizations ***not*** to start in the heated part of conversations — that is to say in set, predetermined positions. Debate is not bridging. Rather, start by understanding who people are and where they come from.

Coleman emphasizes that citizens need spaces to learn the skills like civic discourse and bridging that are processes for building trust. Importantly, for these spaces to be mind-opening, organizations need to refrain from asking people their opinion on hot topics. They will often parrot someone else's opinion, and saying it will harden their own opinion. Instead, ask them to

share an issue they've personally experienced that gives them hope or concern. Now they are talking about themselves and what they really think. Work up to talking about areas of difference.

Professor Loretta J. Ross of Smith College offered a compelling example of effective bridging and finding third spaces:

"One of my dear friends and a co-founder of SisterSong, Juanita Williams, was brilliant in creating relationships. I don't think she ever met a stranger. Juanita was part of a knitting circle in rural South Carolina. She was the only Black woman in a group of conservative, white Christian women who gathered weekly in a crafting community. Most were probably Trump supporters although they never discussed politics while crafting. As a fervent Christian from New York, Juanita had built strong relationships, culturally bridging the overhyped racial and urban/rural divides that dominate the national news.

"When Juanita asked her crafting circle to knit pink pussy hats, the women recoiled, exclaiming 'We can't say THAT word!' Sadly, these grandmothers weren't ready to talk about their lady parts in those terms. Undeterred, Juanita changed tactics. She started leading them in singing Tom Jones' song 'What's New Pussycat?' and they all laughed when they recognized it. She said they knitted 200 hats for the 2017 Women's March while endlessly singing that song! Juanita was proud to report how Calling In through 'Whoa, whoa, whoa' refrains brought people together for a common cause in her sphere of influence.

"Instead of seeking ideological unity, Juanita chose strategic unity using differences as strengths instead of liabilities. We should all be brave and resourceful when encountering differences. Stop fighting facades."

Bridging can be a high-risk activity. The perceived out-group you want to bridge to may think about or talk about issues in ways that can be perceived as offensive and non-starters for some. People engaging in bridging are agreeing to meet where people are, not insisting they immediately abandon their positions. Anyone engaging in these activities needs training and preparation and must ***agree*** to bridge rather than being compelled to. There are models out there from Braver Angels to Othering and Belonging Institute to Starts With Us that offer well-researched models that involve people engaging as equals and with ground rules.

Reflect

How can you bring new constituencies into your work that doesn't reinforce an "us vs. them" divide? How can your organization create or support third spaces that enable people to come together in ways that build social trust?

Don't Step in It

Own up to mistakes and to misalignment of organizational values and actions. If your organization is spinning, washing or any synonyms of that … stop. Your organization can't talk its way out of misalignment — it can only act its way out.

- **Don't underestimate expertise or engage in drive-by relationships.** These transactional interactions hinder rather than ladder up to trust.
- **Engage in deep in-group bonding without othering.** Ultimately, vilifying others in the name of bonding contributes to long term trust problems.

Own up to mistakes and to misalignment of organizational values and actions

If your action or decision turns out to be a mistake, own it. You may not even realize there is a misalignment until someone else brings it up. Consider it from their vantage point.

There's a familiar saying, "You can't put lipstick on a pig." Perhaps your organization finds itself in misalignment between your expressed values and norms and your actions. For example, you've said there won't be layoffs around a budget shortfall, or that a clinical trial was safe to participate in or that you have a great solution you believe will work … and then find yourself having to walk back what you said without undermining hope. If your organization is misaligned between what it promises, its actions and its results, and then fails to explicitly acknowledge that misalignment, you will erode rather than reinforce trust with critical constituencies. Organizations are in the hot seat when they decide to lay off staff or make changes in big organizational priorities or compromise on policy positions, or even choose *not* to take a position on an issue. If your action or decision turns out to be a mistake, own it. You may not even realize there is a misalignment until someone else brings it up. Consider it from their vantage point. It probably was a tough call, so openly discuss what made it tough and what guided the action or decision. Sometimes organizations will believe and say they have a simple optics problem when in fact they have a serious alignment problem. People see what's happening and they don't like it or understand it, even if they don't say they don't. An organization that glosses over the problem by dissembling or saying that staff or those they serve "just don't get it" is being disrespectful and corroding the essential trust you have otherwise so painstakingly been trying to build. It may be hard in those moments to not get defensive or shift the focus from impact to intentions. But it is in these moments when there is real opportunity to build trust.

