DO GOVERNMENTS TRUST COMMUNITIES?

THE TRUST FLOWS PROJECT RESEARCH REPORT 2024

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This report was researched and written on unceded Country. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' ongoing struggles for empowerment, healing and self-determination.

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The Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS) is an independent think-tank, researching some of the trickiest challenges that our society is facing – racism, societal division, systemic bias and disadvantage, economic inequities, extremism and discrimination. Our team is passionate about creating meaningful social change. We produce robust evidence and rigorous analysis that shapes policies for social inclusion and resilience and supports people and communities working in these fields. At the heart of our approach is a genuinely inclusive and collaborative practice. We partner with organisations working on the ground and work with communities at all stages of the research process, from design to dissemination. CRIS is made up of six Australian academic and community partners: Deakin University (Lead partner), Western Sydney University, Victoria University, the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and scope

Around the world, governments in liberal democracies are increasingly worried by the decline of public trust. The question that is often asked is why individuals and communities have declining trust in government institutions. However, the reverse question – whether governments trust communities, and if not, why not – is far less frequently explored. A relationship of trust involves one party trusting another, and that trust being returned. One key quality of trust is therefore reciprocity. For a successful trust relationship to be created and maintained it must flow both ways – not just from communities to government but from government to communities.

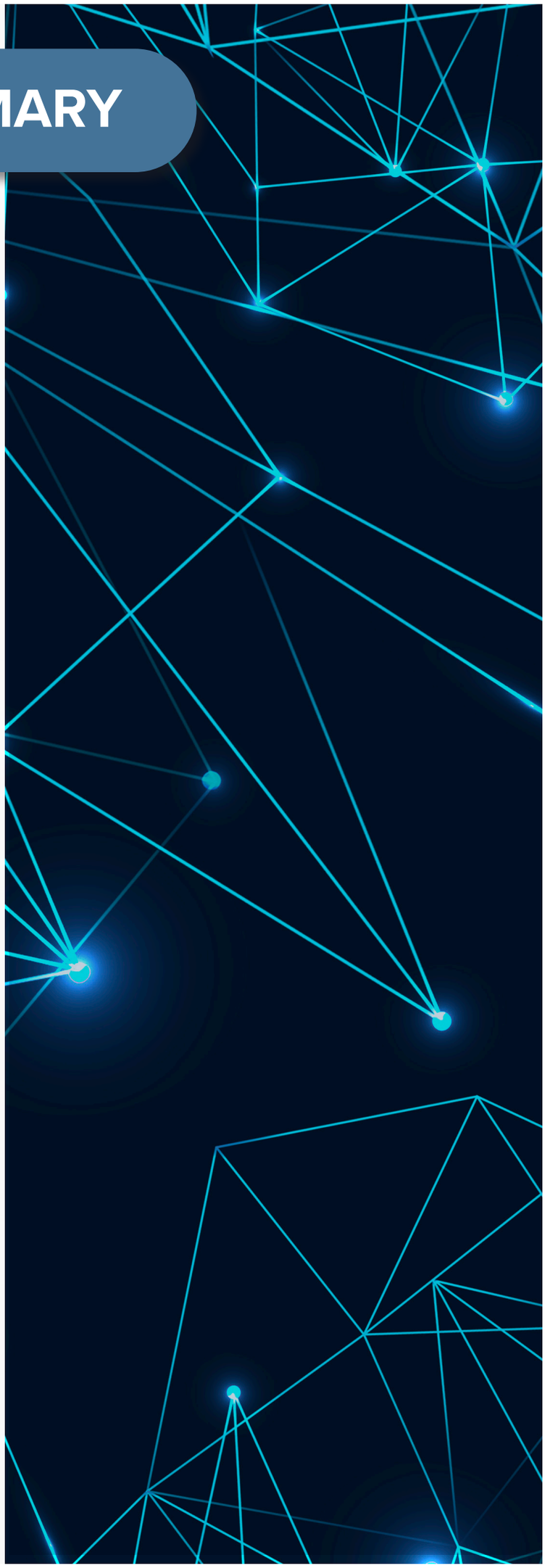
This project examines the role trust relationships between government and communities play in developing resilience to social harms. The particular focus is on the areas of disaster recovery, emergency response and dealing with violent extremism, and the ways in which government officials implement related programs and policies. The aim of the project is to support government officials and community leaders and members in creating and sustaining the trusting relationships that are needed to deliver these types of resilience-building programs.

Methods

For the research, we conducted a systematic literature review. We also collected empirical data through semi-structured interviews. The rapid literature review, conducted between August 2021 and March 2022, involved searching for English-language documents published since 1990 on themes related to government trust in citizens. The search used various terms related to “trust” and “government” across multiple databases, yielding 565 documents including academic papers, book chapters and reports. Out of these initial results, 53 documents were deemed relevant. These papers were reviewed and analysed.

For qualitative data, 20 interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023 with government workers and community leaders across various sectors in Victoria, Australia. The interviews focused on trust dynamics between governments and communities, particularly in emergency response, public health, and countering violent extremism. Participants discussed the extent of government trust in communities, the impact of trust on policy co-production, and mechanisms that foster trust. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for themes, highlighting issues relevant to community organisations and government workers. The research conducted by members of the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies based at Deakin University, aimed to understand trust in policy and program co-production and received ethics approval from the Deakin Human Ethics Committee.

Our initial findings were shared with key stakeholders in several conference presentations, workshops and roundtables. Feedback from these roundtables has been integrated into this report.



Key findings

Our data underlines the importance of personal relationships and indicates that, for trust to grow, such relationships need to be tended and carefully maintained. Key to the creation and maintenance of trust are behaviours and attitudes such as openness, reliability, accountability, respect and confidentiality.

Trust-building behaviours were relevant to the following ways in which trust is built and strengthened:

- Building and maintaining relationships
- Expanding familiarity and awareness
- Increasing cultural awareness and competence
- Establishing communication strategies
- Developing methods for constructive collaboration
- Distributing trust equally across society
- Both government officials and communities developing ways to build trust
- Increasing trust building activities

1

Building relationships

Interpersonal relationships emerged as key to trust building. Many participants thought that relationships could grow when there was enough time and money invested to support relationship-building activities, and when individuals had authority to make decisions. For government workers, their timelines are often at odds with those of communities. Moving at the pace of communities rather than of government deadlines creates an environment in which trust is more likely to develop.

2

Expanding familiarity and awareness

Trust is built on expectations about the interests and motivations of the other person, knowledge of the context in which an interaction takes place and awareness about the organisational processes or constraints. High staff turnover can also stand in the way of trust as developing relationships are interrupted. In addition, understanding the internal diversity within communities and government organisations helps foster trust. This also involves recognising communities as assets not as “problems” to be managed.

3

Increasing cultural awareness and competence

Awareness of cultural diversity is important for building trust with communities. For government workers to understand the cultural context, including the experience of the community helps foster positive interactions and contributes to trust.

4

Establishing communication strategies

Open and honest communication is a key element of trust. This includes being open about the limitations of a relationship. Building up functional relationships before a crisis arises is important to ensure that channels of communication and systems for interventions exist when they are needed. Confidentiality and direct communication are also important, as negative media headlines can break down trust quickly.

5

Developing methods for constructive collaboration

Sharing power and facilitating collaborative processes are key to building trust. Community organisations want to be involved in decision-making processes and want to have their voices heard. To build trust they must also take on responsibility for the outcomes of their activities and be accountable for the work they do as part of a collaboration with government. Co-production of policies and programs is one key method for building trust relationships. This means that communities have agency and are not just “consulted” on program development and delivery.

6

Trust is not equally distributed across society

Governments should not assume that all parts of society trust them equally. There is strong evidence of two (or more) trust realities. Those who are wealthier or have higher levels of education often have higher levels of trust in government and find it easier to navigate government systems. Those who are less wealthy, less well-educated and from non-English speaking backgrounds often have less trust in government. This is partly because government officials sometimes trust them less as well. There is also a tendency for government officials to extend more trust to those communities who understand how government works, and who use the technical language of government policy, funding and budgets.

7

Both government officials and communities to work on methods to develop and maintain trust

Both government workers and community members can contribute towards trusting relationships by emphasising behaviours that enable trust and by avoiding behaviours that break down trust. These behaviours are different for government and communities due to their different roles and responsibilities. Clearly governments are better resourced and need to make the time and effort to change from a traditional "top-down" way of working. However, methods can be identified and agreed upon to help establish mutual accountability in trust building.

Government can improve trust by:

- Demonstrating through actions that they value community experience, and that community empowerment and agency is real.
- Providing the resources, time and funding for relationship building.
- Delivering on promises and, if this is not possible, being transparent about why a promise cannot be fulfilled.
- Focussing on longer-term policy outcomes as much as shorter-term actions. Making announcements in a media release while discussions with community members are ongoing can undermine trust.
- Building the cultural competency, capabilities and awareness of government workers.
- Being open about potential outcomes, both positive and negative.
- Limiting personnel turnover and, where this is not possible, developing processes that enable trust relationships to survive changes in staff.

Communities can help improve trust by:

- Taking on increased responsibility for their own affairs where resources permit. (Governments may need to provide these resources in a way that allows communities to deliver on their own priorities not just government priorities.)
- Being aware of accountability and financial transparency.
- Maintaining confidentiality of discussions with government agencies and representatives. Raising an issue with the media before it has been discussed with government officials can undermine trust.
- Understanding better government processes and limitations. Governments also have a responsibility to make available better information and training on these processes.
- Being open in their engagements and clear about their motivations.
- Acknowledging the diversity of opinions within their community.

8

There needs to be a greater emphasis on training and trust-building activities

There needs to be training for those who lead and engage in trust-building activities. It is important that those in government who are working with communities are better supported to develop these skills. Individuals, however well qualified, cannot just be taken from other work and expected to know how to build relationships of trust with communities. These skills also need to be valued more.

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

The Trust Flows project examines government trust in communities, to what extent it is present, how it can be built, and what factors contribute to trusting relationships. The project is based on the premise that reciprocity is a key element of trust and that, for a successful trust relationship to be created and maintained, trust must flow both ways – not just from communities to government but from government to communities.

The flow of trust between government and institutions in the community – and in particular the presence of government trust and the way this has an impact on relationships with the community – has not been the subject of significant inquiry in Australia. This is a gap that the Trust Flows project aims to fill. To do this, the project looks at a number of key issues:

» To what extent do government officials display trust in communities when designing policies and projects?

» If governments do not trust communities, why is this so (from communities' points of view)?

» What sort of relationships do governments seek to form with community leaders and communities? Do they expect to form trust relationships or transactional relationships?

» How do trust dynamics between governments and communities affect genuine co-production of policy and programs that aim to foster empowered communities and more resilient and inclusive societies?

» In what ways does government express trust in citizens and communities?

» What strategies or mechanisms foster government trust in citizens and communities?

» What examples of interactions between government and communities suggest government trust and/or a lack of trust in communities? What strategies have been developed to deal with this?

Trust relationships contribute to developing resilience to social harms and in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from, the causes and incidents of stress, shock and crisis. The particular focus of this project has been on examining policies and programs in response to disasters and emergencies and violent extremism, and on the way government officials implement these policies and programs. Understanding how and under what conditions trusting relationships between government and communities develop may help to establish strategies for:

» Reducing the decline of trust by communities in social institutions and government

» Building resilient communities better able to deal with social harms and shock and stress

» Reducing the appeal of misinformation, extremist messages and "alternative facts"

The aim of the project is to develop some guidance for government officials, and also community leaders, about how they can create and sustain better relationships of trust needed to deliver these types of resilience-building programs.

1.1 Methodology

The research combined a systematic literature review with empirical qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The research for the project was carried out by researchers at the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia between 2021 and 2023. The project received ethics approval from the Deakin Human Ethics Committee in 2022.

Rapid review

The rapid literature review was conducted between August 2021 and March 2022. A rapid or brief review is similar to a systematic review in that it follows several clear methodological steps, but is smaller in scope and may limit the scope of included documents to make it quicker and less resource-intensive (Hamel et al. 2021; Tricco et al. 2015; Colquhoun et al. 2014). Some basic steps, however, need to be followed to ensure that the review is comprehensive and objective – for instance, rating documents for inclusion or exclusion by two independent reviewers (Abrami et al. 2010).

We included English-language documents published since 1990, including peer reviewed academic papers, books and book chapters published by academic publishers, reports, working or discussion papers by government institutions, research organisations including policy institutes/think tanks and polling firms. Conference papers, sections for handbooks, textbooks or encyclopedias, blog posts, newspaper articles and MA or PhD theses were excluded.

Search phrases included different forms of the word “trust” as well as alternative terms for “citizens” such as “community”, “constituents”, “people” and for “government” including “government worker”, “official”, “civil servant”, “policy maker” and so on. The use of these search terms in the library database resulted in 565 documents. In addition, similar searches were performed in databases for reports. The documents were pre-screened to determine whether they were indeed relevant to the topic of government trust in citizens. This process resulted in a total of 53 documents being included in the final selection, and then analysed using the Covidence online literature review platform.

Qualitative data

Between 2022 and 2023 we carried out 20 interviews with government workers in different government organisations, as well as with community leaders and staff in organisations that collaborate with government agencies in these policy areas. Government sectors included in the study were local government, state government, law enforcement and emergency management. Community organisations included religious interest groups, multicultural organisations, youth organisations, and community support groups. Respondents were involved in one or more of three policy areas: 1. Emergency response and disaster recovery; 2. the response to the COVID pandemic as a stand-in for large-scale public health events; and 3. programs to counter and prevent violent extremism (C/PVE). We asked participants the following questions:

- To what extent do government officials display trust in communities when designing policies and projects?
- How do trust dynamics between governments and communities affect genuine co-production of policy and programs that aim to foster empowered communities and more resilient and inclusive societies?
- In what ways does government express trust in citizens and communities?
- What strategies or mechanisms foster government trust in citizens and communities?

The interviews were transcribed and then analysed according to a range of pre-existing themes; other themes emerged in the process of the analysis. The research took place in Victoria, an Australian state in the south-east of the country, and some of the conversations with our participants focused on specific pressure points in the relationships between the Victorian government and local civic organisations – such as the way programs are funded, how community organisations are engaged and the way politics can play out in such processes, as well as the role of multiculturalism in Victorian and Australian society more widely. However, many of the comments point to broad issues that are likely familiar to community organisations and government workers in many other countries as well.

