



The Trust Toolkit

*Spitfire's Toolkit for Civil Society
Organizations to Earn and
Repair Trust*

Introduction

Trust is necessary to have a high-functioning pluralistic democracy, improve public health and solve collective problems like climate change. Right now, we have a trust deficit. The good news: American civil society organizations can help reverse it.

With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (the views here do not necessarily reflect the Foundation's views), a team at Spitfire took a close look at the social-science research about earning and rebuilding trust, 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. The result is "[Replenishing Trust: Civil Society's Guide to Reversing the Trust Deficit.](#)"

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.

Spitfire designed this trust toolkit for civil society organizations to take the recommendations in our guide and put them into action. Organizations can use this toolkit to focus on the most relevant sections for their state of trust or to create a comprehensive trust-building plan. By building better trust, we can create a better world together.



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Ask:

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

FOR THIS “ASK” WORKSHEET, REFER TO PAGES 5-6 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

Defining the Spirit of Trust

Let’s explore what trust means to you and for your organization. Trust is essential for strong relationships and reaching your goals. Here we will look beyond the simple definition of trust and redefine it to match the way your organization works and interacts.

DEFINITION

According to experts, 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. Social trust requires generalized trust, which according to experts is a willingness to extend broad trust to others across groups in society. This means a willingness to trust strangers.

The following questions will help you find a clear and meaningful way to describe trust that fits your organization’s goals and values. This is the foundation that will help you build a culture of openness, honesty and respect.

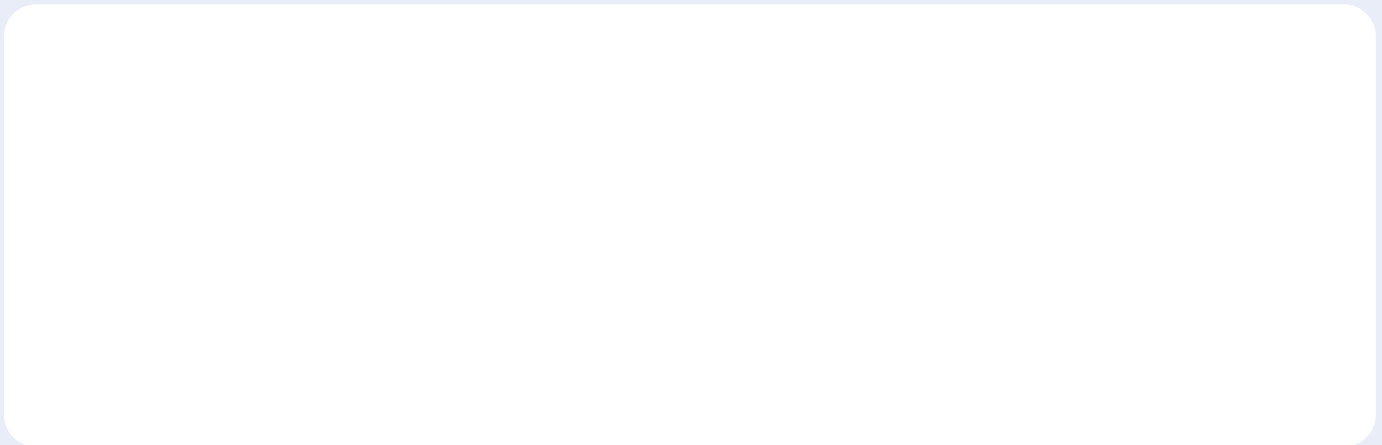
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How would your organization’s work be different and more effective if it enjoyed greater trust among the people it works with, partners with and serves?