Rev. Dr. Cassandra Gould, senior faith strategist with Faith in Action, shared that after the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a call went out among older faith leaders to pray. At this point, young people had gathered in the streets in protest. Rev. Traci Blackmon asked, "If we are going to pray, can we go where they are?" Faith leaders headed to Ferguson. They prayed. Then some told the young people it was time to get out of the street, that they had made their point. But pronouncing that the demonstrations should stop revealed the faith leaders' misalignment between norms and values — holding power to account — and actions. The young people responded, saying the faith leaders should be in the streets with them. They called the faith leaders out and called them in. It became clear to a number of faith leaders that the street was the young people's sanctuary, and those leaders chose to join the youth on the streets for many months. The streets became the church.

While faith leaders in Ferguson showed what real listening and responding looks like in the face of misalignment, San Francisco offers a different example. Leaders in San Francisco decided to launch a campaign about San Francisco's legacy so the city's "brand doesn't suffer" more. According to polls, residents have real concerns about San Francisco. The New York Times summed it up:

"Still, there's no doubt that locals are down on their city. A poll of 458 San Francisco voters conducted last month by GrowSF, a moderate political advocacy group, found that 68 percent of respondents thought the city was on the wrong track. At least 80 percent cited homelessness, open-air drug use and fentanyl dealing as very serious problems, and about two-thirds disapproved of the job that Mayor London Breed and the Board of Supervisors were doing. The good news: 86 percent of respondents believe that the city's problems can be fixed. But can a few catchy words on bumper stickers really help?"

The last question from the article is a good one: Are banners and billboards signaling to people that their concerns are being taken seriously, or will they feel that a nostalgia campaign doesn't get what the real issues are? Residents of San Francisco have shared frank and actionable feedback. If the city leaders, including businesses, respond to this with what may come off as a superficial effort to gloss over city problems, the ad campaign may backfire and erode the sense that a majority feel the city's problems can be fixed. This offers a reminder that window-dressing is unlikely to earn trust or confidence.

Reflect

Where you have misalignment between moral norms and actions, how are you adjusting your actions to fulfill what you have promised?

Don't underestimate expertise or engage in drive-by relationships

The deepest and most significant expertise is often found in the lived experiences of the communities that organizations aim to serve and collaborate with. Tapping into that local, ground-level expertise from within those communities and prioritizing long-term relationships with them builds trust. Be crystal clear about what expertise and experience you value, from community-

based to specialized knowledge. Show how these are complementary rather than one crowding out the other.[77]

"There is no distinction between our member agencies and the community – they ARE the community. People know we're there for them, that they're neighbors. It's about being present and listening and responding."

— **ADOLPH P. FALCÓN, executive vice president of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health**

During the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, Hispanic communities faced a rise in discrimination and, given the failures of government to meet community needs, governmental agencies were not trusted to deliver vaccinations in communities that have been historically underserved. It was trusted community-based organizations that were able to deliver vaccinations in Hispanic communities. By successfully advocating for an increase in federal emergency flexible funding and pushing for federalized distribution, the National Alliance for Hispanic Health helped close the vaccine equity gap among Hispanics across the country, delivering over one million doses. They directed vaccine supplies to communities that were the most underserved and supported them through a network of over 500 frontline community health workers (*promotores*) with the training needed to distribute vaccines. Local Hispanic communities were receptive because their community-based health organizations had decades of ongoing presence. The workers administering the vaccines were hired and trained from within the community. And these in-community health workers listened and responded to neighbors' needs, offering comprehensive services for families. With culturally responsive outreach and access to vaccine supplies, these trusted frontline workers rapidly expanded vaccination uptake.

"When you live in this community, and go through life with people, it makes your leadership and how you formulate organizations and who actually has a say very, very, very different. So we do appreciative inquiry – we go porch to porch, door to door. All of our members are from this community."

— **CAMRYN SMITH, co-founder & executive director of Communities in Partnership**

In 2011 in Durham, North Carolina, after an inadequate city response to a neighborhood shooting, Communities in Partnership (CIP) formed as a way to amplify community voices and hold officials accountable. Early on, while working with partner organizations that came from outside the community, CIP leadership observed practices that used resources in ways that didn't help residents and hindered policies that could have helped.

Now, as it addresses growing economic disparities in East Durham, CIP uses a community-rooted approach that leverages the expertise and resources of residents who live and work there. Communities are leading the work. By being community-rooted, CIP is building trust, developing local leaders and changing the narrative about the community.[78]

Reflect

How can you shift power and decision-making to the communities you serve to build higher levels of trust? How does your staff and board reflect the lived expertise of the communities you serve and share decision-making power with them?