PART 2

CONTEXT FOR THE PROJECT

"We know that trust is a must"

2.1 Role of trust in a well-functioning democratic nation

This report assumes that in a deliberative democracy citizens have a say in the development and delivery of public policy and projects. The issues addressed in the report about the flow of trust are most important where the concept of government involves a reciprocal relationship between governments, communities and individuals, as is the case in many areas of Australian policy.

There are three different components of trust that operate in a liberal democracy:

TRUST

Occurs when A trusts that B will act on their behalf and in their interests to do X in particular and more generally.

MISTRUST

Mistrust occurs when A assumes that B may not act on their behalf and in their interests to do X but will judge B according to information and context. This definition is associated with the notion of a critical citizen and active citizenship and is viewed to strengthen democracy.

DISTRUST

Occurs when A assumes that B is untrustworthy and will cause harm to their interests in respect of X or more generally.

(Source: Evans, Jennings and Slater 2020, 5)

The study of trust is not just a theoretical investigation of an abstract term, as trust is a central part of a well-functioning democratic, socially cohesive and resilient society. As a Demos paper on the state of trust comments:

> ***Trust is one of the most important assets that a governing institution can possess. Its presence helps to foster democratic participation, economic success and public sector efficiency. Its absence can lead to grinding battles between the state and its citizens, and sometimes to an outright refusal to participate in government activities.***
>
> (Parker et al. 2008, 9)

The decline of trust is becoming a serious issue for Australia. The 2023 Edelman Australia Trust Barometer's key finding was that "Australia is on a path to polarisation, driven by a series of macro forces that are weakening the country's social fabric and creating increasing division in society" (Edelman 2023). The 2023 report found that almost half of all Australians (45%) say the nation is more divided today than it was in the past (Edelman 2023). Slightly less pessimistic was the 2023 Scanlon Institute Australian Cohesion Index report which commented that:

> ***History tells us that this trust is fragile and must be nurtured by political leaders. That means politicians who promise integrity and transparency must deliver on those promises. And governments should avoid setting unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve. Ultimately, trust is the political capital that our leaders draw on to make hard policy decisions.***
>
> (Scanlon Institute 2023, 16)

It is clear from these comments that to develop and implement good public policy and programs, a government in a liberal democracy needs to develop and maintain the trust of its citizens.

2.2 Declining trust in government

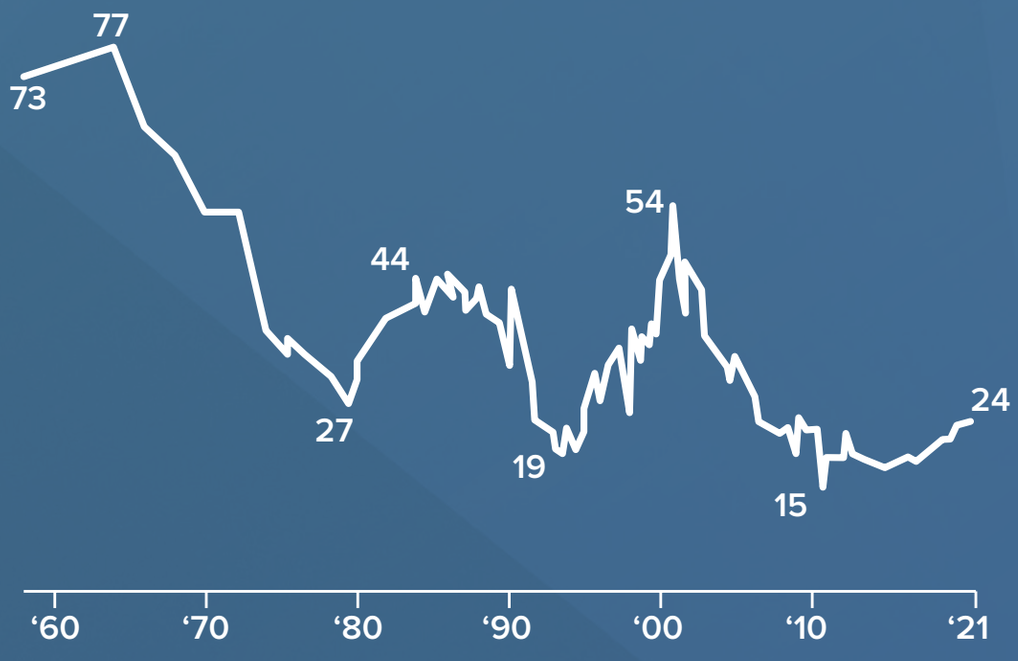
The decline of trust in government by individuals and communities over the past 60 years is documented in a range of surveys, many of which are conducted annually across different countries (Ipsos 2019; OECD 2024; Edelman 2020; Pew Research Centre 2023). The Pew Research Centre has tracked public trust in government since 1958. In 2019 it found that public trust in the US government neared historic lows (Pew Research Centre 2023)

While the collapse of trust in Australia is not as marked as in the US, it has been significant. The 2023 Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index found that in Australia, "[p]oliticians are the least trusted profession and doctors and scientists seen as the most trustworthy" (Ipsos 2023). This has been consistent for some years. The Ipsos poll in 2019 found that, while Australians had higher trust in their police and armed forces, politicians were not highly ranked in terms of trust: "Australia's trust in the Police is 18 percentage points above the global average and trust in the Armed Forces is 15 points higher. The third lowest is politicians. Government ministers and politicians rank only above pollsters and advertising executives" (Skinner and Clemence 2019). The OECD in 2023 found in its global survey that "around four in ten people (39%) had high or moderately high trust in their country's national government and a higher share (44%) had no or low trust." The figures for Australia were slightly better with 46% having high or moderately high trust and 38% no or low trust. The OECD further commented in that "[c]ontinued low trust environments not only damage social cohesion and political participation, but also limit governments' ability to function effectively and respond to complex domestic and global challenges" (OECD 2024).

Twenty years ago Paul Skidmore and James Harkin made the point that "the intensity of the contemporary preoccupation with the 'trust deficit' suggests that the current period is unusual, if not completely unprecedented" (Harkin and Skidmore 2003, 3). This preoccupation has, if anything, intensified. The interest in the issue of trust, where it is present or absent, and its rise and decline, is evident in liberal democracies around the world. The decline of trust in government and government institutions has therefore become a matter of increasing concern for Australia's governments, civic institutions and policy makers.

Public trust in US federal government remains low

% who say they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time



Note: From 1976–2020 the trend line represents a three-survey moving average.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 5-11, 2021.

Trend sources: Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (2020–2021). Pew Research Center phone surveys (2019 and earlier). National Election Studies. Gallup. ABC/Washington Post. CBS/New York Times and CNN polls.

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2.3 Co-design as a response to declining trust

Some governments, such as the Clinton administration in the US, came to the view that if government was more efficient, then people would trust it more. As President Clinton put it, "[w]e have a performance deficit that has led to a trust deficit" (cited in Suleiman 2003, 309). However, this managerial approach – in which citizens were framed primarily as customers – did not significantly improve the state of trust. As Yang has commented, "When markets replace governments, negotiation and bargaining replace government-citizen interaction, why would administrators trust the integrity and honesty of self-interested customers?" (Yang 2006, 590).

In the early 21st century, leading think tanks such as Demos and NESTA came to the view that a focus on service improvement alone would not be enough to gain popular trust. Instead, governments also "need[ed] to use the personal interactions between their staff and the public to build ongoing, two-way relationships with the people they serve based on honesty and reciprocity" (Parker et al. 2008, 9). This led to the development of the idea of the collaborative state, which aimed to replace the top-down policymaking model with "one that focussed on people and places – not just on programmes and outputs, valued local information and networks and encourages local priorities setting and resource allocation" (Blacher and Adams 2020, 71). One of the key features of the collaborative state is co-operative approaches to service development, design and delivery.

Under the traditional model, professionals plan and deliver a service, often consulting communities in planning and design. The more co-operative approach uses other methods such as co-creation, co-design and co-production in which user and professional knowledge is combined to design and deliver services (Burkett 2012; Boyle and Harris 2009). Linked to these ideas was the focus on community resilience and the idea that that, to develop this, governments needed to change the relationship with communities from a "top down" approach to one that empowered communities.

The role of co-design in building trust was also emphasised in the 2024 Commonwealth Government's Multicultural Framework Review. The Review's Report *Towards fairness: A multicultural Australia for all* included a section on building trust that stated that "we heard a strong, united voice from communities wanting to be a part of decision-making processes, to co-design with government and business, to share responsibility and in effect have a role in accountability as well…people told us they want to see action and be a part of the action; they want to co-create, co-design, co-produce with the relevant layers of government and community". (Commonwealth of Australia 2024, 130)

2.4 Institutional responses

In 2009 the OECD published a paper on measuring trust which commented: "[t]rust is commonly viewed as a proxy indicator of social capital, and a high level of trust is considered a factor that can enhance economic growth and social well-being" (Morrone, Tontoranelli, and Ranuzzi 2009, 3). The OECD work identified the main drivers of trust in government institutions, including reliability, responsiveness, openness, integrity and fairness.

In 2022, and following the OECD work on trust, 40 countries adopted the "Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy" (OECD 2022b). In this declaration, leaders stated that:

WE RECOGNISE that renewed efforts to build trust in public institutions are essential for the future of democracies.

WE WELCOME the key findings from the OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions as a call to strengthen action to place trust at the centre of policies to deliver better for citizens and reinforce democracy. (OECD 2022b, 5)

The declaration further states:

WE COMMIT to:

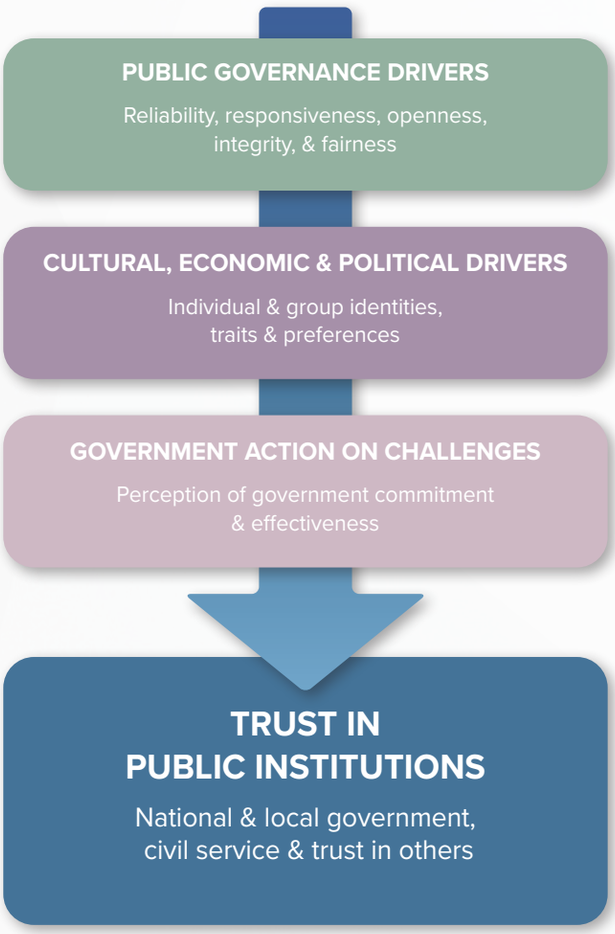
- Reinforce, promote and strengthen the foundations of democracies acknowledging that they should rise to the challenges of growing and changing citizens' expectations in terms of representation, responsiveness, open government, and integrity of institutions, as well as green policies including through innovative approaches in the public sector.
- Strengthen the resilience of our democratic systems to address declining trust in public institutions, political disengagement and polarisation, as well as rising mis and dis-information and other sources of destabilisation.
- Maintain open government as a core element of our democratic systems, while continuing our ongoing and open dialogue on public governance with non-OECD Members, with a view to maintaining peace, stability and free flows of goods, services as well as data and information flows. (OECD 2022b, 4)

Australia is one of the signatories to this declaration. Since 2022 the results from the national Survey of Trust in Australian public services has been available in a new Annual Report on "Trust in Australian public services" (Australian Public Service Commission 2023).

Likewise, the public and private sector leaders at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2021 expressed deep concern about the state of trust. The WEF report on rebuilding trust stated that:

> *... we have an epidemic of misinformation and widespread mistrust of societal institutions and leaders around the world. And the divide is widening. The lack of trust is apparent all around us – among voters and politicians, consumers and multinationals, and between countries and heads of states. This is extremely worrying. We know that trust is a must, if we are to solve the challenges we are facing as a collective.*
>
> (World Economic Forum 2021)

When faced with this decline in trust, public and private sector organisations are looking at what they can do to increase trust in them by communities.



(Based on: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2017; Australian Public Service Commission 2023)

2.5 The role of trust in government policy: counter terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE) and disaster resilience

One key focus of this project has been investigating the role of trust in government policies designed to promote resilience to social harms. Trust is a key component in developing and implementing effective public policy. The OECD in commenting on Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* stated how "[t]rust as part of social capital is not a substitute for effective public policy but rather a prerequisite for it and in part a consequence of it" (OECD 2013, 38). The importance of trust is recognised as a key element in many government policies and strategies for counter terrorism, preventing and countering violent extremism, crisis and emergency management and disaster resilience (see Duckworth 2022). The US emergency management agency FEMA notes:

> *Trust is a recurring theme that underpins healthy and strong communities. It acts as the glue that holds different groups together, strengthens and sustains solidarity, and supports the means for collective action ... Fostering relationships and collaborating with community leaders is a way to build trust within the broader community as they are the links to individual community members. To this end, it is important that the government and its partners are transparent about information sharing, planning processes, and capabilities to deal with all threats and hazards.*
>
> (US Government 2011)

The *Guidelines for Emergency Managers Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities* makes it quite clear that "[e]stablishing credibility and generating trust amongst CALD community groups are essential parts of effective community engagement" (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience 2007, 26). In addition, being a trusted source of information is one of the central tenets of communicating during a crisis. Police and emergency management agencies rely on the public trusting the information they are being provided and then acting on it. As Australia's *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* states in its section on "Empowering individuals and communities to exercise choice and take responsibility", empowerment "requires the availability and accessibility of transparent, accurate and trusted sources of information in various forms, and the provision of tools to help communities understand and act on the material provided" (Council of Australian Governments 2011, 10). This approach is contrasted with the traditional approach often employed by authorities which "by emphasising cultural difference as vulnerability rather than as resource or asset... fails to acknowledge the varieties of resilience capital that many culturally diverse individuals and communities may bring with them". (Grossman 2013)

The importance of trust has also been recognised as critical for the effectiveness of Australia's CT and CVE policies. Australia's 2006 National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security included as one of its objectives "strengthening mutual trust within communities and between communities and governments, through ongoing dialogue" (Commonwealth of Australia 2012, 16). The idea of trust is built into resilience strategies across Australia. For example, the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2014) sets out how "State, national and international experience has shown that the following elements contribute to a resilient organisation or community:

» Risk-informed and appropriately prepared individuals

» The capacity to adapt

» Healthy levels of community connectedness, trust and cooperation" (Queensland Government 2017, 7).

