



Practical Lessons in Winning Public Support for Infrastructure Projects

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**“I have trust issues
because people have
lying issues.”**



No matter your role in the public sphere, trust is the basis on which you will succeed or fail.

Trust in Political Leaders and in the American People

% Great deal/Fair amount of trust

■ American people ■ Political leaders



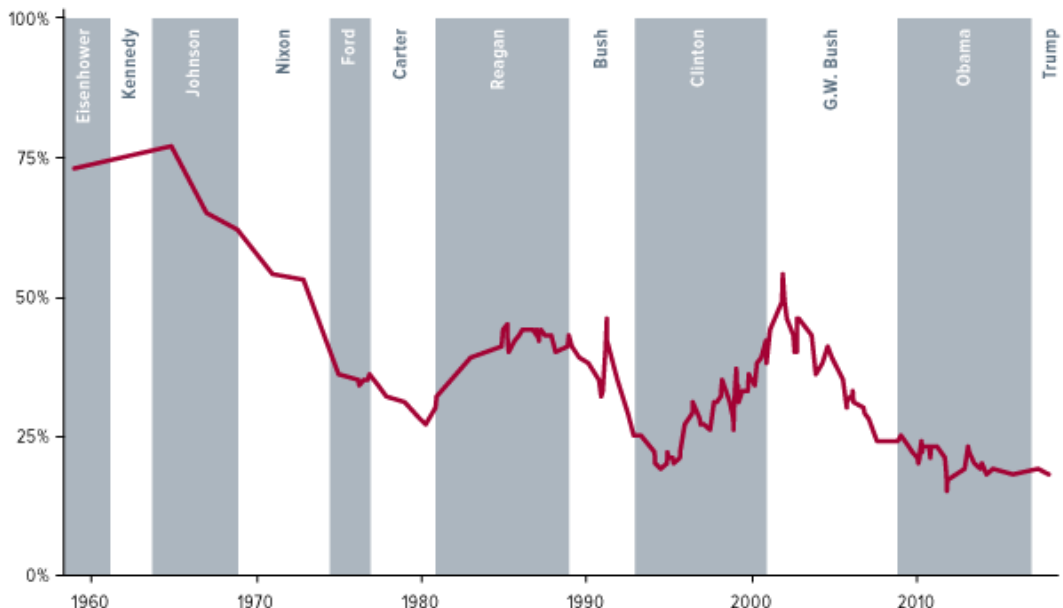
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Government is particularly distrusted in recent days...
we have our work cut out for us.

U.S. Public Trust in Federal Government Near Historic Lows

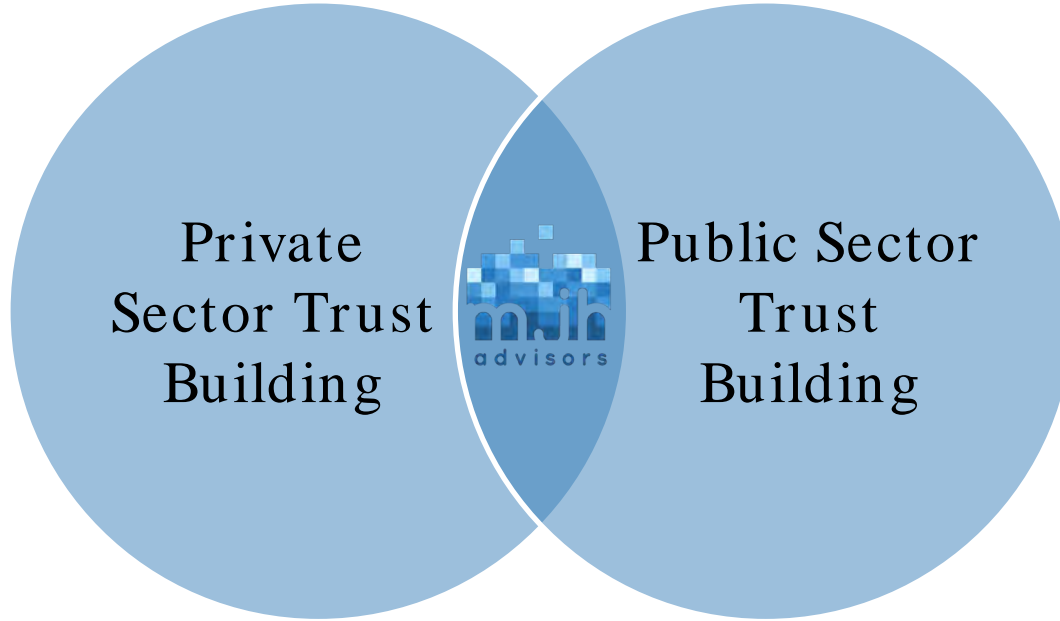
Percent Who Claimed to Trust Washington "Always" or "Most of the Time"



