

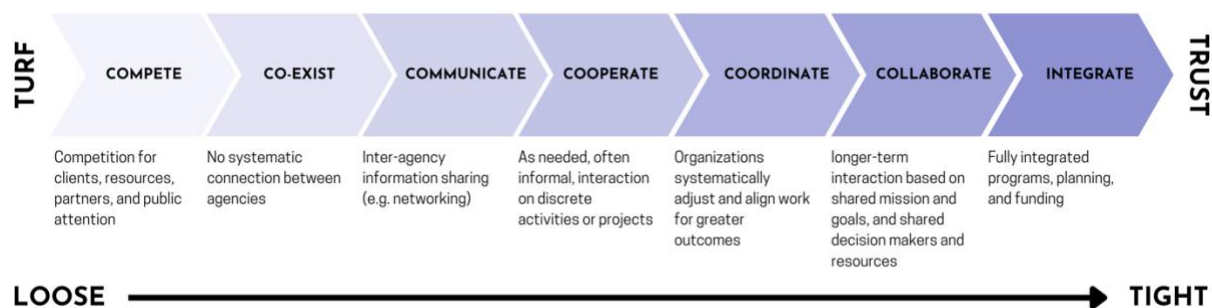
COLLABORATION | The Act of Building Trust

LIZ WEAVER

Collaboration grows at the speed of trust.

This phrase resonates and has been shared by many community-change and collaborative leaders during workshops that I have attended. While the attribution of the phrase is not completely clear, *The Speed of Trust* author, Stephen Covey is likely the best source. Covey, in this [short video](#)ⁱ, succinctly draws the link between coordination, cooperation, collaboration, and trust. He says that effective collaboration requires partners to deepen relationships and build trust.

[The Collaboration Spectrum](#)ⁱⁱ a tool and approach developed by the Tamarack Institute to describe different forms of collaboration, overlays the elements of turf and trust. Different forms of collaboration require deeper connection and engagement between partners. This means that the partners should focus on strategies which actively trust.



This resource builds on previous papers on trust developed by the Tamarack Institute and explores different facilitation tools and techniques which leaders could use to actively grow the speed and success of their collaborative effort.

BUILDING TRUST BEGINS WITH YOU

We often look beyond ourselves when we think about building trust. That is wrong. Building trust begins with looking at ourselves first. Covey, in *The Speed of Trust*, describes trust as waves starting from the first splash which he describes as self-trustⁱⁱⁱ.

It makes a lot of sense, particularly when collaborating with others. If we do not trust that we can live up to the commitments we are making as the convener, how can we expect others to trust us? Covey writes that self-trust is about your personal credibility and includes actions such as fulfilling commitments and living your values. Further, Covey describes four core elements which build personal credibility: acting with integrity, defining your intent, ensuring that you have the capability, and focusing on results^{iv}.

Trust does not just happen. It is values-driven, requires intention and skills, and is purposeful in its results and outcomes. These foundations of trust begin with you at the centre and then splash out across the waves to others.

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BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The second wave of trust is when you build and deepen relationships with others. This is the core of collaboration. Individuals engaged in a collaborative effort are in relationship with each other, working collectively toward achieving a shared outcome. Two core principle of building effective relationships is acting with integrity and consistency.

Acting with consistency can be challenging for collaborative efforts. Depending on the timeframe for the collaboration, there may be many shifts and changes that happen in the organization, community or with collaborative partners.

To effectively build authentic relationships, Tamarack recommends that collaborative planning tables work together to co-develop a set of principles for working together. These principles describe the shared values of the partners. [The Establishing Values and Principles for Working Together Tool](#)^v is designed to support a shared conversation.

Once the principles for working together have been developed, they should act as a reference for decision-making by the collaborative table. As well, the principles should be reviewed at least annually to make sure they are still relevant and useful to advancing the collaboration and the collaborative partners.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT: ORGANIZATIONS, MARKET, AND SOCIETY

In the rippling waves of trust, Covey also describes the importance of understanding and building organization, market, and societal trust.

Is the organization we represent worthy of the trust of others? Does the organization have a culture of internal actions which build trust?

The 5 Waves of Trust



Market trust is about the reputation that individuals and organizations have in communities and with partners. Does the market trust the brand of the organization or business? Societal trust asks whether the collaborative effort is seen to be contributing to society. Individuals, investors, partners, and funders are not likely to engage if the contribution is not clearly articulated or if people cannot see the benefit accruing from their investment. Collaborative tables often do not consider the third, fourth and fifth waves of trust as described by Covey. They should.

When a collaboration is aiming to influence policies, shift systems, or achieve a population level impact, it needs to be both inwardly focused on self and relationships as well as outwardly focused on its relationship with community and other partners. Understanding the different waves of trust and what is working for and against the collaboration can help to increase the speed of trust.

EQUITY, JUSTICE, AND BUILDING TRUST

Collaborative efforts seeking to build trust must include an equity and justice lens. The Collective Impact Forum recently published a set of resources focused on centering equity in collaborative efforts.

Only when collective impact efforts take the time to understand who has been marginalized and why and how they are experiencing marginalization, and, after such investigation, take targeted action to create policies, practices, and institutions that address current and historical inequities, will these communities be liberated to achieve their full potential.^{vi}

Centering equity in collaborative action is about engaging with individuals who bring diverse experiences, community knowledge and perspective. It is also about understanding the experience of your community through both data and individual experience.