The first National strategy in Australia to set out the approach of government to countering violent extremism was the 2010 Counter-terrorism White Paper, *Securing Australia. Protecting our Community.* The White Paper states how building a strong and resilient Australian community that can resist the development of violent extremism "will require the continuation of government policies that help to build trust, respect and a sense of belonging within Australian society and serve to undermine the appeal of violent extremism" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2010, 67).

Many of these approaches around trust, co-creation and reciprocity were set out in the Victorian Government's *Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities*, which states that

> ***Initiatives will be co-created with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure they build on existing community strengths and reflect the local context … We will establish equity among stakeholders and support regular communication and the building of trust through positive partnerships.***
>
> (Victorian Government 2015, 5)

The ANZCTC 2015 *National Guidelines for Protecting Critical Infrastructure from Terrorism* states how:

> ***One of the key aims of terrorism is to generate fear and insecurity within a community and undermine public confidence in government and national security systems and organisations. There is an ongoing role for all national security related agencies to ensure that information and media activities work to … create public trust that governments and national security agencies are open and accountable and will release all information possible within the confines of operational and security considerations.***
>
> (Australia New Zealand CounterTerrorism Committee 2015, 12)

The importance of trust for countering violent extremism was highlighted in the United Kingdom's Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) which in 2022 devoted an edition of the CREST Security Review to the concept of trust. One article comments that:

> ***Trust is of vital importance to organisations; it is essential for maintaining stakeholder relationships and promotes successful organisational functioning. Security agencies, including police forces, rely on trust to grant them legitimacy and to encourage public cooperation and acceptance … Trust is a crucial currency for security services, but it is difficult to maintain and easy to lose.***
>
> (Lockey 2022, 21–22)

This is part of increasing awareness by government authorities that trust needs to be invested in and not assumed. Having a document that recognises importance of trust in delivering effective policy is not enough. It must be supported by actions. Many of these approaches around trust, co-creation and reciprocity were set out in the Victorian Government's *Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities*. This stated that a key principle was: "How we do this work is just as important as which initiatives we undertake". (Victorian Government 2015, 5)

This is supported by evidence of how trust can be built through positive interactions. with officials. One analysis on the decline of community trust in government pointed out that "these poll numbers, which are widely used to lament the loss of faith and confidence in government, also point to clear opportunities for policy initiatives that could improve public engagement. When the respondents in nationwide polls are asked if they had direct contact with a government official within the previous few months, those who had such encounters reported significantly higher levels of trust in authorities and a willingness to work together." (Bach et al. 2015, 37)

2.6 Rise of mis/disinformation and of two trust realities

There is a direct link between the decline of trust and the increasing appeal of extremist narratives. The decline of trust in existing government institutions provides those who are developing extremist narratives with an increasingly receptive audience. Organisations around the world increasingly recognise the risks posed by a lack of trust and the rise of misinformation and disinformation. The 2024 World Economic Forum *Global Risks Report* states: "Emerging as the most severe global risk anticipated over the next two years, foreign and domestic actors alike will leverage misinformation and disinformation to further widen societal and political divides" (World Economic Forum 2024, 8). A further OECD report in 2022 found that the issues that lead to declining trust "are compounded by newer threats facing democracies today, such as misinformation and disinformation, inequalities in political voice and participation, and uncertainty about governments' abilities to address long-term and global challenges in a rapidly changing world" (OECD 2022a, 101). The rise of disinformation was also exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID accelerated these trends, as the deliberate spread of false information during the pandemic further damaged public trust in government. As the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, Melissa Fleming, put it:

> ***We are not only fighting a [health] pandemic … we are fighting an 'infodemic.' Our common enemy is a virus, but our enemy is also a growing surge of misinformation. So, to overcome this virus, we need to urgently promote facts and science. We also need to promote hope and solidarity over despair and division.***
>
> (UN Department of Global Communications 2020)

In Australia, trust in government initially increased during the pandemic but then declined again (Edelman 2021). The OECD stated in its Trust in Government report: "[t]he breadth and depth of the COVID-19 crisis make it incumbent on the public sector to challenge existing models for measuring trust" (OECD 2023).

A recent study of trust in data points out that "what is generally missing from these debates around trust is how structural inequalities shape the extent to which people trust and what people deem to be trustworthy." Both historically and more recently, the wealthy and well-educated have higher levels of trust than more disadvantaged groups. Therefore "trust can be seen as a privilege enjoyed by majority groups … [and] distrust is logical for many disadvantaged groups" (Kennedy 2020). This was confirmed by the Scanlon Institute Australian Cohesion Index (Scanlon Institute 2023, 15), which found that "people with lower levels of education, those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and those who describe themselves as poor or struggling to pay their bills are much less likely to believe that people can be trusted." In a similar way, the Australian Government survey on Trust in Government Services found that individual characteristic drive differences in trust. These included

> ***[D]emographic characteristics (such as age, gender, location, education, income, culture…); life experiences that shape their trust in others and satisfaction with life generally; and life events in the last 12 months which led them to access Australian public services.***
>
> (Australian Public Service Commission 2023, 13)

This is backed by the Edelman Trust Barometer. Its key finding for Australia in 2020 was that Australia's trust inequality was the highest in the world. It found a 23-point difference in trust between different groups marked by socio-economic and educational differences, "by far the highest gap ever recorded in Australia and an increase of 10 points from 2019" (Edelman 2020). While those with good access to information were more trusting, Edelman argued that "the majority of the mass population do not trust their institutions to do what is right" (Edelman 2020). The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer found that the trust inequality had narrowed, not because trust increased for those on low incomes, but because those on high incomes were trusting less (Edelman 2023).

2.7 Why this context is important

This focus on improving relationships of trust between governments and communities is consistent with new ideas about public service delivery. In July 2021, Demos published a paper *The Social State: From transactional to relational public services,* according to which:

- The pandemic has pushed us to a tipping point. We need to move on from the transactional model that has driven public service reform thinking for generations: a model that treats people as individuals, instead of part of communities; a model that is obsessed about processes instead of outcomes; a model that disconnects professionals from citizens instead of connecting them together.
- We need public services that establish and nurture strong relationships both with and between people, both to help prevent problems, and to manage them more successfully.
- Relational public services can improve outcomes by giving citizens more control and confidence to resolve their problems. And relational public services can build communities that are able to mobilise and resolve problems by themselves, without relying heavily on the state. (McKenzie 2021, 4)

Likewise, the WHO (2021) recognised that:

> ***Trust is earned through meaningful engagement, action and accountability, not top-down, one-way communication. Individuals and communities across the globe are more and more sceptical of health messages from governments, global public health authorities, and health care professionals – institutions they should be able to trust.***
>
> (World Health Organisation 2021)

World leaders have recognised the impact of the decline of trust on their ability to govern effectively and deliver their programs. Clearly, government strategies highlight the importance of trust in resilience to social harms. One of the issues this Report investigates further is the extent to which the lack of strategies to build trusting relationship s with communities has hindered the delivery of these policies and programs.

PART 3

KEY TERMS: TRUST AND RECIPROCITY

3.1 What is trust?

Trust is a social construct with many characteristics (Weber and Carter 2003). It is based both on emotion and on experience and evidence. It requires a reciprocal relationship with the parties and includes a number of characteristics: predictability and reliability; confident expectation of future action; being vulnerable.

> *[T]rust is ultimately a kind of gamble, a risky investment that we make every day to manage our lives in a complex and unpredictable world. It is also an emotionally charged investment, because to trust someone is to expose ourselves to the possibility of betrayal. The alternative to trusting is either for us to disengage from a social relationship or to attempt to use fear, control and power to force the other party to behave in a way we find trustworthy.*
>
> (Parker et al. 2008, 15)

Trust can also be broken when one party does not act in accordance with expectations. Trust thus requires those involved to open themselves up a degree of vulnerability and "provides a vital way for social beings to deal with risk, uncertainty and complexity" (Cadwell 2019, 158).

Trust is a complex theoretical concept partly because the term is ubiquitous and because it is central to our social functioning. While theorists agree that, "without any trust [a person] could not leave their bed in the morning" (Luhmann 1989, 8), it can be difficult to pin down a precise definition of trust, its determinants and how to facilitate it. On top of this, the word "trust" is often used synonymously with other concepts such as confidence, reliance, dependence and faith, or used "to describe a variety of very different phenomena, such as morality, empathy, reciprocity, civility, respect, solidarity [or] tolerance" (Morrone, Tontoranelli, and Ranuzzi 2009, 8). At its most basic, though, trust is the belief that someone else will act in some kind of beneficial way without any means of enforcing this action or punishing non-compliance. Put in other words, the term trust refers to the voluntary risk actor A takes with the expectation that actor B will act in their best interest (Cook and Santana 2020; Levi 1998; Morrone, Tontoranelli, and Ranuzzi 2009). A and B respectively are often referred to as the truster and the trustee, and could be individuals, companies, organisations or communities. Because actor A has no certainty that actor B will do what they hope they will do, trust can be seen primarily as "a state of favourable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions" (Möllering 2001, 404).

But where does this favourable expectation come from? How is trust built, and what factors are required for trust to grow? Above all, why is trust required in the interactions between government and citizens? Some theorists argue that the social system rises, "because trust provides a more functional way of reducing complexity" (Luhmann 1989, 12). Giddens similarly sees trust as "involved in a fundamental way with the institutions of modernity." Trust here "is vested, not in individuals, but in abstract capacities" (Giddens 1991(a), 26). In Giddens's view, people develop trust towards institutions even though they have little knowledge of or control over their internal functioning.

Other theorists explore how trust comes to exist; Durkheim, for example, points to shared norms and values as a basis for social order, pointing out that even contractual agreements are underpinned by often unspoken social and cultural norms that promote trust (Lewis and Weigert 1985; Misztal 1992). Simmel argues that as culture and society have become more diverse, so have different forms of trust (Frederiksen 2012). Giddens suggests that there is an element of optimism about the future and faith in the other, by pointing out that "Trust [...] is a form of 'faith,' in which the confidence vested in probable outcomes expresses a commitment to something rather than just a cognitive understanding" (Giddens 1991(a), 27). In interactions where trust plays a role, there is thus always an element of ambivalence and a lack of knowledge (Misztal 1992). As Held has put it, "trust is most required exactly when we least know whether a person will or will not do an action" (Held 1968, 157). Because of this element of risk, trust is not necessarily a preferred choice; as Giddens has put it, "trust is much less a 'leap of commitment' than a tacit acceptance of circumstances in which other alternatives are largely foreclosed" (Giddens 1991(a), 90). At the same time, trust also involves making oneself vulnerable and even dependent on another person; an "active dependency and active responsiveness to it to promote them as ways of extending our agency through dependency on others" (Jones 2012, 66). Vulnerability and risk are thus essential parts of trust, as are confidence and reliance.

3.2 The importance of reciprocity

One of the things that studies of trust have clearly shown is that reciprocity is key. It is for this reason that this is a report into "trust flows". As Stephenson pointed out, "Reciprocity is key to the power of networks, exerting a governing logic over them – the alchemy of mutual give and take over time turning to a golden trust" (Stephenson 2004, 40).

In democratic societies, trust in government and its institutions is crucial for citizens to comply with laws and regulations. Citizens may vote for the representatives they trust most, but at the same time they need to also trust non-elected bureaucrats – in particular where the state exerts its powers over citizens, for instance to pay tax or to comply with the police. Were citizens to not trust the police, for example, they may be hesitant to report crimes or collaborate with the police.

Some observers argue that trust can be leveraged as a method of generating trustworthiness (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001; Hawley 2014; Jones 2012). As Jones has put it, "sometimes displaying trust is sufficient to elicit trustworthiness as we respond to the call to be moved by the other's dependency" (Jones 2012, 65). Trusting in someone means assuming positive characteristics the other person might then want to prove, including desirable traits such as loyalty and competence (Bacharach and Gambetta 2001; Hawley 2014; Pettit 1996). This distinguishes trust from reliance, which does not rely on any such assumptions about personal traits (Hawley, 2014). It also means that a failure to live up to those expectations results in feelings of disappointment, which is not the case for reliance (Baier 1986; Hawley 2014).

The rise and decline in public trust in government is frequently the focus of media headlines around the world. However, few observers focus on the reverse: government trust in citizens. Superficially it may seem that government servants do not need to trust citizens, where social trust has been replaced by rules-based order and powerful institutions that enforce these rules (Anderson 2003), and government servants must fulfil their duties according to the remit of their position. For some government roles a certain fundamental distrust of citizens may even seem a prerequisite, for instance in the judicial system, policing or tax collection.