Source: Pew Research Center, U.S. Global Investors

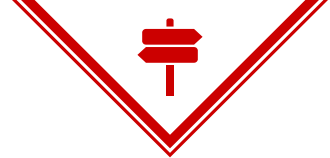


Why should you take my word on any of this?





*Where do we look to see
trust-based engagement
done well?*



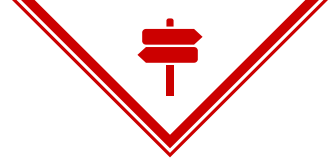
What did we see?

Mr. Fred Rogers

- ◆ Considerable poise
- ◆ Domain expert
- ◆ Relatable
- ◆ “Heart is in the work”
- ◆ Confronted reality

Senator John Pastore (D - RI)

- ◆ Asked good questions
- ◆ Willing to be moved
- ◆ Spoke honestly
- ◆ Delivered the goods



What did we see?

Questions to consider:

- ◆ Who from the video do you identify most with in your job?
- ◆ How typical is this caliber of interaction?
- ◆ Do you believe you and your colleagues are capable of this type of interaction?
- ◆ How much more rewarding might your work be if this was typical for public interactions?



*How do we build trust
with constituents?**

1



Present Reality with Candor

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Straight shooting with credibility, empathy.

- Where We Fall Short: Jargon/ bureaucratic impediments
“Day-to-Day” bias – assumes shared knowledge
Lousy at quantifying value, telling the story
- Solutions: Frame investments as “opportunities with costs”
Quantify impact at the margins – individualized
Balance “negative impacts” with “public goods”
Know your numbers, always
- Examples: Special topic meetings; project white-papers



2



Create Parity with Your Audience

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Demonstrate mutuality and an extension of partnership.

- Where We Fall Short: Default behavior to being “on trial”
Credit cheap and easy to give, yet we don’t
Owning historical errors is critical, lacking
- Solutions: Model what mutual buy-in looks like
Acknowledge contributors, empower them
Create dialogue opportunities, attend them
Show process improvements since last time
- Examples: Create public committees, update channels



3



Prove to Be a Capable, Reputable Partner

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Create a trusted, transparent process in which all can participate.

- Where We Fall Short: Assuming public meetings/ tokens are sufficient
Failure to provide updates, misfires
Honoring kept commitments matters
- Solutions: Invest in public-facing resources, forums
Hire vendors who value accountability
Create expectations with the public
- Examples: Improve web presence, celebrate milestones, get out of the minutes.



4



Deliver the Goods, Prepare for Next Time

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Be known for completing projects as expected, creating a vision.

- Where We Fall Short: We rarely let the public see what they bought
Realizing that the next “ask” is on the way
Limiting feedback “false-starts” the next project
- Solutions: Find time to wrap-up big projects, engage the public
Formalize a feedback opportunity
Build on trust by extending it back
- Examples: Open houses, standing committees,
cement relationships born of major projects





What did we learn?

Questions to consider:

- ◆ Do you think critically about earning trust in your work?
- ◆ Are there changes that you can make that would enhance your rapport with colleagues and constituents?
- ◆ How much time do you normally spend planning your engagement strategy around a major project? Can you see that changing?
- ◆ How effective do you think trust -based engagement will be in making future investments/projects more readily supported?