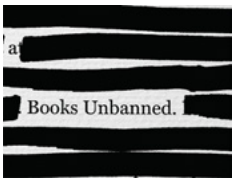
Engage in deep in-group bonding without othering

Deeper trust within an in-group can derive from bonding among members who share common missions, purposes and values, including common moral norms. The key to successful bonding is to do this without othering those who are in a perceived out-group, to bond around who you are and what you want to be collectively rather than who you aren't – your opponents, antagonists or perceived enemies.

DEFINITION OF IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS

From West Chester University:

> "An in-group is a group to whom you, as a person, belong, and anyone else who is perceived as belonging to that group. In-group members have positive views of each other ... . An out-group consists of anyone who does not belong to your group. Out-groups are viewed more negatively... ."



Brooklyn Public Library's Books Unbanned initiative offers inspiration. In response to book bans in school libraries, often citing content inappropriate for certain age groups, "the Brooklyn Public Library joins those fighting for the rights of teens nationwide to read what they like, discover themselves, and form their own opinions. We invite individuals ages 13-21 to apply for a free BPL eCard, providing access to our full eBook collection as well as our learning databases."

The library is doing deep bonding with book lovers. It is also doing deep bonding with those who share a common moral norm that information should be accessible and not banned. This includes students, parents, teachers and more. It is doing this in a way that is "against" banning but does not "other" specific people who might be pushing for bans. It is not naming organizations that are banning books or scapegoating parents who might be at school boards making a case that a book is obscene or not age-appropriate.

Ultimately, deep in-group bonding can build deep trust, but it is important to consider doing so in a way that does not alienate others that your organization ultimately might want to share this moral norm.

Reflect

How can you build space for deep in-group bonding that does not alienate partners, constituencies and communities you want to bring in?

Rebuild:

MENDING BROKEN TRUST

> *"'I am sorry' are perhaps the three hardest words to say. We can come up with all manner of justifications to excuse what we have done. When we are willing to let down our defences and look honestly at our actions, we find there is a great freedom in asking for forgiveness and great strength in admitting the wrong. It is how we free ourselves from our past errors. It is how we are able to move forward into our future, unfettered by the mistakes we have made."*
>
> **— ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU in The Guardian**

No one is perfect at this. You'll probably face broken trust that needs repair, whether it happens on your watch or already existed.

Research says when trust breaks, organizations must commit to moral repair.[79] Those who believe they have been wronged cannot rationally choose to forget broken trust.[80] Those who are perceived to have broken trust are unlikely to engage in repair if treated with derision. Organizations must analyze breaks in trust and determine steps to restore relationships, including acknowledging wrongdoing, holding those who broke trust accountable and reinforcing shared moral norms. Repairing broken relationships means addressing all elements of the fracture, including feelings and rational judgments.[81] Collective memory is a locus of broken trust, but it is also a locus of hope for rebuilding trust and social transformation, both locally and globally. Within collective memories lies radical hope and the potential for transcending those conditions.[82]

Recognize when trust is broken and why, then commit to rebuilding

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization in the United States, has had to address broken trust. It has faced challenges for lacking inclusivity of transgender people and issues. In 2003, HRC amended its mission statement to specifically include transgender people. In 2007, Joe Solmonese, then-president of HRC, told attendees of the Southern Comfort transgender conference that the organization would advocate for federal employment protections, fully inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite that promise, HRC supported a non-inclusive version of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA) that included sexual orientation, but not gender identity and expression, when it was introduced in the House later that year.

The inconsistency between HRC's mission and public statements and its advocacy for a non-inclusive ENDA further damaged already strained relationships with the transgender community and its allies. Since then, HRC leadership has acted to rebuild trust with the transgender community and integrate trans issues into its work. They engaged in ongoing dialogue with transgender people to understand the fracture, assess perceptions of the organization and its work and develop a strategy for repairing the relationship using the moral repair steps below.

When an organization finds itself in this position, moral repair is needed. Moral repair involves four steps.[83] This guide adapts these to apply to the civil society context.

FOUR STEPS OF MORAL REPAIR

STEP 1

Understand what the fracture is

STEP 2

Repair the fracture

STEP 3

Take pulse regularly to see whether the work is paying off

STEP 4

Over time, assess whether the moral repair worked

STEP 1

Understand what the fracture is.