However, this view of the role of trust in governance is limited (Fukuyama 1995; Hardin 2002; Misztal 1992). After the rise and fall of New Public Management in particular (Bouckaert 2012; Mizrahi, Vigoda-Gadot, and Cohen 2010), trust has re-emerged as an important foundation of good governance. Trust is now increasingly seen as reciprocal, and collaboration is emphasised over control. As Yang has put it:

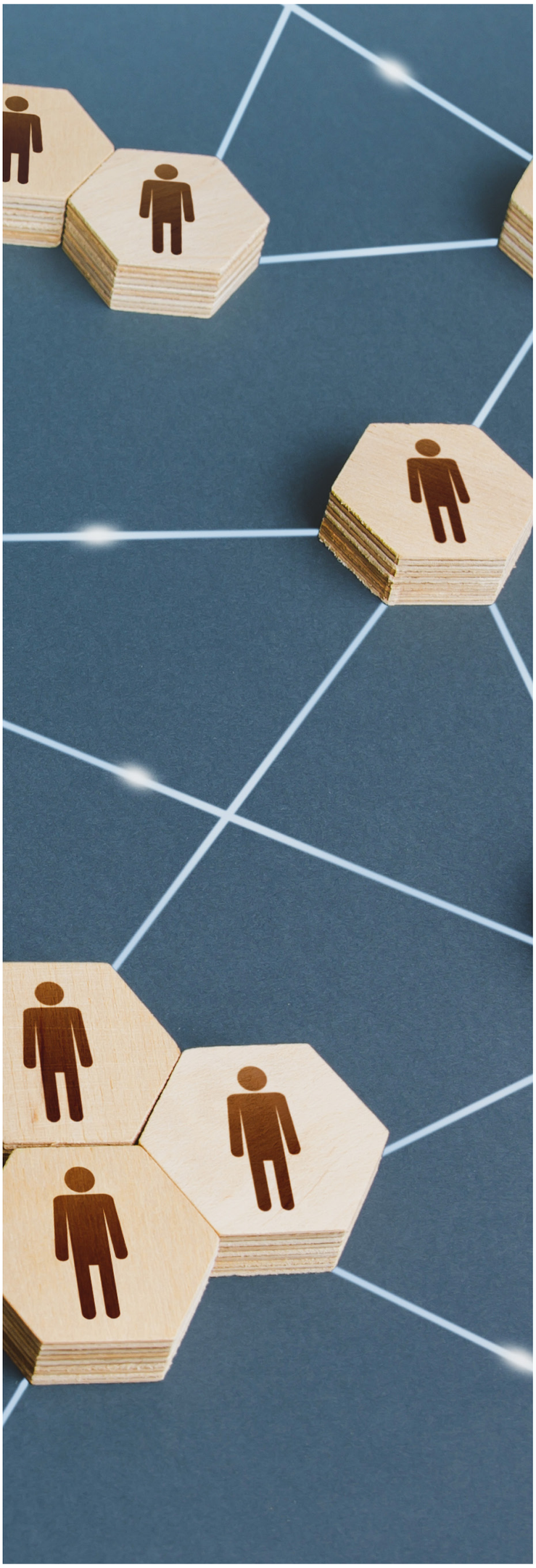
> *A theory of improving citizens' trust in government is incomplete without an explanation of administrators' trust in citizens because trust is mutual and reciprocal. Citizens will not trust public administrators if they know or feel that public officials do not trust them. Public administrators are not likely to proactively implement trust-enhancing reform policies if they do not trust citizens.*
>
> (Yang 2005, 273)

A small but growing body of research suggests that government trust in citizens is an important foundation of good governance and a basis for a functioning democracy (Walle and Six 2014; Walle 2017; Yang 2005; 2006). This is in part because trust is reciprocal, which means that if citizens are to trust the government, they must feel that the government trusts them as well (Yang 2005). Government trust in citizens is also thought to encourage more trustworthy behaviour (Vigoda-Gadot, Zalmanovitch, and Belonogov 2012) and reduce the need for oversight and control (Feld and Frey 2002).

Government trust in citizens is a prerequisite for a range of collaborative efforts in which government representatives and citizens are involved. These include participatory planning processes, community policing and other strategies that aim to involve citizens in the work of government and draw on citizens' on-the-ground knowledge of relevant issues or problems (Åström 2020; Curry 2012; Hansson 2018; Westmarland 2010).

Trust relationships are reciprocal, and this means that government trust in citizens can engender citizen trust in the government (Vigoda-Gadot, Zalmanovitch, and Belonogov 2012). Trust generates trustworthiness (Braithwaite 1998), and this is particularly important in collaborative processes and citizen participation in policy or planning (Yang 2005). Trust can also mitigate the need for control and monitoring, making oversight easier and less costly (Vigoda-Gadot, Zalmanovitch, and Belonogov 2012). This plays out in particular in the context of a welfare state where citizens apply for services based on their individual needs (Walle and Lahat 2017), or in the context of tax collection (Feld and Frey 2002; Raaphorst and Walle 2018).

Collaborative efforts have become mainstream in some government organisations, but obstacles persist. Even well-thought-out strategies for citizen collaboration do not automatically lead to successful practices or the development of trusting relationships; as Åström notes, "the argument that participation leads to trust assumes that [citizen] participation is effective and satisfying, which is still rarely the case" (Åström 2020, 85). Public servants do not always hold positive opinions about citizens' competence, abilities and motivations (Raaphorst & Walle, 2018). They may struggle to reconcile an organisation's professional culture with a trusting attitude (Chen 2016; Myhill and Bradford 2013). They may find the collaborative process difficult or limiting (Curry 2012; Hansson 2018). All this leads to negative experiences on both sides and limits the effectiveness of policies and programs.



3.3 The idea of “trust flows”

The concept of “trust flows” is intended to highlight the nature of trust as a mode of dynamic, relational and interactive social capital, one that is both mobile and mobilised through social relationships and environments, rather than a fixed quality, feature or attribute of individual or collective dispositions.

Trust can flow:

» Vertically: such as between governments and institutions, and communities and individuals; and

» Horizontally: such as between communities and individuals.

These relationships are also connected to sources of power and the impact of hierarchy. It is clear that reciprocity is key to a trust relationship. To be reciprocal, Trust needs to flow both ways.

When considering what we mean how trust works, it is necessary to recognise, as Grossman has observed, that:

> *the capacity and level of trust in the context of preventing or countering violent extremism tends to be explored only in terms of how much or how little communities experience trust in government; the reverse question, of whether, why, and how much or how little governments trust communities, and the consequences of this, is not canvassed. When we stop thinking about “trust” as a static variable and start thinking about it instead as a multisystemic and dynamic process of flows, what might this tell us about how to advance multisystemic resilience to violent extremism through building transformative relationships that understand the dynamics and distribution of reciprocal trust in new ways?*
>
> (Grossman 2021, 311)

This is important because the way trust flows between governments, government agencies, and communities has significant implications for where power resides in decision-making.

The flow of trust from communities and individuals to government is the subject of many papers and books. A small but growing body of research suggests that the flow of trust the other way – government trust to citizens – is also an important foundation of good governance and a basis for a functioning democracy (Walle 2017; Walle and Six 2014; Yang 2005, 2006). This is in part because trust is reciprocal, which means that if citizens are to trust the government, they must feel that the government trusts them as well (Yang 2005). Government trust in citizens is also thought to encourage more trustworthy behaviour (Vigoda-Gadot, Zalmanovitch, and Belonogov 2012) and reduce the need for oversight and control (Feld and Frey 2002).

PART 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

There were three types of literature reviewed for the report: academic books and articles; think tank and civil society organisation reports and papers; government reports. This Report has already referred to a number of these sources. Out of several hundred articles reviewed, 53 were identified as forming the existing literature on government trust in communities or citizens.

The analysis of these documents indicates that frontline interactions between government and communities are often marked by a lack of trust that leads to negative experiences on both sides and limits the effectiveness of policies and programs. The articles tended to focus on areas of interaction between government officials and communities. The literature focussed on three areas of government–community interaction: police; community participation, including in urban planning; and provision of government services.

Some of this literature was quite context specific, however some general themes emerged. In one Australian study from 1998, Mark Peel undertook work in four suburbs commonly ranked among the most disadvantaged in Australia: Adelaide's Elizabeth, Brisbane's Inala, Sydney's Mount Druitt, and Melbourne's Broadmeadows. He concluded that the people living there:

> *...have good reasons for distrusting a government that, through its agents, so consistently manifests its distrust of them. For disadvantaged citizens, distrust is a rational, critical response to their actual experiences of distrustful and even destructive governance...*
>
> (Peel 1998, 316)

Peel also observed that a managerial approach helps create this distrust. He comments:

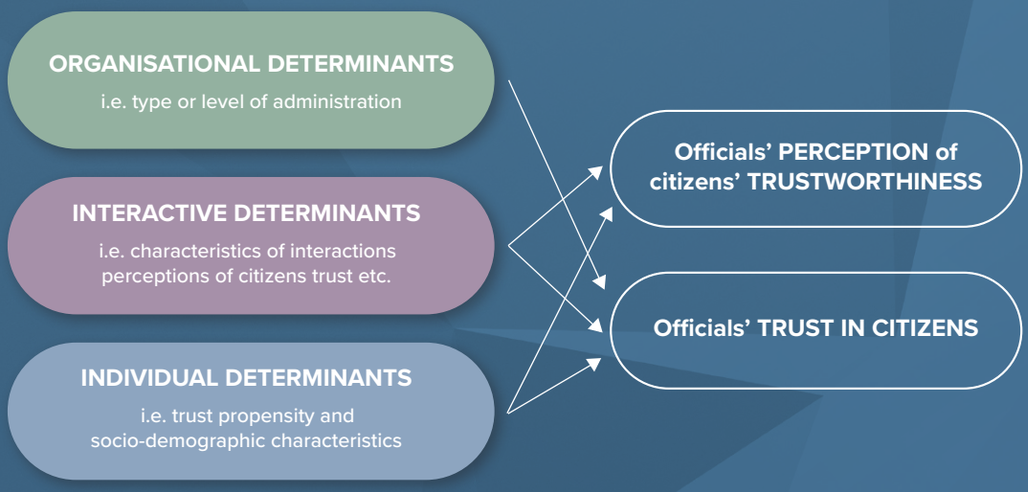
> *[A] key motive of managerialism is avoiding risk, which usually means an obsession with controlling funds. Avoiding risk, of course, also means avoiding innovation, while the insistence on control at all costs only creates more control costs. The most important faults of the managerialist paradigm stem from its profound distrust in the ability of either local workers or those actually suffering disadvantage to define needs and to carry out programs for addressing them. Increasingly strict accountability and fund management criteria almost seem to expect fraud, ignorance, and poor financial skills.*
>
> (325)

This comment aligns with some of the data from the interviews discussed later, where this is also a frequent complaint by some communities of authorities during recovery after major natural disasters.

Of the non-Australian studies, Yang's "Public administrators' trust in citizens: A missing link in citizen involvement efforts" (2005) stands out for its use of survey data. Yang concludes that trust by public officials is based on the belief that "citizens who are affected by their work (or whom they are serving) ... will act in a fashion that is helpful (or beneficial) to administrators' performance (or goal fulfillment)" (276). Trust is therefore a rational act to be made after assessing the risks involved in trusting. This links with earlier observations about distribution of trust and that these government officials are selective in who, and which communities, they trust. It also raises the question as to whether trust without risk is really trust at all. The article "What do public officials think about citizens?" (Moyson, Van de Walle, and Groeneveld 2016) outlines several reasons why civil servants can be reluctant to recognise citizens' active role in service delivery. Many public officials:

- have been trained in a particular role with a focus on bureaucratic control and a strict separation between public administration and citizens.
- simply disagree that citizens are eligible for participating in administrative processes that traditionally fall within their own jurisdiction.
- are attached to their professional ethos, they see themselves as experts in their policy area and, therefore, better equipped to make good policies. Involving citizens can be seen as an attack against this expert position.
- can also doubt the actual benefits of citizen involvement in public affairs.

The same article also sets out what determines the trust relationship between government officials and citizens:



(Based on Moyson, van der Walle and Groenweld 2016)

Of the think-tank literature, that produced by DEMOS and NESTA in the UK is of particular importance. As previously outlined this work recognised that governments also "need to use the personal interactions between their staff and the public to build ongoing, two-way relationships with the people they serve based on honesty and reciprocity" (Parker et al. 2008, 9).

Linked to this was the increasing literature of co-design and co-production as a means by which government policy and programs are developed with communities and not just done to them. Under the traditional model, professionals plan and deliver a service often consulting communities in planning and design. The more co-operative approach uses other methods such as co-creation, co-design and co-production in which user and professional knowledge is combined to design and deliver services (Boyle and Harris 2009, 1; Burkett 2012).

The difference between the traditional way of developing policy and programs and a new way of governments working together with communities is set out here:

Co-production

RESPONSIBILITY FOR DELIVERY OF SERVICES	RESPONSIBILITY FOR DESIGN OF SERVICES: Government as sole service designer	Government and users/communities as co-planners	No government input into service planning
Government as sole service deliverers	Traditional government service provision	Government service provision but users/ communities involved in planning and design	Government as sole service deliverer
Government and users/ communities as co-deliverers	User co-delivery of government designed services	**Full co-production**	User/community delivery of services with little formal/government input
Users/ communities as sole deliverers	User/community delivery of government planned services	User/community delivery of co-planned or co-designed services	Self-organised community provision

Adapted from Carnegie Trust (2006) 'Commission for Rural Community Development – Beyond Engagement and participation, user and community co-production of services.' By Tony Bovaird, Carnegie Trust, and from NESTA (2009) 'The Challenge of Co-Production: How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services' by David Boyle and Michael Harris

This literature overall gives some reasons why trusting communities may be difficult:

The benefits of co-design and resilient communities are difficult to cost

"The current public service model for public sector reform focuses attention on easily costed and easily delivered changes, siphoning attention and money away from preventative interventions, which are often more difficult to model" (Boyle and Harris 2009, 9) and not so easy to measure in budget papers.

Hierarchy and control

Relationships of trust may challenge traditional structures. While public and private organisations know that "the only way to satisfy the changing demands and expectations of customers and citizens is to be embedded in networks … Networks challenge our conceptions of leadership, which too often are still rooted in an outmoded 'great man' theory that mistakes the formal authority of status, rank or station with the exercise of leadership. When you ask people about the leadership of an organisation, most people reach for the organogram and point to the top. When it comes to leading across networks there are no such easy answers" (Skidmore 2004, 91).

