

Twelve Points to Building Trust in Communities

Sean Bradley, Groundwork London

These are 12 points that can be applied in the process of co-creation to build trust with the community and other important stakeholders:

1. **Know your community & establish relationships:** Work to understand the make-up of your local community. This helps ensure that you are capturing the full range of lived experiences. Prioritise establishing relationships by supporting local groups, being present to lend a hand and be part of existing events and encounters. These relationships and social connections form trust over time. When possible, do not rush to apply methods to extract information.
2. **Involve the community throughout & from the outset:** Involve the community from the earliest opportunity, ideally from the agenda setting stage. Design/ deliver a multi stage iterative process that is flexible enough to agilely respond to emerging needs.
3. **Provide meaningful opportunities to contribute:** Show a willingness to share power and involve people in the highest levels of participation possible. Demonstrate your awareness of any local institutional rigidity and the willingness to challenge these issues constructively. Create a working environment that is requires community input early and frequently.
4. **Manage expectations while demonstrating effectiveness:** Let people know what they can expect from the process and what is expected from them. Demonstrate that not all difficulties are insurmountable barriers and that there are both challenges and opportunities.
5. **Work transparently with good communications and feedback:** Make project information accessible and decision-making processes transparent. Discuss how communications can be set up to be systemic and focused. Work towards everyone having a general understanding of the root issues. Consider the diversity and range of communications and make sure stakeholder contributions are followed up by later feedback.
6. **Help build community, capabilities and confidence:** Help local stakeholders to form stronger and more cohesive networks. Let people know that you are open and able to help people with their collective goals and can help more informal social groups become more structured, empowered and connected. Provide opportunities for people to learn from each other and from the technical team. Give people the time to build confidence in doing things in a new way and adopting new roles.
7. **Utilise a strength based approach and overcome barriers:** Build on strengths and capabilities that exist in the community. Identify and devise strategies to overcome barriers to engagement. Demonstrate an understanding the specificities of the local cultures and the decision-making context so appropriate provisions can be made.
8. **Work in smaller, effective groups:** In conjunction with wide-ranging engagement, set up smaller working groups in which people can feel more comfortable, establish social connections and contribute more effectively to the solutions. Smaller groups help people share and learn and generally feel listened to. Set aside enough time for these groups to gain a sense of cohesion and purpose.
9. **Overcome distrust and apathy with quick wins:** Heal past issues and problems by showing constant progress in resolving local issues. Focus on identifying some quick wins to celebrate and set up periodic milestones that can be celebrated collectively and give a sense of accomplishment.

10. **Recognise contributions:** People sharing local experiences, suggestions and offering solutions should have their time and effort recognised and, when possible, compensated for. This recognition shows that their contributions are being valued as well as helping overcome difficulties and barriers to participation.
11. **Work towards diversity of perspective:** Demonstrate to participants that a representative diversity of perspectives is valued and important for the process. Lived experience plays a critical role in the process. Therefore, create partnerships that represent a full range of experiences in a community.
12. **Create a welcoming atmosphere:** Overall, though this may seem obvious, work to create a welcoming atmosphere of acceptance and openness for all types of engagement. Offer inviting and neutral environments together with warm greetings, food, drink, comfortable seating and avoid overly formal events. Consider the balance of face-to-face interaction with any online engagement and give preference to face-to-face, friendly environments when possible. Develop activities that are both productive and enjoyable to take part in.

Recommended reference for details on a number of these topics:

McKercher, K. A. (2020). Beyond Sticky Notes: Co-design for real: Mindsets, methods and movements.