

Job Aid: How to Build Trust

Adaptation Requires Trust and Confronts Distrust

Adaptation – like all challenging governance problems – requires trust among those involved and affected. But with much at stake under climate change and so much polarization in public debate, trust is maybe even more important for adaptation than some other issues. As decision-makers in elected office charged with responsibilities for entire communities or as CEOs of businesses, or as neighbors and family members trying to find the best way forward, people typically confront:

- **Complexity** – working through complex considerations involved in adaptation
- **Lack of technical expertise or familiarity** – considering scientific and technical information with which many are not familiar
- **Deep uncertainty** – dealing with uncertainty and sometimes outright not-knowing in the face of unprecedented changes associated with a changing climate
- **Risks and trade-offs** – facing significant risks and difficult trade-offs and seeking a balance among divergent interests that is acceptable to all involved
- **Legacies** – addressing legacies of unfair or biased interactions (from interpersonal altercations to long-standing structural injustices such as poverty and racism)
- **Emotional intensity** – navigating through sometimes intensely emotional responses to the climate issue and to potential adaptation options, and ultimately,
- **Human dignity and meaning-making** – deciding how to be and live with each other in ways that are respectful of oneself and of others.

Under such challenging pressures and conditions, trust is not easy to come by, and yet essential. Instead, often it is lacking, while suspicion, fear and distrust prevail. Many have disengaged from public decision-making processes due to some negative prior experience. And even where trust exists, it must be carefully tended to maintain it. It is even harder to work together if trust was broken and needs to be rebuilt. Adaptation professionals should expect unresolved issues to show up in the course of adaptation; in fact, while there are no quick fixes, adaptation offers a chance to work toward better futures.

What is Trust?

Trust is a dynamic aspect of relationships. It can be built, earned, tried and tested, retained or lost and regained. It is not a given. While there is no one definition, trust can be thought of as:

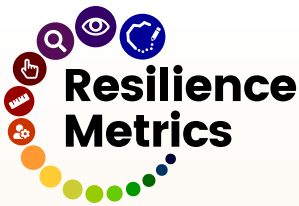
- “The intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998)
- “The extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions and decisions of another” (McAllister 1995)



Some consider trust the essence of social capital, the glue that holds relationships together, the foundation of good, healthy relationships. It has cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (see figure below).



This job aid was created to serve as a reference for individuals interested in indicators and metrics to help communities define and track progress on their climate adaptation goals. Additional background and resources are available on the website: www.ResilienceMetrics.org. This website was developed in partnership with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System with funding from NOAA.



When people trust they openly engage, put their energy into a relationship or situation, are willing to contribute and share of themselves in deep and meaningful ways. When trust is lost, people withdraw their energy and engagement from a relationship or situation; they are less likely to show up, speak their truths, or share anything that might make them vulnerable. Importantly, someone may show up in person but still internally disengage, so outward presence does not equal internal engagement.

ELEMENTS OF TRUST

A	ABLE Demonstrates competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The other is smart, capable, expert, competent – an expert; has credentials; is capable of doing what they are supposed to do; can resolve problems; help others etc.
B	BELIEVABLE Acts with integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The other is honest, sincere, respectful, upfront; is empathetic, understanding, and nonjudgmental; is fair; keeps things shared in confidence
C	CONNECTED Cares about others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The other shows concern and interest; is transparent, authentic and congruent; has no hidden agenda; owns up to a mistake/shortcoming; is open, shares themselves, offers praise and acknowledgment; shows their own vulnerability
D	DEPENDABLE Honors commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The other is reliable, dependable, predictable (through time); comes through on commitments; is timely, responsive, consistent, and organized; follows up

Source: Adapted from Blanchard Greece-Cyprus, based on Blanchard, K., C. Olmstead, & M. Lawrence (2013) *Trust Works: Four Keys to Building Lasting Relationships*

The Basics: How to Build Trust

Building trust begins with an open mind. Negatively judging others is not a fruitful starting place.

Instead, building trust starts from self-awareness (reflection on one's own worldview, triggers, typical reactivity and behaviors, desires/hopes for an outcome, value commitments, etc.).

On that foundation, one person can initiate a conversation to build genuine other-awareness, i.e., to learn about the other, offering an invitational, open, exploratory space.

Depending on the process, pre-existing conditions and any anticipation of tensions, it can be important to jointly agree on conversational ground rules.