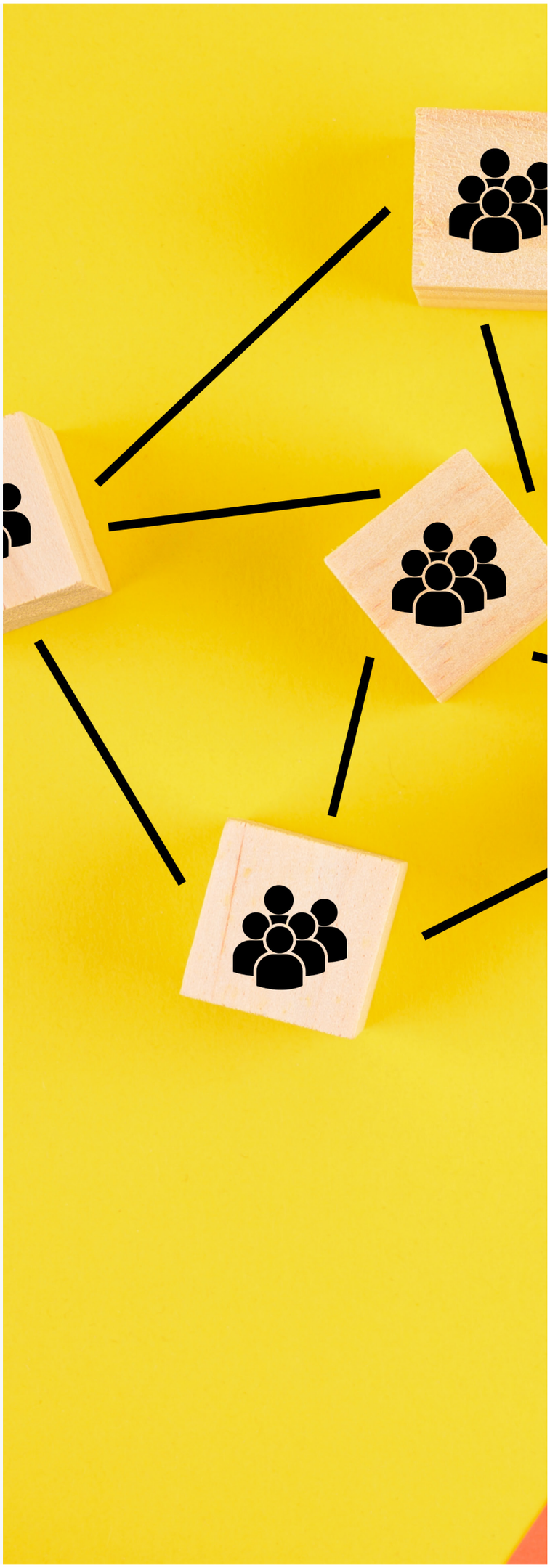
Trusting communities is too risky

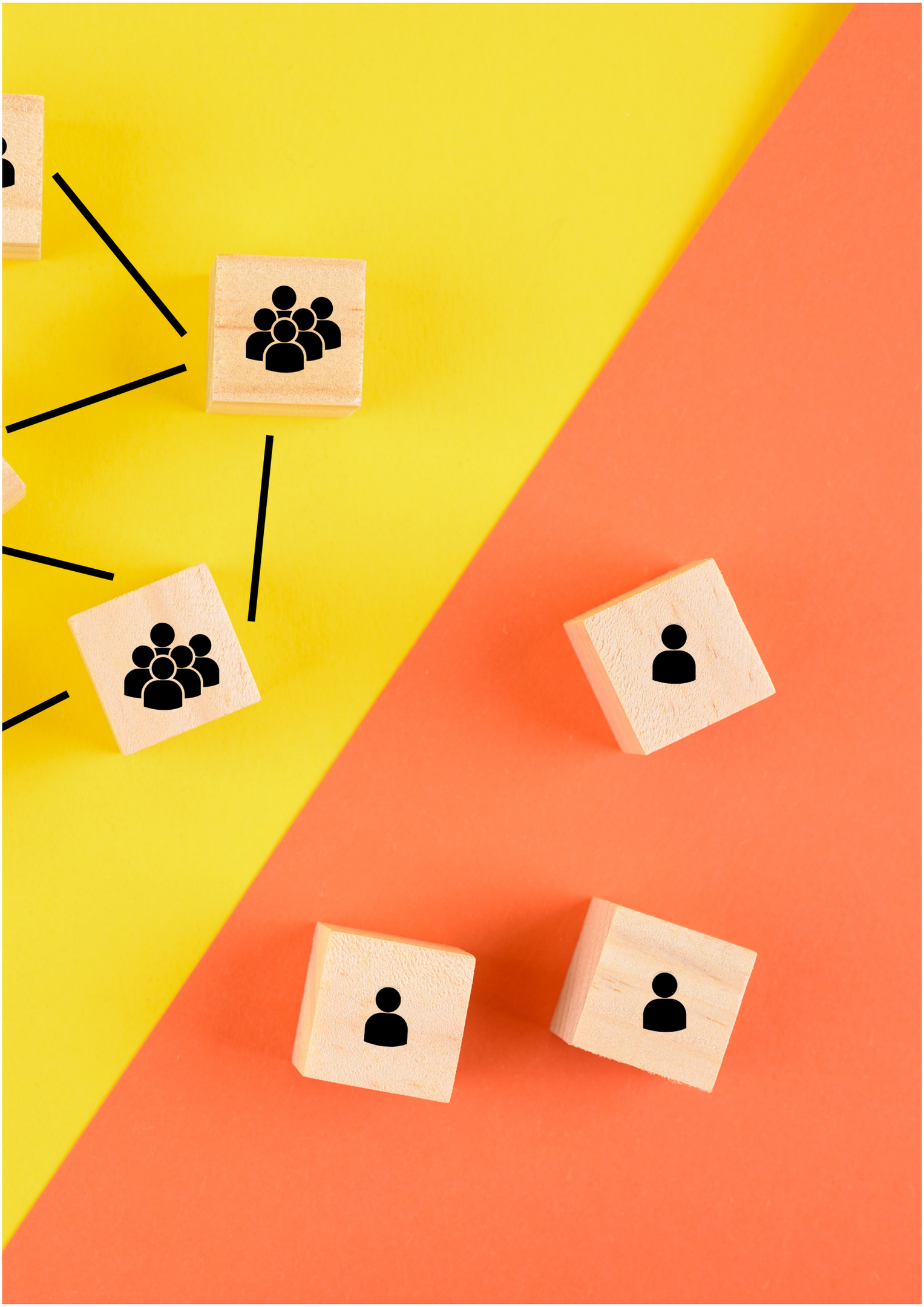
Governments often have problems with trusting communities because of the risks involved in letting go of control. Assessing risk involves an assessment of the chance of unforeseen consequences as risk "is not just uncertainty … It is uncertainty plus the potential for harm being done if the other does not act as desired" (Weber and Carter 2003, 127).

Learning from other disciplines

One issue under discussion in emergency management in Australia is the difference in approach between those working with Australian communities and "humanitarian" aid from Australia to other countries. The 2021 Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Final Report on Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20 recommended the development and implementation of:

> *a set of operating principles which are guided by Australia's current humanitarian and foreign aid principles… [and that the] values that would inform the development of these operating principles would be the universal values of humanitarian assistance—impartiality, non-discrimination, political neutrality and cross-cultural awareness.*
>
> (Recommendation 4)





PART 5

EVIDENCE FROM INTERVIEWS

5.1 Methods

Part of the research for this Report involved depth interviews with government workers in different government organisations, as well as with community leaders and staff in organisations that collaborate with government agencies in these policy areas. Government sectors included in the study were local government, state government, law enforcement and emergency management. Community organisations included religious interest groups, multicultural organisations, youth organisations, and community support groups. Respondents were involved in one or more of three policy areas: 1. Emergency response and disaster recovery; 2. the response to the COVID pandemic as a stand-in for large-scale public health events; and 3. programs to counter and prevent violent extremism (C/PVE).

While our government respondents held different types of positions within government bodies, most of our community respondents held leadership positions within a community organisation. Many of these had direct contact with government where government funded programs or initiatives, which meant that they were at the same time dependent on and accountable to their government partners. However, community organisations also at times provided information and knowledge about the communities they supported, or acted as liaison between government and communities.

5.2 How trust is defined

It may seem that in modern governance the importance of interpersonal relationships has been minimised to enable equal access and opportunity and to reduce potential bias in decision-making on the part of the government. At the same time, interpersonal relationships are still key to making community–government collaborations possible. Most of the respondents in our interviews acknowledged the importance of getting to know one another in order to build trust at a professional as well as personal level. This suggests that familiarity with the other is an important part of the process of building trust:

> *[Trust] is confidence in the person that you're dealing with and it's almost like a bank [account] that you build up … and in each transaction, you are either depleting or increasing the confidence the person has in you.*
>
> (GS1, female)

As we have discussed above, trust involves two people as well as an issue that is the key to their interaction. This suggests that context is an important part of a trust relationship. If both parties have a shared interest and ability to work towards this common goal, trust can develop out of their interactions. One participant described the need for a shared interest as a "mutually beneficial reason" around which trust is allowed to grow:

> *People come together for some mutually beneficial reason and the more time they spend exploring that mutually beneficial reason that they've come together for, the stronger that relationship becomes, and I think with that strength, the relationship becomes [one of] trust.*
>
> (GS5, male)

The importance of the interpersonal component of trust relationships came to the fore in comments made in the interviews. Being able to form a personal relationship was seen as fundamental for the development of professional relationships. Participants did not necessarily want to make friends with their counterparts, but it nevertheless seemed to be important to find some kind of common ground. According to one participant:

> *It comes down to interpersonal relationships. Stepping into the relationship, which is a critical aspect of the trust building, is a curiosity in each other, and that ability to look a person in the eye and demonstrate that you're genuinely interested in them. You have a genuine curiosity, a genuine interest in each other.*
>
> (GS5, male)

The "getting to know" element of people's descriptions of trust was particularly evident in the data from government workers, who emphasised the relationship-building process that enables trust. Views from community participants were somewhat more nuanced. While the relational element was still important, participants' responses suggested that the power differential between government and community actors at times stood in the way of trust. Most of our participants were in some way reliant on government funding for their community programs and activities. This meant that they were keenly aware of the risk of having their relationship interrupted and trust being withdrawn. They were also aware that the government organisations they worked with had their own priorities, which were not always shared by the community organisation. These differences in priorities sometimes meant that issues or concerns were not heard by their government counterparts. Community definitions of trust were thus more likely to include a reference to this power differential. According to one participant, for instance, being listened to and understood was a crucial part of feeling trusted:

> *It's really [about] understanding what communities are saying … As much as communication is about talking and being able to transmit a message, but the other half of communication is also listening … So, listening well and really being able to have a finger on the pulse about what communities are thinking, saying, feeling and desiring for the future.*
>
> (CS8, female)

> *[Trust] is having the confidence in each other. Having the confidence to work together to towards a common goal, trusting that the other party's going to do the right thing.*
>
> (CS7, male)

> *[If you have trust] you just need less systems of control … [For government,] you don't trust people there is a cost of requiring systems of accountability all the time. And it actually is a real drag on government's effectiveness. You have to worry all the time about are people stealing or literally, are they acting dishonourably in how they interact with you? And it paralyses the ability of government. I mean, I'm a great believer that that linear relationship between trust and success of societies, the more trusting a society is, the more successful it is, the evidence is overwhelming, but it is a two-way street. Governments exist within culture, so government governing, you can't just create it externally. It's a complex set of relationships.*
>
> (GS8, male)

5.3 Trust as a process

Building trust: Key behaviours

Trust develops between individuals as a result of shared interests and personal interactions. This means that the actions and behaviours of the parties involved are key to the establishment of trust. Our research has found that there are five key behaviours or processes that support the building of trust, which are underpinned by key attributes that are involved in trusting relationships. We refer to these as trust processes or behaviours, because rather than one-off efforts they must be anchored in day-to-day activities and organisational outlook.

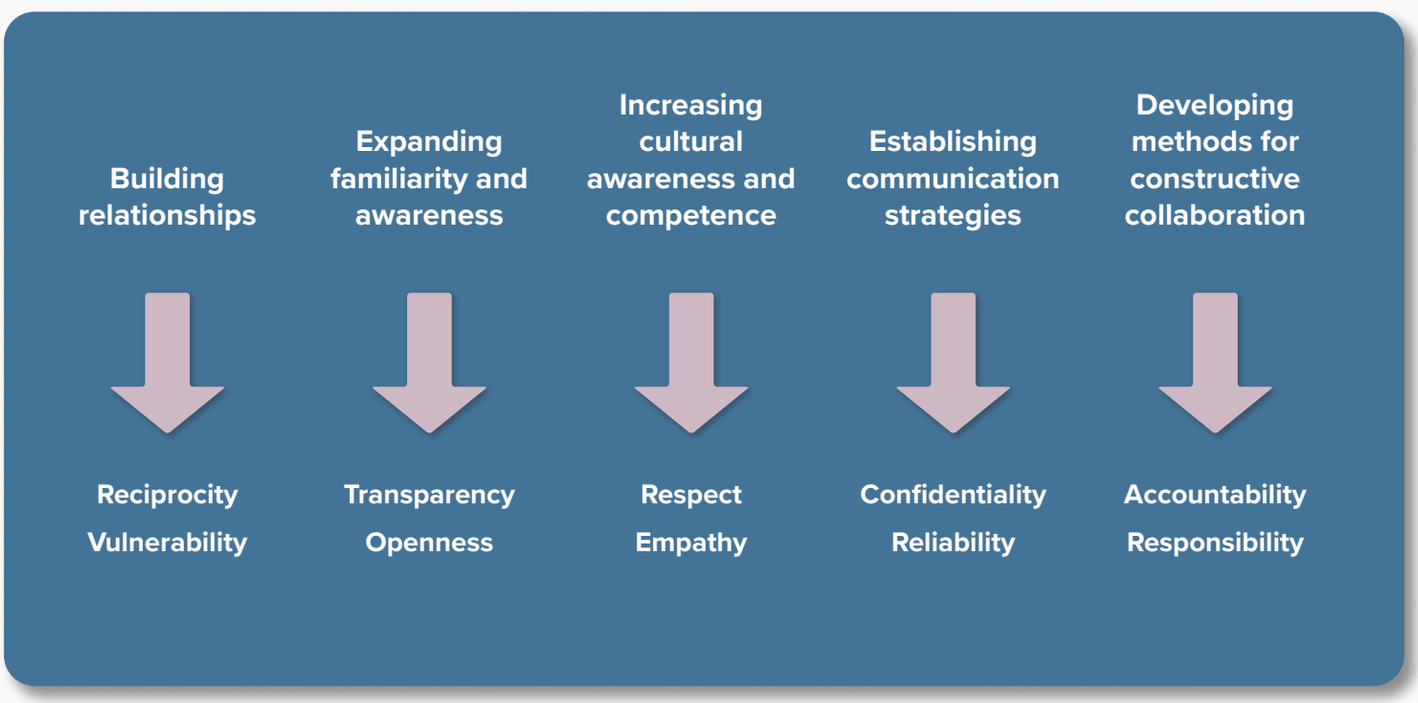
Our analysis resulted in the following five key processes or behaviours that foster trust:

- Building relationships
- Expanding familiarity and awareness
- Increasing cultural awareness and competence
- Establishing communication strategies
- Developing methods for constructive collaboration

These processes or behaviours require both sides to show specific attitudes, which we refer to as the attributes of the interaction that contribute to trust. These include reciprocity; reliability; transparency, openness; vulnerability; empathy; being accountable; taking on responsibility; demonstrating respect and maintaining confidentiality. We will address these as part of our trust processes below.