In advancing the end of poverty in Canada, Tamarack partnered with leaders who brought their lived and living experience of poverty to develop [10: Engaging People with Lived and Living Experience^{vii}](#). This guide is a useful reference for collaborative groups seeking to centre equity and justice in their work.

Centering equity and justice also means that collaborative tables must act differently. They should reflect on the barriers they are creating which prevent individuals from full participation. This might mean changing practices, shifting meeting times, providing additional resources to create equitable engagement, and making a commitment to equity as a core value of the collaboration.

ENGAGEMENT BUILDS TRUST

Collaborations can stumble when leadership is not transparent or shared. Effective engagement is an important way of building trust. Individuals who are connected, engaged, and involved in the co-design of the collaborative purpose and outcomes are more likely to trust both the people and the process of collaboration.

There are many ways to build trust. The first technique is to engage first in inquiry rather than focusing on solutions. Start a conversation with the following: what questions do we need to consider about this topic? Spend the first 10 to 15 minutes inviting partners to bring their questions forward. Questions spark curiosity. They can lead to uncovering additional dimensions to an opportunity or challenge the collaboration might be facing. Questions are also an invitation to potential solutions.

[Inspiring Communities New Zealand](#) believes in learning by doing. They also focus on the importance of questions. Inspiring Communities developed a resource for community leaders called [How to Craft Powerful Questions](#)^{viii}.

Not all questions are powerful. Closed questions, those which require a yes or no response are less likely to lead to insights. Truly powerful questions invite engagement and build connection and trust.

Powerful questions used in thoughtful conversations:

- help people to discover their own knowledge
- are thought-provoking and help people reflect and find deeper meaning
- expand thinking about new possibilities or focus attention on what really matters
- help underlying assumptions and diverse perspectives come to light
- stimulate curiosity and creativity
- help accelerate the potential of a group or community to move forward

Consider how often you weave inquiry or powerful questions into your collaboration conversations? Trust is relational. It is about giving and receiving. Improving your practice of asking questions will build engagement and build trust.

REPAIRING TRUST WHEN IT IS BROKEN

Trust can be fragile. Collaboration is dynamic and there are times when trust breaks down. Organizational priorities shift. Resources shift. People shift. When trust is broken, it is important to have an open and transparent conversation about how the trust has been broken. Try to address the issues as quickly as possible. Seek to learn and understand rather than engage in gossip and accusations. It might be a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation. Keys to repairing broken trust is to own that trust has been broken, determine and agree on a set of actions which will rebuild trust and then work toward rebuilding that trust through action and behaviour change. Writing down a rebuilding trust plan and regular check ins can be instrumental steps.

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT COLLABORATION AT THE SPEED OF TRUST

Collaboration is all about trust. Collaboration success is achieved when partners work well together, trust one another, and feel valued and connected. Building trust is both an intention and a practice. Trust is also fragile and can be broken.

Collaborations which focus on building trust and engagement create ties between partners which are better able to navigate the twists and turns of change. Building trust is not a one-time activity, but rather an ongoing practice between partners. Strong collaborative efforts grow at the speed of trust.

Tools for Navigating the Collaborative Ecocycle

1. Tamarack Institute. [Establishing Values and Principles for Working Together.](#)
2. Collective Impact Forum. [How to Center Equity in Collective Impact.](#)
3. Tamarack Institute. [10: Engaging People with Lived and Living Experiences](#)
4. Inspiring Communities. [How to Craft Powerful Questions.](#)
5. Tamarack Institute. [Turf, Trust, Co-Creation and Collective Impact.](#)

ABOUT LIZ WEAVER

Liz Weaver is the Co-CEO of Tamarack Institute and leading the Tamarack Learning Centre. The Tamarack Learning Centre advances community change efforts by focusing on five strategic areas including collective impact, collaborative leadership, community engagement, community innovation and evaluating community impact. Liz is well-known for her thought leadership on collective impact and is the author of several popular and academic papers on the topic. She is a co-catalyst partner with the Collective Impact Forum.



This is the third paper in a series about Collaborative Leadership and Governance. The papers will be released starting in August 2022. We invite your comments and feedback. If you are a member of a collaborative table, we would love to hear from you. Please email Liz Weaver – Liz@tamarackcommunity.ca

ⁱ Franklin Covey. Collaborating at the Speed of Trust. Stephen Covey. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Collaboration%20Spectrum%20Tool%20July%202021%207.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Tamarack Institute. The Collaboration Spectrum. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/collaboration-spectrum-tool>

ⁱⁱⁱ Franklin Covey. The Five Waves of Trust. <https://resources.franklincovey.com/franklincovey-blog/the-5-waves-of-trust>

^{iv} Franklin Covey. The Four Cores of Credibility. <https://resources.franklincovey.com/the-speed-of-trust/the-4-cores-of-credibility>

^v Tamarack Institute. Establishing Values and Principles for Working Together. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/establishing-values-and-principles-for-working-together-tool>

^{vi} Collective Impact Forum. How to Center Equity in Collective Impact. <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/resource/how-to-center-equity-in-collective-impact/>

^{vii} Tamarack Institute. 10: Engaging People with Lived and Living Experience. <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/ten-2019>

^{viii} Inspiring Communities. How to Craft Powerful Questions. https://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/ic_resource/how-to-craft-powerful-questions/