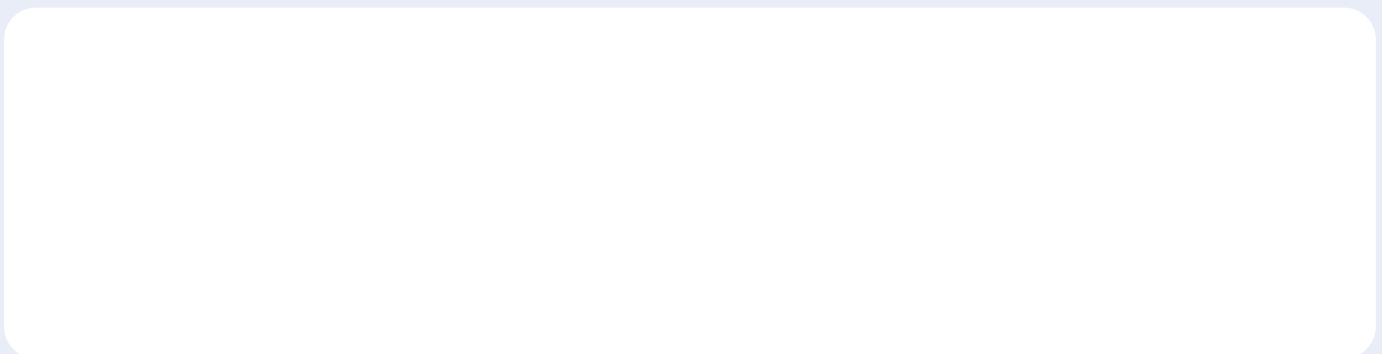
- 2 Whom does your organization need to involve to create the best definition of the spirit of trust it wants to cultivate?



- 3 Reflect on what “strong trust” means for your organization. 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.*” In between, you might note what guides your organization’s actions, what priorities are, and how those manifest in how the organization works.



- 4 Create a short list of the different groups and people you want to build trusting relationships with. Avoid being too broad; focus on those who matter most.





Assess:

WHERE ARE YOU WHEN IT COMES TO BEING TRUSTED?

FOR THIS “ASSESS” WORKSHEET, REFER TO PAGES 7-12 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

1 Which signs of high trust are present in your organization?

- 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.
- 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. They have substantial control over decision-making, not just more responsibility.
- 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. Those engaging with you do so with responsiveness and vulnerability.
- People engaging with your organization feel welcome, have agency and participate in ways meaningful to them.**
- There is a spirit of optimism within and around your organization.** 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.
- There is a strong sense internally and externally that your organization places public interest over self-interest** — for instance, people and the planet before profit.
- 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. The choir is growing.
- Your organization is conflict-resilient.** There is continual communication, especially when conversations get hard. It holds difficult discussions, acknowledges breaches of trust and takes steps to repair them.
- Communities and partners seek out your organization**, and there is measurable positive word of mouth about your organization and team.
- There is visible accountability**, including your organization listening and leading with empathy, taking feedback and acting on it. Communities are invited to provide honest and open input. Your organization checks assumptions and responds to their needs. Public accountability also includes transparency, responsibility, fairness, efficiency, responsiveness and honesty. Your organization institutes and upholds processes and practices that ensure people are accountable for bad outcomes regardless of intentions.
- Your organization treats growing social trust as a valuable goal in itself.**

- 2 Based on your answers above, with whom does your organization have high trust now? With whom could your organization do a better job?

- 3 How is your organization delivering on what it says it will do? How is your organization sharing that in a way that resonates with those who need to know about it and believe it? Is there consistency in delivering on promises across all levels of the organization, with partners and communities? Where are areas of improvement to focus on?

- 4 Are you experiencing lack of trust, mistrust and/or distrust? How is it manifesting (consider social traps, hypocrisy, weak access points that are causing confusion or doubt, etc.)?

- 5 What structures, processes and incentives (positive and negative) does your organization have in place that hold it accountable to make sure staff and the organization are being trustworthy? What feedback loops do you need to put in place to keep track of trust?

- 6 Does your organization's reputation as a trustworthy partner outweigh negative perceptions? Who are the people or groups that see you as trustworthy?

- 7 How does your organization actively work to repair trust when it falls short of its stated values?

Implement:

10 CONCRETE WAYS TO EARN TRUST



Walk Your Talk

FOR THIS “WALK YOUR TALK” SECTION, REFER TO PAGES 14-20 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

Behave With Integrity: Can you identify instances where your organization has acted with integrity? Are there areas of misalignment? What measures are in place to ensure staff integrity?

Action Plan: Outline strategies to maintain what your organization is doing well and how to address any misalignments or gaps it has identified (e.g., continue or start to hold town halls to hear feedback).

Identify Moral Norms: What moral norms (e.g., fairness) are central to your organization’s work, and how does it embody them?

Action Plan: Where is there confusion about the moral norms you follow that need clarity? Which moral norms are in consistent use, and which moral norms do you need to practice more?

Practice Moral Elevation: How often and in what ways has your organization practiced moral elevation by showcasing and advancing others' good deeds this year?

Action Plan: How might your organization practice moral elevation more often?



Put Your Best Foot Forward

FOR THIS “PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD” SECTION, REFER TO PAGES 20-29 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

Trust Trio — Equality, Competency, Hope:
How does your organization exhibit equality, competency and hope?