Trusting relationships do not emerge out of nowhere; they can be fostered and supported, both at the organisational and at the individual level. Our research shows that the behaviours and attitudes that contribute to trust can be learned and can become part of an organisational culture and embedded within strategies and programs. This suggests that training and support for those who are in roles where relationships with community are important would be an important asset for improving trust between government and communities.

> *Entering a community that is not your own is a bit like entering a foreign country. Government officials need the analytical skills to quickly develop an understanding of the community, to build (and maintain) situational awareness and identify the power dynamics and the various intentions and motivations at play. Well-developed relational skills are crucial. There is real skill needed here.*
>
> (CS11, female)



Building relationships

For both government and community participants, forming trusting relationships was an important aspect of their professional roles, and so everyone had an interest in fostering such relationships wherever possible.

Several government respondents emphasised that it was important to enable relationship building by appropriately resourcing relationship-building activities, and that relationships needed to be in place to deal with crises rather than trying to quickly find the right partners once a problem had already arisen. Informal conversations also emerged as a crucial element of forming trust relationships, and participants pointed out that space needed to be made to enable these outside of formal meetings.

> *Trust is iterative. I'll trust you a little bit and if you do the things that we've just described, you follow through, you listen, you respond in appropriate timeframe, you do all those things, next time I'll trust you a little bit more. And I think it's that iterative nature of trust that builds trust over a long period of time. But trust can be eroded really, really quickly by almost one thing that you said you'd do that you didn't do. And then it's like all those years of building that trust are just eroded.*
>
> (GS1, female)

One obstacle to trusting relationships was that the values and motivations of both sides did not always align well.

On the government side, political or career considerations could get in the way of the relationship. On the community side, respondents felt that sometimes ulterior motives were at play or that the community leadership did not agree with the government on certain issues and that this could lead to a breakdown in trust.

> *[My advice for government] would be take the time to build trust and rapport outside of these emergencies, just in peace time. Take that time. Invest that time. Resource adequately this aspect of community engagement, so ensure that you have the people with the [necessary] skills and knowledge.*
>
> (GS4, female)

> *More informal conversations, so that when you are doing the formal engagement, you already have a strong basis and foundation and shared understanding of the conversation. And you can go deeper … More time to build relationships. And I would love less formality.*
>
> (GS8, female)

> *Essentially, a relationship is reciprocal. We have to do work with community and demonstrate that transparency, accountability and honesty with community. And similarly, we need that back in terms of that mutual engagement from community as well. So, unless you've got that sort of working, two-way working relationship, those trust flows aren't going to happen. You really have to have that two-way connection, and that's been pretty good to focus. I love that word, 'reciprocity.'*
>
> (GS6, female)

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is key to trust relationships; trust leads to trust because someone who feels trusted will act in more trustworthy ways. Trust is also built through reciprocity, as one party reciprocates the positive actions and attitudes of the other. Like the establishment of trust through iterative interactions, trust also grew out of this reciprocity, as participants from both government and community organisations noted. A large part of the process of building trust related to the ability to consider the potential for long-term returns as a result of a relationship. Trust here emerges as the confidence that good deeds will ultimately lead to a return that matches, at least in part, the investment. Building trust is easier where there is a common goal or interest and where those in an organisation know that the other partner in the relationship is invested in the same ultimate aim.

> *It's that kind of reciprocity where you don't expect anything in return or maybe you think, we'll get something back in the long run. We'll leave it. It's about the long-term nature of that trusting relationship … because we've got shared common goals. But in the back of my head I know, one day it will boomerang back and something good will come out from it. I don't do a tally on a chalk board, but I know it goes both ways.*
>
> (CS8, female)

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is perhaps the most difficult attribute of a trusting relationship to achieve, particularly in a government–community context. However, the term here relates not so much to revealing any particular shortcomings or failings but more to the ability to discuss the limits to what each partner in the trust relationship is able to offer or achieve. In our research, the importance of vulnerability emerged on both the government and community sides, although it related mostly to the ability of government to be clear and honest about what can be achieved in a particular interaction.

> *It's about being prepared to demonstrate vulnerability [that] sometimes we don't have all the answers, rather than standing up and going, trust us but trust us based on what we know at this point in time. So that vulnerability piece I think is also really important.*
>
> (GS2, male)

> *[The key thing is] delivering on what you've agreed to, like in a relationship with your partner. What you say is what you do. That doesn't always go to plan, but it's also about the ability to be vulnerable. And if a mistake's likely to be made, then I think it's identifying that earlier and nominating solutions to that.*
>
> (CS2, male)

Expanding familiarity and awareness

While trust is most important in situations where there is a lack of knowledge, our research suggests that familiarity and awareness of the context in which an interaction takes place is nevertheless necessary for trust to develop. This related to the organisational processes that formed the backdrop to individual interactions, but also the limitations individuals were subject to.

Both government and community participants agreed that high staff turnover disrupted the development of relationships and thus the building of trust. On one level, the simple fact is that experience and knowledge are lost in the process, but on another level high turnover in government roles is part of role progression, so individual officers are less likely to get invested in the issues the communities are dealing with.

Aside from this, though, a lack of knowledge about organisational processes and culture can also become an impediment to trust. As one government participant pointed out, government relied on a specific language and style that communities may not be familiar with or leverage successfully. For community organisations that do not speak that language, this may present a barrier to successful collaboration with government.

Government participants also felt that sometimes community members, including community organisations, were unaware of the organisational constraints faced by government, and about the internal processes that they needed to comply with. The sense was that government might appear as omnipotent yet uncaring, where in fact government workers were faced with internal processes over which they had little control. More awareness of these processes would result in greater trust.

> *In a lot of program delivery areas of government there are a lot of staff on contract roles. Either one year, six months, non-ongoing roles … if you're on a project that is all about relationship building and that familiar face, within a year that person rolls out of that role, you've lost that corporate knowledge and also lost all that relationship with your stakeholder and it is really the good graces of a particular case officer if that relationship is maintained ongoing with the new officer … although that's like an employment issue, it [is also an] issue around delivery of good relationship building.*
>
> (GS9, female)

Transparency

The term transparency here refers to the ability to understand the kinds of systems, rules and organisational pressures that others operate within and are constrained by, and the ability to communicate these. Thus, it also relates to the term empathy.

> *[It would be good] to build more trust that sometimes government is doing the best that they can, but they may well be constrained by all of those things like the resources or the planning. Sometimes you just have to accept that that's perhaps the way it is or spending a little bit of time to understand what are those pressures on government rather than just thinking they don't care. There might be something else behind it. Just trying to create a bit of awareness and understanding of those processes.*
>
> (GS4, female)

Openness

Many participants agreed that open and transparent conversations were key to trusting relationships, even if this meant discussing difficult truths or acknowledging the limits to what governments could offer in terms of support. Participants emphasised the importance of personal engagement and the ability to start an open conversation as an important aspect in building trust. This also ties in with the importance of being able to show vulnerability and being reliable in delivering on promises.

> *I think the openness to having the conversation … and it then moves into the openness in the dialogue, and comfort in having an open conversation … If you are not comfortable to put your foot in that door and to have that conversation, then you're not going to end up with an open dialogue.*
>
> (GS6, female)

> *In post-disaster settings there's a natural inclination to [want to] fix it and make it better for people, and so you want to promise whole bunch of stuff that you can't necessarily deliver on. But in fact, what people want to know is, when it all settles down, just tell me where I stand so I know how I can deal with this and how I can navigate the system. So, trust is really about being able to be open and upfront, deliver on what you say you'll deliver on, and be able to explain why you can't in in a reasonable way.*
>
> (CS6, male)

Increasing cultural awareness and competence

Where some participants mentioned a lack of awareness of internal government processes as a barrier to trust, many also felt that government lacked cultural awareness and competence when interacting with multicultural communities, in particular. According to one participant it was not enough just to be sensitive to language but to have an awareness of the cultural context in which interactions took place. The best way to achieve this was to co-design with communities to make sure that government messaging arrived in the way it was intended and to ensure the collaboration of the community. This was also reflected by the comments from our participants from law enforcement agencies who felt that cultural awareness was still limited within the force. At the same time, one participant pointed out that this lack of awareness was mirrored by a lack of knowledge about organisational processes, as we have indicated above.

The view that a lack of cultural awareness was a barrier to trust was shared by community participants as well. One pointed out how the government still lagged behind the community in terms of diversity and that it would be better if people from different communities were part of government to improve intercultural understanding.

At the same time, participants also pointed out that communities were not always united in what they wanted and that sometimes the people who acted as community leaders did not in fact represent their community's majority. This points again to the internal diversity of different communities and to the difficulty of achieving appropriate representation in community interactions.

> *Building trust requires a certain sensitivity, requires an understanding, requires cultural safety, cultural awareness, cultural competence, requires speaking a language that the communities can understand, and they can only understand this language if that information is somehow co-designed with those communities. It's not enough to just translate or interpret something. If the source message is not crafted in a certain way, you can engage your best interpreters and translators in the world, that message is not going to be effective. It's how we craft this message together with the communities that we serve that is fundamental in building trust.*
>
> (CS3, male)

Respect

In the context of government work with communities, respect for different positions or views came up as a strong theme across different interviews. For some community organisations, these differences could result in the withdrawal of funding in cases where government views did not align with those of the community organisations, even though both were keen to work towards the good of the community.

The issue of respect also emerged in the way communities were seen to invest time in achieving cultural awareness and competence. A lack of awareness of important occasions or traditions emerged as a lack of respect where it showed unwillingness to learn about communities on the part of government workers.

> *There needs to be a way in which government and community organisation can disagree respectfully and it won't impact the broader relationship, which is ultimately to serve the benefit of the community.*
>
> (CS1, male)

> *Even if you disagree with someone, you should be able to respect the fact that they're an advocate on behalf of an organisation, even if you disagree with that organisation. So, it's quite possible to trust people who disagree with you if you can see that their motivations, you can empathise with their motivations. I think that's a critical element of building trust.*
>
> (GS8, male)

Empathy

The ability to understand someone else's emotions and viewpoints is a huge asset when building trust. Particularly for diverse communities and those with migrant backgrounds, experiences with government organisations may differ. For those who may have experienced government corruption or violence, trusting government institutions may be difficult. Even communities or groups who simply do not identify with mainstream society may find it more difficult to trust the government if they do not feel represented or if they have historically been marginalised.

> *Trust requires empathy. To trust someone is to see them as someone who you are empathetic [with]. There's an action element to it, so how people conduct themselves ... but it's also rooted in experiences of how people behave or how organisations behave.*
>
> (GS8, male)

> *Trust is a very complex matter, and the degree of trust varies depending on the experience of the stakeholders. It's very, very difficult to establish a trust relationship with a lot of emerging communities, especially communities that come from countries where democracy is not in place, or people come from war torn countries or countries where power has constantly abused the trust.*
>
> (CS3, male)

Establishing communication strategies

Another recurring topic was that good communication was a crucial element of building trust. For some, communication was defined as having frequent conversations aside from official meetings to build relationships and engage in dialogue. For others, it was the methods used to communicate with citizens, the language used to address them, and even the media through which issues were communicated. As one participant pointed out, not everyone had the same levels of experience with different forms of digital communication, so this needed to be specific to the community and according to what worked at the local level. At the same time, others also suggested that government needed to talk more about the things they were doing and explaining to their communities so they would not be seen as inactive or complacent.

One of the most important issues with regards to community–government communication was that confidentiality needed to be maintained. In particular, community participants showed keen awareness that it was important for some conversations to take place behind closed doors, where trust meant that both parties would be confident that information would not be shared with others.

While everyone felt that airing grievances in the media was a breach of trust, some thought that the government sometimes also made media announcements without consultation and that there were instances where it was, if not justified, then at least understandable that communities used this as a last resort. At the same time, most participants also felt that exposure in the media was not a good way of actually getting results or resolving an issue.

> *Building trust requires a certain sensitivity, requires an understanding, requires cultural safety, cultural awareness, cultural competence, requires speaking a language that the communities can understand, and they can only understand this language if that information is somehow co-designed with those communities. It's not enough to just translate or interpret something. If the source message is not crafted in a certain way, you can engage your best interpreters and translators in the world, that message is not going to be effective. It's how we craft this message together with the communities that we serve that is fundamental in building trust.*
>
> (CS3, male)

Confidentiality

Participants emphasised the importance of being able to work out differences through confidential engagement and discussion rather than turning to the media to voice criticism or grievances, which was seen as a breach of trust. Even in existing trust relationships, confidentiality was seen as an important way of maintaining and expressing trust where, for instance, those involved shared information about internal processes or decisions that might cause damage if they were made public. Confidentiality was thus seen as an important element of building as well as maintaining trust.

> *When dealing with government, the trust comes in, where [you know that] the conversations that you're having now are not going to appear on the front page of the Herald Sun tomorrow morning. You know that you are able to have an open conversation and hopefully confiding and being open enough to say, OK well I trust that you're not going to use this against us or you're not going to expose this.*
>
> (CS6, male)

> *Breaches of trust, it's like if community is not getting its own way and goes to the media … don't air your dirty laundry in public. Get behind closed doors and argue it out. But sometimes government forces it. Sometimes government will go out and say things without consulting the community.*
>
> (CS10, male)

Reliability

The reference to reliability ties in with the concept of trust in that most participants felt that trust was built on the experience of the other party being reliable and delivering on promises. This idea also resonated with other terms such as being open about capabilities and transparent about any limitations or barriers, including institutional barriers.

