

Building Trust in Partnerships

Research Foundation, Case Studies & Practical Resources

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BUILDING TRUST THAT LASTS



Trust is essential to successful partnerships, especially those with complex collaborations receiving federal funds, such as regional economic development coalitions or complex multi-stakeholder projects.

Our trust-building resources show self-interest, common goals, and gratitude are essential building blocks, which can be measured to shared standards, like federal compliance.

Peer-Reviewed Research – Theory and Case Studies

Adam & Donelson (2020). *Trust is the Engine of Change*. Systems Research and Behavioral Science. Original framework introducing reciprocity as measurable trust dimension. [doi:10.1002/sres.2766](https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2766)

Adam & Donelson et al. (2020). *Implementation research and human-centred design: How theory driven human-centred design can sustain trust in complex health systems, support measurement and drive sustained community health volunteer engagement*. Health Policy and Planning. Replicable methodology for sustained engagement for trust, with evidence from multiple communities working through shared learning cycles. [doi:10.1093/heapol/czaa124](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa124)

Renner, Adam & Donelson et al. (2023). "I am now 5 steps ahead"—How co-design platforms sustain Kenyan community health volunteer engagement. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships (Johns Hopkins)*. Demonstrates how health workers actively grow in trust, confidence and capability, creating motivations lasting beyond typical project and funding cycles. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/907965>

Adam & Donelson et al. (2025). *How Does QI Work? A Trust-Building Framework in African Healthcare*. BMJ Open Quality. Empirical validation of trust building framework across African continent, with primary evidence from Kenya and Malawi. [doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2025-003330](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2025-003330)

Additional Case Studies

Arizona Border Region — Federal Grants Collaborative. 15 nonprofits, \$480K ARPA funds, partners demonstrated successful complex collaboration santacruzcountyaz.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20911

EDA Recompete Pilot Program — 90+ Partner Coalition. Trust framework supported approach to convening partners across 3 jurisdictions. \$500K Phase 1 awarded; \$52M Phase 2 finalist. <https://www.eda.gov/funding/programs/recompete-pilot-program/2023/Santa-Cruz-River-Sonoran-Corridor-Recompete-Plan>

In progress (2026): Kenyan hospital health systems work and 10-member coaching cohort through national intermediary

Practical Resources – Validating Trust With Compliance (developed by Angela Donelson and Jenni Moreno):

Your Seat at the Table is a parable about a public-private partnership put to the test. Trust isn't just felt; it's observable and measurable. The structures partners learn to develop around compliance make rebuilding trust possible.

That story sets the stage for the tools. The companion workbooks, *The Money Trail: How They Lost It or Stole It* and *Lines You Shouldn't Cross: Power, Privacy & Policy*, examine eight typologies grounded in real-world compliance failures, presented through a Socratic, peer-learning format. They present the importance of shared compliance frameworks rooted in 2 CFR Part 200, the Uniform Guidance governing federal awards, serving as self-guided training or alongside our coaching to align partners. Short videos and ordering information is at: entrustsource.com/product-category/money-trail/

Free Resources

trustforchange.org — Adam and Donelson trust-building process models, measurement frameworks, trainings and peer reviewed publications

SALT Training Manual — Practitioner guide for organizing peer groups around shared learning trustforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SALT-Training-Manual-15.6.2018.pdf

Finegood (2025) Complex Systems Frameworks — Adam and Donelson trust model visualized as feedback loop within complex systems <https://www.complexsystemsframeworks.ca/framework/process-of-building-trust/>