Action Plan: Where are there opportunities to double down on effective behaviors and practices, and where is there room for improvement to do this more deliberately and consistently?

Signal Trust to Communities: In what ways does your organization show your communities that they are trusted, and where are you sending mixed signals you can clear up?

Action Plan: Identify ways to demonstrate more trust in your communities (e.g., follow community-led solutions, provide nonrestrictive funding, etc.).

Encourage Participation: How does your organization engage people, including soliciting and responding to feedback?

Action Plan: Where could your organization increase opportunities for people to participate meaningfully and for your organization to be responsive to feedback?

Extend the In-Group: Where is your organization bringing in new constituencies? Where are you, perhaps inadvertently, creating an “us vs. them” divide?

Action Plan: Where are opportunities to bring more people in? What third spaces can your organization create to make this happen? What bridging will need to happen and by whom for this to succeed?



Don't Step in It

FOR THIS “DON'T STEP IN IT” SECTION, REFER TO PAGES 30-33 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

Own Up to Mistakes: Where have your organization's actions not aligned with its moral norms?

Action Plan: What does your organization need to own up to as a way to earn more trust?

Don't underestimate expertise or engage in drive-by relationships: Where is your organization being more transactional rather than relational? Where might your organization be usurping voice and power rather than using it?

Action Plan: How can your organization prioritize relationships more? How can your organization honor and elevate expertise and lived experience?

Foster In-Group Bonding Without Othering: Does your organization foster in-group bonding without dehumanizing and scapegoating others? Where might your organization have room for improvement?

Action Plan: Propose ways to strengthen in-group bonding without othering (for example, an event or experience that brings people with common interests together).

Rebuild:

MENDING BROKEN TRUST

FOR THIS “REBUILD” SECTION, REFER TO PAGES 34-37 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

4-step moral repair process with key constituencies

This section of the toolkit explores a step-by-step process that Kurt T. Dirks, Roy J. Lewicki and Akbar Zaheer created to mend trust once it’s broken. Spitfire has adapted this process for civil society organizations. Provide thoughtful answers to each question as you

identify what caused the fracture in trust, and walk through behaviors and practices for repairing the fracture and assessing whether the repair worked over time. Note there may be more than one fracture to repair.



Step 1: Understand what the fracture is.

What led to the real or perceived fracture with your organization?

What was it like before the fracture? What is it like now?



Step 2: Repair the fracture.

Begin to rebuild trust by acknowledging the following:

- This was wrong.
- This is what happened, why it was wrong and who was harmed.
- Restate the moral norm (e.g., inclusivity, fairness, etc.) 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 your organization can uphold these norms; they are real, and they are enforceable.

Outline a statement to repair trust that considers all of the above.

What lessons can your organization draw from this trust fracture and act on?

**How will your organization uphold and reinforce these norms for the long term?
Who will be responsible?**

- 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.**
- If you can, connect with those involved in the trust fracture to repair the relationship. Ongoing connection will decrease distrust if done in good faith.**



Step 3: Take the pulse regularly to see whether the work is paying off with more trusted relationships and what more might be needed.

How often will your organization take a pulse to see whether this work is paying off? Whom will your organization reach out to?



Step 4: Over time, assess whether the moral repair worked.

How does your organization know that people have more trust in the organization as the result of this work? What signs can it point to as evidence?

Ask and Act:

KEEP TRUST TOP OF MIND

FOR THIS “ASK AND ACT” SECTION, REFER TO PAGES 38-40 OF THE “REPLENISHING TRUST” GUIDE IF YOU NEED CLARITY ON TERMS OR EXAMPLES.

As people often say, “We measure what matters.” If trust matters, you need to measure it.

Frequently review and ensure your organization is asking the explicit question: “Are we keeping our promises and staying aligned with our stated values and moral norms?” Your organization can do this 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.

Create feedback loops among the internal team as well as external communities.

What feedback loops does your organization have that it can use now, and which ones will your organization put in place to assess its trust?

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

When will people who provided input hear back from your organization about how feedback will be implemented?

Set up indicators that your organization believes earn trust and assess them.

Trust indicators	Have they stayed the same, increased or decreased since you last checked?

Based on the above, what does your organization want to keep doing, stop doing, and start doing to maintain or improve trust, and who is responsible for taking action?

Keep doing	Responsible

Stop doing	Responsible

Start doing	Responsible



*Spark
Change*