> *You can lose trust really quickly if you're not delivering upon what you say you're going to be doing. I think that there can be sometimes a false expectation of what your capacity is. Sometimes community-led organisations can unintentionally set themselves up to fail because they're actually trying to appeal to government for support. I think it's about trying to balance that and be realistic around what you can deliver.*
>
> (CS2, male)

> *Trust is really about being able to deliver on, being open and upfront, deliver on what you say you'll deliver on, and be able to explain why [if] you can't in a reasonable way. And of course, not everyone's going to accept that, but at least you can get to a point where people say "okay" [I accept your position].*
>
> (CS6, male)

Developing methods for constructive collaboration

Another aspect of building trust was to establish practices that facilitated collaboration between government and communities. The distribution of power, in particular where funding arrangements were at stake, sometimes meant that community organisations felt that they were not listened to and even disempowered where they felt that they had no ownership over the programs the government wanted to initiate.

Government workers also discussed how certain styles or processes could stand in the way of relationships where community organisations were unaware of or unfamiliar with the procedures on which government systems rely. This meant that differences in style or vocabulary, and expectations around communications or deliverables, could interfere with relationships and thus with trust. More flexibility around different organisational styles would be helpful not only to foster trust relationships but also to be more inclusive of smaller or emerging community organisations that might be excluded from government funding because of their inability to comply, or lack of awareness of the required processes and language.

> *Government has very set questions, set style, a very set methodological approach … it's a very particular style of government. When they deal with community groups that are service focused and have been in the not-for-profit sector that has its own style, you will find either a lot of hand holding which gets a bit [patronising] or a lot of frustration. And a lot of content that comes from community will be disregarded because it doesn't fit that particular mould.*
>
> (GS9, female)

> *Empowering the communities [is important to establish trust.] Let them design and deliver programs whether it be in response to a crisis or anything else. And also, pre-emptively work with communities. So, when a crisis does emerge … you've got established relationships with communities, whether they be leaders, youth leaders, work on developing that before a crisis situation arises.*
>
> (CS7, male)

Accountability

Many respondents saw accountability as an important aspect of being trustworthy in government–community relationships. Since many community organisations received government funding, most were aware of how a lack of accountability could diminish trust. At the same time, overly strict rules around accountability could also be an obstacle to trust.

> *You've got to put in all this paperwork and absolutely acquit every single little thing, and it just becomes overwhelming … The amount of oversight and everything that had to be done in all these ways, in ways that government wanted it, not necessarily in ways that the community wanted it, made it so much more difficult, so much more challenging.*
>
> (GS4, female)

> *The government doesn't want community actors who are controversial, whether it be because of the positions they take or because they're not professional or because there's some scandal. The last thing the government wants to be associated with is a community actor that is plagued by scandal. They certainly would be wary. I think [they] have that general level of wariness that something could blow up in their faces because of the community actor that has got some issues in their governance or their transparency for their financial matters, etcetera*
>
> (CS1, male)

Responsibility

Government respondents in particular saw the ability to take responsibility for outcomes as an important issue. In emergency management, the idea was raised that overly relying on government could be a barrier to developing community resilience and that a balance between the two was important:

> *[Communities also need to] accept responsibility, if people are living next to rivers, next to mountains, where there's going to be land slips, what's your plan B? And many communities and many families are fine with all of that. But this is one of the challenges – resilience versus reliance. And the pressure we are under at times in government about delivering services over and above what we're actually capable of delivering – some of those should be the responsibilities of the individuals, of the families of those particular communities.*
>
> (GS2, male)

> *Government needs to find ways to give community ownership of their own outcomes. But in doing that you actually need to put some accountability mechanisms in place and put some fences around that. And you need the community to acknowledge that they are responsible for some of these outcomes … And if you get it wrong, well guess what? You're in the same world that us as agencies are in.*
>
> (GS10, male)

PART 6

KEY FINDINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION

This section of the report outlines key findings and sets out future directions for action based on the research interviews and consultations undertaken, as well as on the review of the academic literature, government and think-tank reports.

Key findings

1 Reciprocity is the bedrock of how trust flows and is maintained between government and communities

Trust is based on reciprocity. Without trust flowing between parties there is no relationship of trust. This applies to the relationships between government agencies and communities as much as it does for individuals.

2 Policy settings need to explicitly recognise the importance of trust

Many polices and strategies developed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, as well as local governments, recognise the importance of trust for the delivery of policy objectives. However, while recognising the importance of trust, these polices rarely focus on what is needed to actually create it.

3 Perceptions of lack of trust by government agencies in communities undermine the effectiveness of government policies and programs

Government policies and programs that aim to build community resilience to social harms or prevent violent extremism need to be built on trust to be effective. Feedback received demonstrates that some communities perceive that they are not trusted; that they are not given agency; and that there can be a gap between government policies that state they are about empowerment, but which are implemented in a way that is focussed on control. Robert Putnam (1993) makes clear that trust is a prerequisite for effective public policy. Trust is not an optional extra, but essential for the many programs focussed on building resilience to social harms.

4 Trust is made or broken by behaviours

Many government policies outline the importance of trust. However, if the way agencies or their employees act does not create trust, then these policies will not work. Government agencies need to be aware that how they do things is as important as what they do. The behaviours needed to develop trust include reciprocity; reliability; transparency and openness; vulnerability; accountability; responsibility; respect; confidentiality; and empathy. These need to be present within the interpersonal relationships that have emerged as key to trust building. Many participants thought that relationships could grow when there was enough time and money invested to support relationship-building activities, and when individuals had authority to make decisions. For government workers, however, their timelines are often at odds with those of communities. Moving whenever possible at the pace of communities rather than of government deadlines creates an environment in which trust is more likely to develop.

5 Both government officials and communities need to develop agreed methods to build and maintain trust

Both government workers and community members can contribute towards trusting relationships by emphasising behaviours that enable trust and by avoiding behaviours that break down trust. These behaviours are different for government and communities due to their different roles and responsibilities. Clearly governments are better resourced and need to make the time and effort to change from a traditional "top-down" way of working. However, methods can be identified and agreed upon to help establish mutual accountability in trust building.

Government can improve trust by:

» Demonstrating through actions that they value community experience, and that community empowerment and agency is real.

» Providing the resources, time and funding for relationship building.

» Delivering on promises and, if this is not possible, being transparent about why a promise cannot be fulfilled.

» Focussing on longer-term policy outcomes as much as shorter-term actions. Making announcements in a media release while discussions with community members are ongoing can undermine trust.

» Building the cultural competency, capabilities and awareness of government workers.

» Being open about potential outcomes, both positive and negative.

» Limiting personnel turnover and, where this is not possible, developing processes that enable trust relationships to survive changes in staff.

Communities can help improve trust by:

» Taking on increased responsibility for their own affairs where resources permit. (Governments may need to provide these resources in a way that allows communities to deliver on their own priorities not just government priorities.)

» Being aware of accountability and financial transparency.

» Maintaining confidentiality of discussions with government agencies and representatives. Raising an issue with the media before it has been discussed with government officials can undermine trust.

» Understanding better government processes and limitations. Governments also have a responsibility to make available better information and training on these processes.

» Being open in their engagements and clear about their motivations.

» Acknowledging the diversity of opinions within their community.

6 Risk-taking and vulnerability vs control

Trust requires both parties to be vulnerable. Vulnerability requires openness and the willingness to give up some control. It is often difficult for government officials to take the risk to trust some communities. Sometimes they are working to set timelines for delivery of an outcome that government has already set. Government officials feel frustration when set timelines are not met and when communities rework government's preferred outcomes. It is not possible for a community to have agency or be empowered and for the process to be controlled at the same time. Developing mutual approaches to shared power that acknowledge the vulnerability inherent for both communities and government in such arrangements is more likely to support robust trust relations over time.

7 Government officials and communities need to have a clear understanding about what they can expect of each other

Key characteristics of trust include predictability, reliability and a confident expectation about what the other party will do. Trust is built on expectations about the interests and motivations of the other person or party, knowledge of the context in which an interaction takes place and awareness about the organisational processes or constraints.

8 Governments need to invest time in developing and maintaining relationships

Frequent changes in personnel can stand in the way of trust as developing relationships are interrupted. In addition, understanding the internal diversity within communities and government organisations helps foster trust but takes time. The more senior a public servant becomes, the more time they must spend with ministers and the less time they have to spend with communities. Some communities see the relatively junior level of officials given responsibility for community engagement as indicating that it is not seen as important.

9 Government agencies need to make sure that cultural awareness and respect for diversity are core parts of employees' jobs

Awareness of and respect for cultural diversity is important for building trust with communities. Government workers understanding the cultural context, including the experience of the community, helps foster positive interactions and contributes to trust. This understanding needs to be developed before a crisis happens. During a crisis, communities that have different cultures, speak languages other than English or are made up of recently arrived migrants or refugees are often seen as 'problems' to be 'managed' rather than as partners with community strengths and assets that can be harnessed.

10 Trust is not equally distributed across all communities

Different communities have different levels of trust in government, and sometimes there are varying levels of trust within communities towards government, for example between older and younger community members. Likewise, government officials trust some communities more than others. There is evidence from the literature and our study data that communities that have different views from government officials and do not communicate in a way that aligns with government language are less trusted. The wealthy and well-educated have higher levels of trust than more disadvantaged groups. This is because they find it easier to navigate systems within government. Treatment by government officials means that, for some groups in the community, distrusting government authorities appears to be a rational choice.

11 Accountability requirements should be robust but not onerous

The process and design of programs should promote innovation and be done with communities, not to them. Funding should meet community needs and the application processes and accountability requirements should be fair and transparent but not unduly onerous. Too often government grant and funding processes are very restrictive and focussed on achieving government outcomes that involve overly burdensome accountability mechanisms which some communities are not equipped to meet, creating sense of mistrust by government in community integrity. There need to be innovative ways of managing accountability and evaluation that focus on what has been achieved in terms of outcomes, and not merely on how much was spent.

At the same time, communities cannot expect to have responsibility for or access to significant resources without proportional accountability about how power is exercised or funding spent. In addition, some community groups do not always understand the legal and administrative constraints within which government officials operate. Clear communication on these issues is essential for building and maintaining good flows of trust.

12 There is often little training in how to build a relationship of trust with communities

Developing relationships of trust with communities should be regarded as a type of “trade craft” for public servants. This type of training already exists for those engaged in providing humanitarian aid. Strangely, community building and connection is regarded as essential when Australian officials work with communities in other countries but less important when working to develop community resilience or post-crisis recovery within Australia.

Future directions for action

1 Establishing good communication with communities

Open and honest communication is a key element of trust. This includes being open about the limitations of a relationship. Building up functional relationships before a crisis arises is important to ensure that channels of communication and systems for interventions exist when they are needed. Confidentiality and direct communication are also important.

2 Training for government officials

There is a need for more training for government officials in how to develop relationships with communities. Developing relationships of trust with communities should be regarded as a type of “trade craft” for public servants and officials.

This type of training already exists for those engaged in providing humanitarian aid. The capability to build trusting relationships is a skill that can be taught. These skills need to be more valued and training programs embedded to develop these skills for government personnel who regularly interact with and rely on community engagement for their work. This training could be based on the Principles and Guidelines set out in this Report focussing on:

Building relationships

» Reciprocity

» Vulnerability

Expanding familiarity and awareness

» Transparency

» Openness

Increasing cultural awareness and competence

» Respect

» Empathy

Establishing communication strategies

» Confidentiality

» Reliability

Developing methods for constructive collaboration

» Accountability

» Responsibility

The training should also focus on behaviours through which trust is built and strengthened:

» Building and maintaining relationships

» Expanding familiarity and awareness

» Increasing cultural awareness and competence

» Establishing communication strategies

» Developing methods for constructive collaboration

3 Training for communities in how government works

Often those community groups that speak the language of government and understand government processes get swifter and more comprehensive access to government resources. There needs to be greater training for government officials in how to develop relationships with communities. This also requires timing and resources before a crisis occurs. Likewise, government needs to support increased training across communities in how government works, good governance and the legal and administrative constraints on government action.

4 Greater training in techniques for building trust relationships through co-design and co-production

Co-production of policies and programs is one key method for building trust relationships. This means that communities have agency and are not just "consulted" on program development and delivery. True co-production takes time and sustained effort to work with communities as partners. There needs to be a more widespread understanding of how these techniques could be used and the willingness to take the time to use them.

5 Develop and implement more proportional accountability standards

Sharing power and facilitating collaborative processes are key to building trust. Community organisations want to be involved in decision-making processes and want to have their voices heard. To build trust they must also take on responsibility for the outcomes of their activities and be accountable for the work they do as part of a collaboration with government. Accountability for taxpayers' money is essential. However, many community leaders commented that the accountability procedures were either too onerous for the size of the grant or so prescriptive that communities had little say how the funds would be spent. Governments, in consultation with relevant accountability agencies, should develop simplified acquittal procedures for government grants.

PART 7

PRINCIPLES, GUIDELINES AND TRUST CHECKLIST

Developing the Principles and Guidelines

The following Principles and Guidelines are designed to summarise key points from our research and to help guide practitioners in the factors needed to build relationships of trust.

The Principles are broadly based on the Victorian Government's 2015 *Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities*. A version of the (then four) Principles was included in Duckworth, Archer, Mackinlay, Hallwright *Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding* (Duckworth et al. 2023).

The Guidelines summarise the findings from our literature review and interviews.

A draft of the full Principles and Guidelines was presented to the 2023 AVERT International Research Symposium for further feedback. Following that, they were circulated for further input from our partners. In 2024 we held a community roundtable on the revised Principles and Guidelines. This roundtable focussed on issues raised in consultation and next steps in bringing about the changes needed to build and maintain government trust in communities.

The 2023 version of the Principles and Guidelines were also provided to and discussed with the Commonwealth Government's Multicultural Framework Review, which reported in July 2024. The Review's Report *Towards fairness: A multicultural Australia for all* includes the 2023 version of the "trust checklist". In commenting on this approach, the Review states that the "[t]he… 'trust-checklist' model provides a sustainable framework for building (or rebuilding) trust that should be applied between government and community". (Commonwealth of Australia. 2024, 130)

Principles and Guidelines

Trust is a social construct based on emotion and on experience and evidence. It requires a reciprocal relationship between the parties and includes as characteristics: predictability and reliability; confident expectation of future action; being vulnerable. In this way, trust acts, in the words of Anthony Giddens, as a "protective cocoon" (Giddens, 1991(b) 3).