*What are common
public personas that we
can expect to engage?*

“Factless Freddie”

The person for whom facts don't matter.

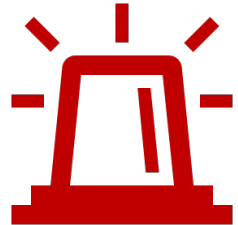
- Perils: Platforms are easy to lose when facts are malleable
Confronting misinformation feels/ looks defensive
- Solutions: Create a shared reality – what can we agree on?
Offer to share data – “are you open to another view?”
Defer (don't deflect) to behind closed doors
Humanize the concern, make it people
- Example: “My road is never plowed!”



“Single Issue Sally”

The person who lives and dies on a singular concern.

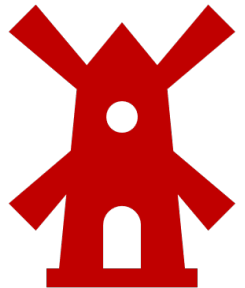
- Perils: Reductionist, ignores complexity/ interrelatedness
Makes deep claims beyond what may be common knowledge
- Solutions: Create a rounded view – “how is this issue related to others?”
Align where concerns are shared
Earn/ recruit an advocate with your actions
Take up new legislative/ action opportunities together
- Example: Tree Replanting



“Nostalgic Nate”

The person for whom ANY change from the past is a bad thing.

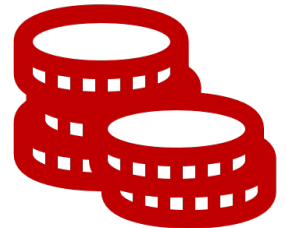
- Perils: Ignores neighborhood dynamism, opportunity costs of waiting.
Easy appeal to spread, harder to defend against.
Behaviorally-driven mindset – “I don’t bike, ergo...”
- Solutions: Honor the past and the present, highlighting good changes
Pledge and affirm community participation
Make the effort to “blend” your constituency
- Example: Walking trails



“Fiscal Francie”

The person with one question: “how are you going to pay for it?”

- Perils: Oftentimes is anti-tax/ anti-fee no matter what
Expects financial specifics that can be complex
- Solutions: Simply put, know your numbers.
Have relevant comparables available (ahead of time)
Express appreciation for their defense of public money
- Example: Stormwater fees (unfunded mandates)



“Governance Gus”

The person for whom *Roberts Rules of Order* is their favorite book.

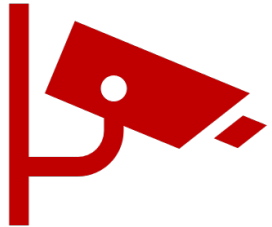
- Perils: Enjoys procedural inquiries (FOIA, RTK)
Can interrupt flow of a process, meeting
- Solutions: Recruit them! Free compliance!
Turn their curiosity into a community asset
Ask them to help you improve, don't spurn
- Example: Community Facebook Threads



“Gadsden Gabbie”

The person who knows their rights and watches for overreach.

- Perils: Least-trusting of government intervention
Unlikely to engage actively in the process
- Solutions: Acknowledge respect for privacy, property, fairness
Respectful disagreement worthy of display
Encourage productive engagement, shared values
- Example: Flood Plane Mitigation





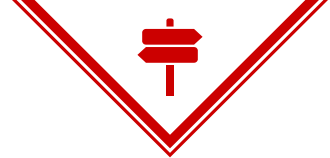
What did we learn?

Questions to consider:

- ◆ How can thinking about these personas ahead of time help you plan your engagement strategy on a project?
- ◆ What persona frustrates you the most? Do you now know of methods for trying to earn that persona's trust?
- ◆ Can you conceive of each persona as potentially an opportunity to help a project along?



*How can we apply what
we have learned to
projects in your locales?*



What did we learn?

Questions to consider:

- ◆ How useful is it to make trust - building a part of your project plan?
- ◆ Can you see this type of planning working within your organization?
- ◆ What would it take to implement this mindset more broadly with your colleagues?

Questions or Comments?



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