What led to the real or perceived fracture? What was it like before with the organization and the people feeling the fracture and what is it like now?

For HRC, this work started in earnest when Chad Griffin became HRC President in 2012. He began making internal changes to create a more inclusive staff and organizational boards. He understood that there was broken trust with the trans community and why.

STEP 2

Repair the fracture[84]

- This was wrong.
- This is what happened, why it was wrong and who was harmed. What lessons can we draw from this and act on?
- Restate the moral norm that will guide behavior moving forward, noting that those harmed may well take a wait-and-see attitude. Stress how the organization will operate differently in the future to uphold this norm. Show change in action.
- Nourish hope that these norms can be upheld; they are real and they are enforceable.
- Commit to this for the long term. These are not statements but ways of being. Successful repair between organizations and communities needs to reinforce reliability, predictability and fairness.[85]
- If you can, connect those involved in the trust fracture to repair the relationship. Ongoing connection will decrease distrust if done in good faith.

For HRC, in a 2013 speech at Southern Comfort, Griffin acknowledged and apologized for the organization's mistakes and committed to improving. He said, "HRC has done wrong by the transgender community in the past, and I am here to formally apologize. I am sorry for the times when we stood apart when we should have been standing together." He also recognized HRC's responsibility to the trans community, which is fundamental to their mission.

Then, Griffin got specific about how HRC would do better. He pledged that HRC would fight for fully inclusive employment non-discrimination legislation. And he didn't stop there. He said that HRC would lead a

campaign for a comprehensive LGBT civil rights bill touching "every aspect of our lives" including housing, public accommodations, credit, funding and education. Last, Griffin asked the crowd to hold HRC, and him, accountable. In 2017, HRC successfully campaigned for the repeal of the North Carolina law (HB2) that banned transgender people from using bathrooms that matched their gender identity.

After HRC acknowledged where it went wrong and shared specific steps to move forward, advocates responded positively. This created opportunities for HRC to work with communities differently moving forward. The organization has since made efforts to affirm trans inclusion in its messaging and reinforce it through its actions.

STEP 3

Take the pulse regularly to see whether the work is paying off with more trusted relationships, and what more might be needed.

Over time and across leadership changes, trans leaders have continued to hold HRC accountable. In 2019, trans community leaders wrote an open letter to then-President Alphonso David that said, "Our lives are the frontlines. We have the solutions." They pointed to existing trans groups leading the movement for trans liberation and called on HRC to support the existing trans-led groups rather than lead on its own. At the same time, they shared they had been excited to see HRC's first Black president and remained hopeful. HRC responded by more fully integrating transgender issues into its legislative advocacy and public education work. HRC listened to and learned from the transgender community and began to align its work and priorities to its trans-inclusive mission statement.

STEP 4

Over time, assess whether the moral repair worked.

Are there signs it made people more confident that the organization will continue to do what it says it is going to do and that it will be a good and effective partner in contributing to a better world? Do predictability and fairness exist when it comes to the organization's behaviors and actions?

In 2022, Kelley Robinson became the president of HRC. Amid what the organization has declared as a national state of emergency for LGBTQ+ Americans, Robinson stated that HRC is centering transgender issues, saying, "I'm serious when I say we're going to get freedom and liberation for every LGBTQ+ person without exceptions."

Ask and Act:

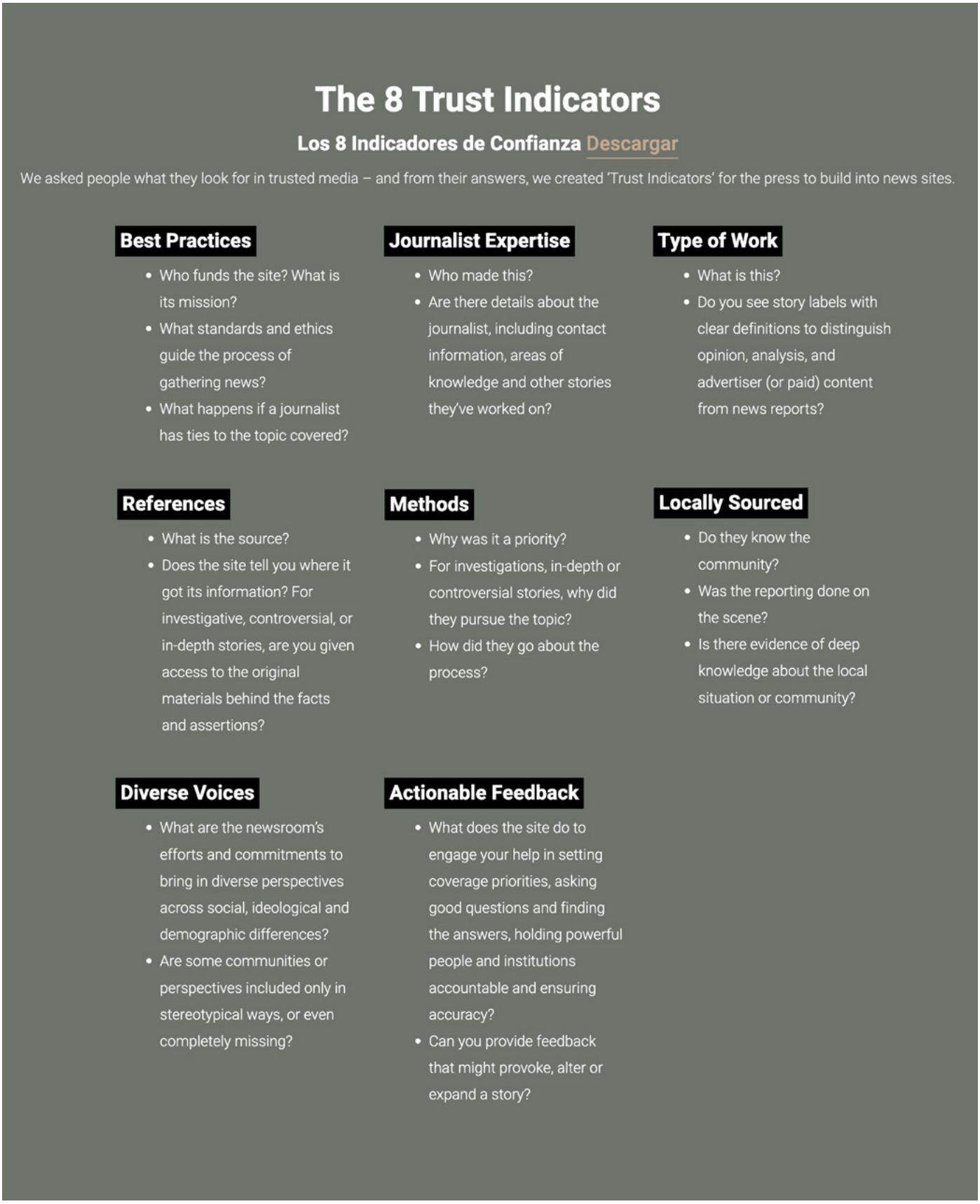
KEEP TRUST TOP OF MIND

As people often say, we measure what matters, and if trust matters, you need to measure it. Find ways to systematically listen to those you can build trust with. Constantly review your communications and ensure you are asking the explicit question: "Are we keeping our promises and staying aligned with our stated values and moral norms?" This can be done through short surveys either at existing touchpoints with collaborators and partners (such as programming or through existing newsletter channels) or through facilitated discussion where there is a commitment to act on the feedback received.

Set up indicators that you believe earn trust and assess them. Create feedback loops among the internal team as well as external communities. This means people at all levels of the organization should be hearing about feedback on the state of trust and know what it may mean for them to act in ways that better align with norms and stated values to build trust. When seeking feedback, look for signs of high trust, and note areas for improvement. Hold senior staff accountable for progress for higher levels of trustworthiness. Adobe has a chief trust officer "charged with driving a unified strategy that leverages technology, law, and policy to strengthen Adobe's products, services, and reputation as a company that employees and customers around the world can trust."

Reflect

Who is the person or group of people responsible for sharing progress across your organization and who is accountable for acting on this information?



(Example from The Trust Project)