A conversation or collaborative process that builds trust has a common set of qualities, and conversation partners and/or facilitators can create an environment in which they prevail

- **Curiosity** – both sides are genuinely interested in understanding the other
- **Compassion** – both sides allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to not just listen to, but hear and feel the truth of what the other is sharing
- **Empathy** – both sides are able to put themselves in the shoes of the other, even while they are not obliged to agree with the other person's stance, and
- **Humility** – both sides admit that they don't know everything about the problem (e.g., a privileged person does not know firsthand what the experience of a less privileged person is) and don't have all the answers.

As a dialogue comes to a close, participants step back and jointly reflect on places of agreements and disagreements, changes in mutual understanding or in the understanding of a situation, points of conversion and divergence, and places that remain unresolved.

In one-time and ongoing processes, participants will build trust (or not) based on their experience of the A-B-C-D's (see figure above) that got conveyed through words and actions of all involved.



If all involved can commit to staying in conversation, to principles of civility and a democratic process, then the conversation can be continued and deepened at a later time. This builds trust both in the process and trust in people previously perceived as “other.”

Facilitation of Group Meetings to Create a Trust-Filled Working Environment

As facilitators of adaptation processes, the work of trust building does not begin in the meeting room, but long before. Preparatory work involves:

- **Stakeholder mapping**
 - Understanding which stakeholders need to be at the table (see related Job Aid)
 - Understanding all stakeholders’ specific concerns, worries, expectations, attitudes and values
- **Information gathering**
 - Having preliminary conversations, in smaller groups or one-on-one, to get to know each other and build one-on-one trust with the process facilitator
 - Understanding the setting, pre-existing challenges and conditions that may color the adaptation process
- **Facilitator’s self-assessment**
 - Being clear and honest with oneself as the facilitator to judge whether one is ready and equipped or the right person to facilitate a process
 - Based on the insights gathered, deciding on who is best suited to facilitate the process (e.g., a staff person of the leading governing entity or a partner organization, or a hired outsider)
- **Careful, deliberate design**
 - Designing a process that sets clear goals, is purpose-driven, accounts for participants’ needs and ensures principles of good governance (see related Job Aid)

In contexts that are characterized by significant reservoirs of pre-existing trust, good will, and openness to other participants and readiness to engage on the topic, general facilitation techniques of helping the group “form, norm, storm and perform” are most appropriate, including:

- **Honoring local culture and customs** – e.g., importance of food sharing, storytelling, honoring land, ancestors, elders, local leaders; celebrations
- **Fostering a spirit of generosity and openness** – e.g., sharing information and expertise freely, inserting fun and humor, offering something “above and beyond” one’s duty



- **Enabling stakeholder participation** – e.g., by providing food, drinks, childcare, free parking, best timing during day/week, and sensible frequency of meetings
- **Helping participants agree on ground rules for group interaction** – e.g., respectful conversation, punctuality/staying on schedule, use of electronics in meetings, presence/absence, frequency of communication/meetings
- **Creating a learning-oriented, dialogic spaces** – e.g., participants share a common language (minimizing/explaining jargon), learn fundamental skills or knowledge to be able to participate fully, providing a clear structure, helping participants stay clear on process, foci of meetings, agendas
- **Honoring multiple ways of knowing and learning** – e.g., including multiple formats for discussion and not just talking, such as activities, field trips, joint projects, silence, walking
- **Addressing challenges as they arise** – e.g., taking time to overtly deal with conflict or disagreements, agreeing with the group when it is most appropriate to do so; as groups observe challenging situations to be handled with care, attention and skill, the trust in the facilitator, the process and the other participants grow
- **Eliciting feedback at the end of meetings** – e.g., with the entire group or with individuals, as appropriate on the contents and/or process to signal openness to critique and then making adjustments to signal responsiveness

Facilitators must create a process that works for everyone, not just some. The responsibility is to the whole group. The facilitator also models trustworthiness and integrity throughout the process.

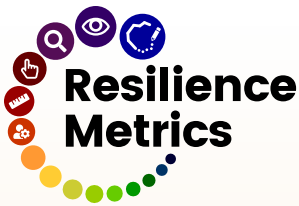
Common Reasons for Lack of Trust

If trust does not grow or seems “shaky”, a facilitator should carefully review what is working and not working. Eliciting feedback from the group (all sides, key champions) is critical to check one’s own observations or conclusions against those of others. Reasons for lack of trust often lie in the structure or process of an interaction, not just individuals, including:

- Poor interpersonal communication
- Lack of attention to relationships, relationship building, rules/norms of reciprocity
- Poorly designed and/or executed processes, characterized by lack of transparency, lack of information sharing, no clarity on roles, poor or inadequately explained decision-making process, lack of follow-through and accountability
- Significant breaches of assumed or explicit rules of conduct
- Histories of incidences where trust was broken and not repaired

Any participant in an interaction (including, but not only, the facilitator) can take the initiative to address lack-of-trust issues. If the issue is between group participants, a mutually agreeable, trusted third party (from within the group or outside) can help facilitate the situation. Where there is trust between a group and the facilitator, the facilitator must create a space to resolve the issues. If the distrust is between the facilitator and the group, a group and the facilitator will be tested in their willingness, courage and ability to work through it together, or to bring in a mutually agreeable, trusted third party from the outside to help.