Trust is also explicitly set out as a key component in government policies for community resilience, preventing and countering violent extremism as well as for building disaster resilience and in post-disaster recovery.

The research for the Trust Flows project aims to give practical suggestions on how trust relationships between government and citizens can be improved as part of building resilience to social harms. Drawing from this research, we have drafted the following Principles and Guidelines to help government officials and community members to develop more sustainable trusting relationships. This includes a "trust checklist" that can be used to identify important elements for building trust.

1

Trust building – the importance of how we work together

Trust is a key part of a well-functioning, democratic, socially cohesive and resilient society. Finding solutions to complex issues need a high degree of collaboration and trust between governments and communities; between different communities; and between individuals and civil society. How we do this work is just as important as which initiatives we undertake.

Trust building is an ongoing process that, when done sustainably, provides enhanced ability to respond to crises. This means the work of trust building between communities, governments and relevant stakeholders is a vital aspect of all community resilience and countering violent extremism activities. Trust building works best when done outside of crisis situations.

2

Power and agency – not just consultation

No one sector, community, institution or organisation can solve these issues alone, nor can one single age cohort. Communities' need to have agency is key to successfully finding solutions to many of the challenges we face. This is at the heart of co-creation.

This may mean reaching beyond established institutions and leaders and existing programs. Governments need to engage with a broad range of stakeholders to identify common interests and benefits that might be achieved by working together. Part of this is genuine partnership with Indigenous stakeholders and practices, as well as engaging better with culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholders, women and men and non-binary stakeholders, youth, elderly, and socially vulnerable members of community. Only through doing this can there be true shared responsibility.

It is also the case that with responsibility comes accountability. One of the impediments to a reciprocal relationship is the lack of understanding about what this means. This arises in particular when it comes to funding. Government agencies may be concerned about the risks in providing communities with funding without significant conditions. Communities may feel in turn that they are not trusted to behave responsibly, especially with money.

3 Better ways of working together

For initiatives to be co-created they need to build on existing community strengths and reflect the local context. This includes working across areas such as education, employment, the arts, sports and local government sectors, both face-to-face and online.

Government needs to encourage and support communities, government agencies, businesses, service providers, philanthropic foundations, young people, academia, and others to work together to identify key challenges and opportunities and create innovative initiatives together. This approach requires equity among stakeholders and supports regular communication and the building of trust through positive partnerships grounded in place-based planning that makes sense to the different communities around Australia.

Too often government agencies assume that communities have the time and resources to be fully involved in community-led preparedness and recovery efforts. However, doing this properly also requires government agencies to give communities adequate and flexible resources and funding for them to be involved as equal partners in developing and implementing programs and plans.

Key to this is that government agencies need to commit to co-operative approaches to co-design service development, design and delivery. While risks should be mitigated, it is important to be willing to take some risks with new and innovative ideas, and to tolerate some failures. This innovative, experimental approach is increasingly being used around the world to address social issues where the solutions are unclear and where no single entity has the authority or resources to bring about the necessary change.

4 Funding should be based on what communities need rather than the limits of existing programs

Funding by government should be based on each of these principles. Consistent with this, the process and design of programs should promote innovation and be done with communities not to them. Funding should meet community needs and the application processes and accountability requirements should not be unduly onerous. There need to be innovative methods of accountability and evaluation that focus on what has been achieved, not on how much was spent.

5 Need for training and trust-building activities

It is one thing to agree on the need to build relationships and trust, but another to know how to do it. There needs to be training for those who lead and engage in trust-building activities. It is important for those in government working with communities to be better supported. Individuals, however well qualified, cannot just be taken from other work and expected to know how to build relationships of trust with communities. In the area of overseas humanitarian aid, community building is seen as a key skill with training and professional development, funding and other resources, the development and implementation of more formal tertiary education opportunities and career pathways. The same should be the case for those working with communities within Australia.

Guidelines

Checklist for Processes and Behaviours that build trust.

Key Processes

Key Processes	Behaviours that build or reduce trust	Are these behaviours built into engagements with communities?
Relationship building	» Trust is often personal as well as institutional. Frequent turnover of government officials reduces opportunities to build trust. » Too often government agencies assume that communities have the time and resources to be fully involved in community-led efforts. Government agencies need to respect that community members have business, employment and family commitments.	» Are relationship-building activities well resourced? » Do government agencies and decision makers give enough time to building and supporting relationships? » Are financial and other resources available, for instance to travel to communities and engage in partnership building activities?
Building familiarity / awareness	» Communities often want to engage with someone local, who will not be going back to Canberra, Melbourne or Sydney after a few days. » Communities can be internally diverse and not all members or segments may be represented by a nominated set of community leaders.	» How well do you know your partners in the community? » How inclusive are your relationships of different voices and representatives within a given community? How consistent are you in engaging with intra-community diversity? » How well do your partners in the community know government processes, terminology, personnel, etc?
Cultural awareness and competence	» Lack of understanding by officials of cultural overlay reduces trust. » Officials demonstrating that they value community experience increases trust. » Being open about the cultural features and expectations of your own professional context increases trust.	» How aware are you of the cultural differences between your culture and those within the community you are engaging with? » Are you aware of community events, important days, customs, traditions? » What are the cultural needs, traditions, practices, and how might they affect the partnership? » Do you communicate the cultural characteristics of your own professional context?

Key Processes	Behaviours that build or reduce trust	Are these behaviours built into engagements with communities?
Communication	» Not communicating with communities between “crises” makes it difficult for officials to build trust. » Officials expecting communities to speak the language of government and understand government processes makes it difficult to build trust.	» What strategies are in place to communicate and engage with communities? » Is communication open, transparent, respectful, reciprocal and regular? » Is the terminology accessible to non-specialists? » Do you provide relevant information and collect and integrate feedback?
Collaboration	» Officials taking the time to co-design with communities, not just consult, builds trust. » Talking about “community led” but not actually letting community lead, reduces trust.	» Collaborations take place between equal partners. Are your relationships with communities collaborative? » How could collaborative structures be built or improved? » Do you know techniques for co-designing programs? » Are adequate resources and time provided to ensure fair and reciprocal collaboration?

Key Concepts

Key Concepts	Behaviours that build or reduce trust	Are these behaviours built into engagements with communities?
Reciprocity	» Officials assuming that they know what communities want and not listening to them, reduces trust. » Fostering joint responsibility, instead of assuming that government will always take the lead, can build trust.	» Reciprocity refers to a process of "give and take" in which benefits and privileges are shared and returned between parties. » What does reciprocity mean in the context of your work? » How can reciprocity be improved?
Reliability	» Officials not following through on promises made reduces trust. » One party speaking to media about issues not raised with the other, reduces trust. » Officials not setting up a sustainable way to engage with communities reduces trust.	» Reliability might mean the willingness to follow through on promises, including in communications with community. » How would you define reliability in the context of your work? » Reliability can be shown through taking time to build a reciprocal relationship.
Transparency and openness	*Trust can be increased by:* » Governments keeping communities informed. » Officials explaining how decisions are made and by whom. » Officials being willing to hear what communities are thinking and feeling	» Transparency and openness could mean clarity about decision-making processes, limitations to funding, or more. » How would you define transparency within the context of your work? » What kinds of information do you think your partners in the community need? What information should not be shared? Why? Can communities at least be given context for why they may not receive the full level of detail?
Empathy	» Officials can build trust through finding a point of engagement with community members.	» Both parties showing understanding of the aims and constraints within which the community members or government officials work.
Accountability	*Trust can be reduced where officials:* » assume that a community cannot manage money. » are more interested in announcing a program, spending money and with compliance, rather than focussing on and measuring impact. *Trust can be increased through officials helping communities understand importance of good governance and providing training and resources to help with this.*	» This relates to the willingness to deliver on promises and stick to agreements. » What does accountability mean in the context of your work with communities?

Key Concepts	Behaviours that build or reduce trust	Are these behaviours built into engagements with communities?
Responsibility	» Communities should be able to have ownership of their own destiny (agency). » However, communities also need to understand that with responsibility comes accountability.	» Empowering communities means government agencies giving up some power and being clear about the boundaries between government and community responsibilities. » Governments need to evaluate outcomes not outputs and not place overly burdensome accountability requirements on communities.
Respect	*Trust can be built through:* » Both sides being open and welcoming. » Community contributions having an influence on decisions. *Officials need to show respect to community leaders by not assigning more junior officials to meet with senior community leaders.*	» Respectful engagements are an important element in trust relationships. What are ways of showing respect in a relationship?
Confidentiality	» Being able to have open and confidential conversations builds trust.	» Confidentiality means not revealing sensitive or controversial information, including in the case of disagreement. » How could confidentiality be fostered in your relationships with communities?

APPENDIX

Indicative questions for government stakeholders

1. Please tell us about how you interact (or have interacted) with community members and organisations in your professional role within government.

2. How would you define “trust” in the context of your working relationships?

3. What do you see as the key characteristics of professional trust relationships in your work or engagement with communities?

   » Possible follow-up: In what ways, if any, are these different than the key elements of trust relationship with colleagues?

   » Possible follow-up: What do you see as the main ingredients of a healthy and sustainable trust relationship with community actors?

   » Possible follow-up: How trusted do you feel by community actors in your professional dealings with them?

4. Can you think of a particular example of a positive trust relationship you have had with community actors and how you experienced this trust?

5. Can you think of a particular example of a negative trust relationship, including one that has broken down, with community actors?

   » Possible follow-up: Can you think of an instance in which your trust was breached in your dealings with community actors? How did this make you feel about working with communities more generally?

   » Possible follow-up: What if anything makes you hesitate to trust community actors? Please be specific.

6. What do you see as the main barriers to developing strong trust relations in your work/engagement with communities?

   » Possible follow-up: To what extent does your organisation’s management of risk make it easier/harder for you to trust community actors in your work?

7. Can you think of an instance where you developed trust for individual community actor but not for their organisation or the reverse of this (trust for an organisation but not an individual)? How did this affect your partnership/project?

8. Are there factors that lead you trust some community actors or organisations more than others? What are these factors?

   » Possible follow-up: Does your sense of trust in community actors rely on whether or not they are/are connected to a formal community organisation?

9. What (up to three) things would you do to improve your trust relations with community actors?

10. What are the (three) things that community actors could do to improve their trust relations with you?

Indicative questions for community participant interviews

1. Please tell us about how you interact (or have interacted) with government agencies or representatives in your current or past professional role.

2. How would you define “trust” in the context of your working relationships with government and government organisations?

3. What do you see as the key characteristics of professional trust relationships in your work or engagement with government?

    a. Possible follow-up: In what ways, if any, are these different than the key elements of trust relationship with community colleagues?

    b. Possible follow-up: What do you see as the main ingredients of a healthy and sustainable trust relationship with government actors.

    c. Possible follow-up: How trusted do you feel by government officials in your professional dealings with them?

4. Can you think of a particular example of a negative trust relationship, including one that has broken down, with government actors? (This may include an example in which you feel your trust was breached, and the impact of this on working with government more generally.)

    » Possible follow-up: What if anything makes you hesitate to trust government actors? Please be specific.

5. What do you see as the main barriers to developing strong trust relations in your work/engagement with government?

    » Possible follow-up: To what extent does your organisation’s management of risk make it easier/harder for you to trust government actors in your work?

6. Are there factors that lead you trust some government actors or organisations more than others? What are these factors?

7. Can you think of an instance where you developed trust for individual government actor but not for their organisation or the reverse of this (trust for an organisation but not an individual)? What were the key reasons for this?

8. What (up to three) things would you do to improve your trust relations with government actors?

9. What are the three things that government actors could do to improve their trust relations with you?

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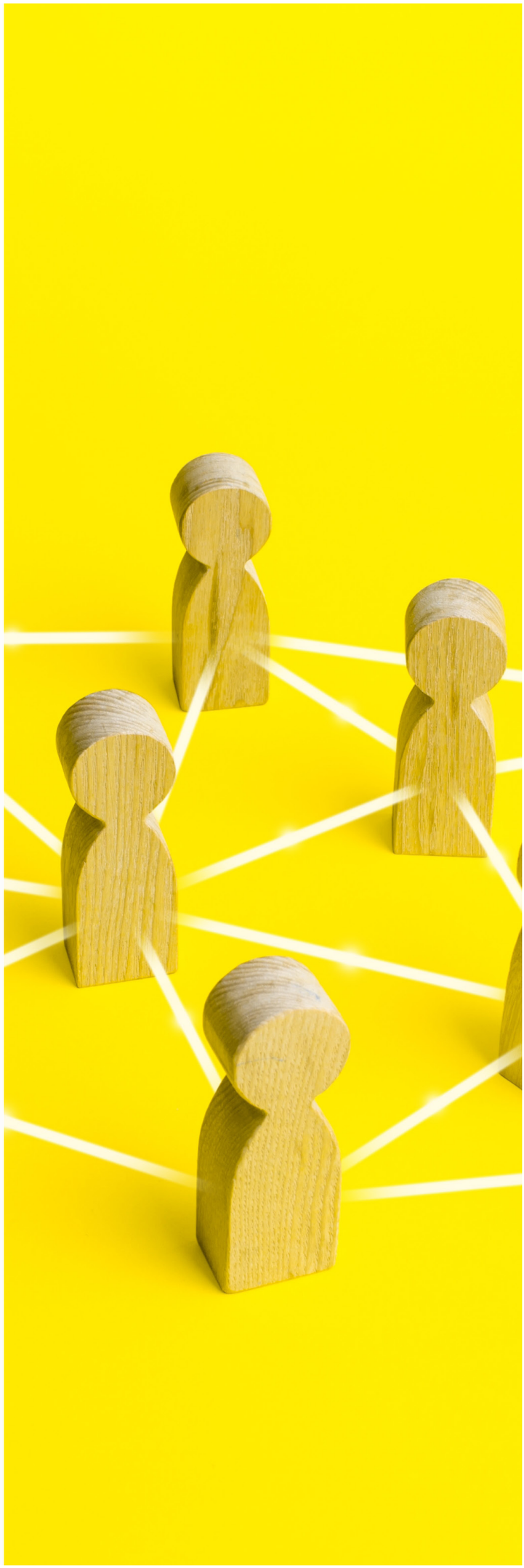

Notes

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