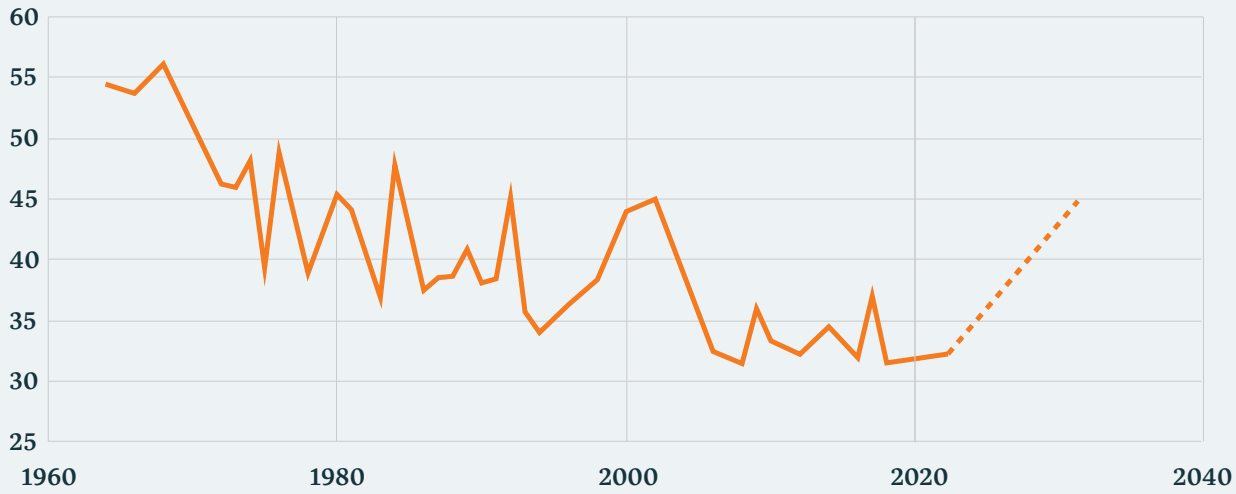
Be sure to have a reasonable time frame in mind when promising action. Asking for feedback without explicit, shared plans for how it will be implemented, if at all, will only erode trust. When asking for feedback, it's important that you're clear about who will hear the feedback and consider it for action, and when respondents will hear back from you. This can mean naming the trust committee or some other organizational structure you have in place. For example, if you're working with a community advisory board, perhaps have it review trust insights quarterly. Whatever the process is that fits within your organizational structure, be clear on the action part of the equation before you ask.

Trust Building Time

There is no better time to engage in trust-building than right now. Ask yourself and your team: Is what we are doing today, this week, this year increasing trust or eroding it? You have a unique position in society and can use your power to make trust a strength for your organization and in our society rather than a weakness. Committing to concrete behaviors and practices that earn trust, and being accountable for the results, will help reverse the trust deficit and elevate social trust. Imagine what's possible in that world.

Chart of Possibility: No Better Time to Earn Trust

% who say most people can be trusted



(Historical data: Kevin Vallier. Future projection (dotted line): Spitfire Strategies)

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Additional Resources

To learn more and use our accompanying Trust Toolkit to put these recommendations into action, visit spitfirestrategies.com/trust.

Walk Your Talk

Finding Legitimacy and **Earning Trust to Build Equitable and Healthy Societies Report** – Centre for Public Impact's reports and resources on building and maintaining legitimacy

"Social Service or Social Change? Who Benefits from your Work" – An essay from Paul Kivel, a leader in violence prevention work, that provides a framework for accountability and shifting power

The 8 Trust Indicators – The Trust Project's trust indicators for the press to build into news, based on what people look for in trusted media

Put Your Best Foot Forward

Braver Angels – Resources, membership and events from America's largest organization bringing conservatives and progressives together

The Broke Project – A report and resources to examine stories about poverty and to build new narratives rooted in lived experience

Calling In – Professor and activist Loretta J. Ross' tool and practice, and related courses and events, for turning difficult conversations into productive ones

Mistrust book and **paper** by Ethan Zuckerman on how social media can make better citizens

Enterprise Capital – A model for boosting the impact of funders, nonprofits and social enterprises by aligning long-term flexible capital with capacity

Inclusivv – Content, training and technology to engage in structured, meaningful conversations that spark change

Plurality Institute – A hub for researchers working on plural technologies to cooperate across difference

Rethink with Rachel newsletter – Best practices on trust from expert Rachel Botsman

Starts With Us – Resources and a newsletter for skills to engage across differences

Just Truth – Spitfire's communicator guide to combating disinformation in a hyper-connected world

Don't Step in It

"Community-Rooted Organizations: Enhanced Accountability and Capacity Building for Community Development" – An essay on Communities in Partnership's community-rooted approach

Ask and Act: What Level of Trustworthiness Does Your Organization Have?

Partnership for Public Service – Data on trust in government

Recognize When Trust Is Broken and Why, Then Commit to Rebuilding

Rebuilding Trust in Government – Our Public Service's resources to set a public standard for trustworthiness, improve the narrative and build champions

Earned Legitimacy Learning Cohort – Centre for Public Impact's insights on how governments are rebuilding trust with communities

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