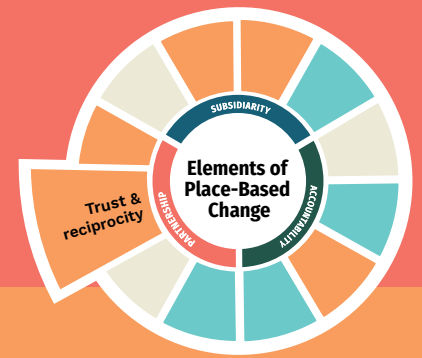


Partnership: Complex challenges can't be solved by one actor alone. Place-based change brings together governments, service providers, funders and communities to work collaboratively, across siloes, sectors and timeframes. To be effective, these partnerships must be grounded in trust, reciprocity and shared purpose.



3.3 Trust and reciprocity

Partnerships are built on respect, shared learning and a commitment to long-term relational work, not transactional exchanges.

What are trust and reciprocity in the context of place-based change?

Building and maintaining trust and demonstrating reciprocity are foundational practices for all those involved in the work of place-based change and are vital to the success of partnerships with community. Trust exists in place-based work where partners have confidence in one another, recognise and value each other's role and expertise, and commit to working in partnership to drive change. Perceptions of actions, attitudes, beliefs and intentions of the people, government agencies and organisations directly influence levels of trust between partners.

Trust does not simply exist; it must be cultivated and is difficult to build and easy to lose. Past actions and experiences, including the ongoing impact of colonisation, traumatic encounters with service systems, as well as rigid and stigmatising processes for accessing the supports people need directly influence trust. Levels

of trust between partners are directly influenced by behaviours and value-based characteristics (accountability, dependability, reliability and transparency) that an individual or organisation actively embodies and enacts.

Past interactions and experiences, harmful encounters with service systems and difficulty accessing needed support, shape levels of trust and what is needed to overcome distrust. At an interpersonal level, trust is built through care, empathy and shared purpose. At an institutional level, it is shaped by values, integrity and the willingness of organisations to share power and uphold commitments. It is easier to build and sustain trust between people than it is to foster between an individual and an institution or organisation.

Building enduring trust is a precondition of a meaningful partnership. It allows shared design, stewardship and accountability for outcomes. In practice, this is expressed through mechanisms that signal and sustain trust,

including transparent data sharing, co-governance and collaborative learning cycles. It is sometimes explained as an ethos of 'doing with, rather than doing to or for'.

Reciprocity (sometimes referred to as walking alongside) complements trust through mutual exchange, co-learning and mutual accountability. It recognises the value of different knowledges and experiences, and ensures that benefits and responsibilities are shared equitably. Practising reciprocity within place-based work requires inclusive practices that promote the voices of all community members.

Trust and reciprocity are both enablers and outcomes of place-based partnerships. They develop over time through consistent behaviour, fair processes and shared leadership. Trust and reciprocity enable partners to bridge differences, take risks together, and sustain collaboration for lasting community-led change.

Why trust and reciprocity are important for place-based change

Trust and reciprocity provide the relational infrastructure for place-based work. When partners trust one another and act reciprocally, they create the conditions for collective understanding, alignment of effort, and long-term commitment to local priorities.

Trust facilitates strong and sustainable partnerships. It allows partners to share information openly without fear

of consequences, share decision-making, and maintain cohesion through uncertainty and change. High levels of trust increase the likelihood that partnerships will achieve outcomes that are valued by local communities, while low trust erodes participation and limits impact.

Reciprocity ensures that benefits, knowledge and responsibilities are shared equitably, and that communities are not only consulted but can genuinely lead decision-making. Reciprocal relationships built on trust help soften role boundaries between partners and

create the openness needed to identify common ground and work across siloes. This mutual exchange strengthens legitimacy and builds the social licence necessary for deeper systems change.

Trust and reciprocity enable governments, service providers, funders and communities to stay connected through inevitable challenges, negotiate differences respectfully, and co-create solutions that are responsive to local contexts. Without them, authentic engagement, shared leadership and sustained impact are not possible.

Key takeaways

- **Start with authentic and sustained engagement**

Building trust requires time, patience, and repeated interactions grounded in respect and listening.

- **Work in relational, not transactional, ways**

Partnerships that emphasise shared purpose, humility and ongoing learning foster stronger trust than those driven by short-term outputs or compliance.

- **Share power, data and accountability**

Trust deepens when communities can meaningfully shape priorities, interpret data and share governance.

- **Embed reciprocity through mutual benefit and learning**

Trust grows when both community and institutional partners mutually contribute and benefit.

- **Invest in relationship infrastructure and continuity**

Go beyond individual projects and focus on the long-term relationship to build reciprocity and confidence.

- **Demonstrate responsiveness and reliability**

Following through on commitments and responding quickly to community needs signals integrity.