How to Restore Trust

Repairing relationships and restoring trust is crucial for the long-term success of communities working through adaptation questions. How to do this and how long it takes depends on the frequency, severity, timing, intentionality and nature of the breach that occurred. Some issues are quickly cleared up, while others can take a long time. There are things to do in the short-term, and things to do over the long-term.

Steps to Trust Repair in the Short-term

- **Seeking clarity** – all involved make efforts to seek out the other to understand what happened in a situation. Walking down the “Ladder of Inference” (see Resources), they clarify what was done, said, meant or intended. This can clear up misunderstandings and deepen communication and trust
- **Apologizing** – as a deeper understanding emerges, all relevant players accept culpability for their part in the breach of trust or their wrong doing (e.g., incompetency) and acknowledge it explicitly
- **Making amends** – to begin restoring trust (where this is possible), it is important that those culpable for a problem go a step further by verbally rectifying a wrong and/or providing material compensation for damages and losses
- **Forgiving** – granting forgiveness for a trespass is not to “undo”, “forget”, “condone” or “accept” the trespass but to be willing to make oneself vulnerable again and give others another chance
- **Returning** – a sign of trust rebuilding and those involved being willing to be vulnerable with each other again is when they come back to the conversation and – maybe slowly at first – reengage

Additional Steps to Trust Repair in the Long-term

- **Reframing** – many long-standing matters of distrust are embedded in particular ways of framing people or situations; these persistent sources of irritation and misunderstanding must be removed and replaced with respectful ways of naming and understanding a situation and people
- **Changing leadership and representation** – depending on the willingness of individuals and groups to reengage with each other, a process or relationship may not be restored with the same individuals involved. Leadership and representation are then key questions to resolve together
- **Enacting structural changes** – to rectify long-standing wrongs, injustices or sources of distrust, it is necessary to solidify short-term repairs through lasting structural rearrangements (e.g., process changes, monitoring, contracts, changes in laws and policies)



Selected Resources

General Resources

- Russell, Hardin (2002). *Trust and Trustworthiness*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Blanchard, K., C. Olmstead & M. Lawrence (2013). *Trust Works: Four Keys to Building Lasting Relationships*.
- Lewicki, R. J. & C. Brinsfield (2017). Trust repair. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 4: 287-313. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113147>.
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- Jourdain, K. and J. Nagel (2019). *Building Trust and Relationship at the Speed of Change: A Worldview Intelligence Leader Series* (Book 1). (See also: www.worldviewintelligence.com)
- *Ladder of Inference*:
 - https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_91.htm
 - <https://thesystemsthinker.com/the-ladder-of-inference/>
- *Dealing with Disruptive Behaviors: Facilitative Techniques*: <https://coast.noaa.gov/ddb/>.

Working in Contexts with a History of Distrust

- Bergstrom, D. et al. (2012). *The Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities*. PolicyLink and The Kirwan Institute. Free access at the [Kirwan Institute](http://www.kirwaninstitute.org).
- Christopher, S., V. Watts, A. K. H. G. McCormick & S. Young (2008). *Building and maintaining trust in a community-based participatory research partnership*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98, 1398-1406. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.125757> (free access).
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- Rodríguez, I. and M. L. Inturias (2018). Conflict transformation in indigenous peoples' territories: Doing environmental justice with a 'decolonial turn'. *Development Studies Research* 5: 90-105.
- Parsons, M., K. Fisher & J. Nalau (2016). Alternative approaches to co-design: Insights from indigenous/academic research collaborations. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 20: 99-105. Free access at [ResearchGate](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311111111).
- Seattle Office for Civil Rights (2009). *Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide*. Free access at: <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/documents/2010IOPEGuide.pdf>.
- Hunjan, R. and J. Pettit (2011). *Power: A Practical Guide for Facilitating Social Change*. Free access at the [Carnegie UK Trust](http://www.carnegie.org).