



# Building Trust

Playbook to Build Trust in  
Networks and Ecosystems

**Compiled by Erin Ouzts and Kevin Asinde**  
in collaboration with Ariane Appel and Beny Meier

*Supported by*  
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to Promote Entrepreneurship & Innovation



# Introduction

## Welcome to the Trust-Building Playbook for Networks and Ecosystems!

Empowering entrepreneurs to reach important milestones more swiftly is the purpose that unites all of us within the ecosystem. As a group of ecosystem builders with over 45 years of combined experience working with entrepreneurs, we see trust as a vital component of success and an essential ingredient in any successful entrepreneurial ecosystem.

With this playbook we aim to stimulate discussion and provide tried and true tools to help ecosystem actors reflect on their roles and identify successes and opportunities within their ecosystems, as well as to build trust within their community. While many of you may be familiar with the information and the activities, what we've aimed to do is to present the information in an interactive and structured manner designed to intentionally build trust.

Following the thinking about entrepreneur ecosystems introduced by Victor Hwang and Greg Horowitz in **The Rainforest** and Brad Feld in **Startup Communities**, both published in 2012, we each forged our own paths to build interconnected ecosystems that accomplished the work of transferring knowledge to those who need it.

The idea for the playbook can be traced back to the Kauffman Foundation's ESHIP Summits, which were launched in 2017 and brought ecosystem builders from across the world together to share best practices, agree on common definitions and develop trusting relationships with each other. These led to a connection between ecosystem builders Kevin, Erin, Beny and Ariane from Uganda, the United States and Switzerland.

The playbook is designed to be used as a roadmap in workshops and for personal development. Those who will benefit most are individuals and groups interested in the success of their entrepreneurs. Each will find thoughtful and practical exercises and success stories that can be adapted to their needs. The various sections of the playbook build on each other yet can also stand alone.

We start with the "why" of trust-building in ecosystems, exploring the proven science of improved outcomes with increased trust. We then ask readers or workshop attendees to look inward and consider their own trust framework, and conclude with ecosystem builders from around the world sharing their experience.

We invite you to leverage these tools to build trust and empower your network to best support entrepreneurs.

# Acknowledgements

## From Erin Ouzts:

The many speakers, audience members who asked questions, fireside chat partners and practitioners of ecosystem building are the inspiration for this playbook. Swisscontact and its staff made this possible. Kevin Asinde had the vision. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and its resources educated me throughout the years. Personally, Andy Stoll, Sr. Program Office, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation; the original 1 Million Cups Team, and Sam English, Upstate U of SC Office of Economic Engagement, were always there with wise guidance. Mostly, this could only be done with the efforts of Kevin Asinde, Ariane Appel and Beny Meier – thank you!

## From Kevin Asinde:

The champions of the Kampala Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Project who trust that the process is as or even more important than the result. All the ladies who trust and create opportunities for each other; Riitta Kujala, Catherine Othieno, Tania Haidara & Gabriella Crescini. To Erin Ouzts & Ariane Appel for keeping us steadfast.

## From Swisscontact:

All the colleagues supporting entrepreneurs around the globe have contributed in one way or the other through their experience and advice - notably Andrea Mazariegos, Sara Usinger, Sokhuy Lay, Teresa Widmer and her team of the 'Swiss EP'. This playbook would not have been possible without the support of Andrina Schwartz, Head Financial Inclusion at Credit Suisse, and funding from the Credit Suisse Foundation. A word of appreciation also to the ecosystem builders who share their learnings and recommendations in the last section – standing for many more who tirelessly, and often invisibly commit to the success of the entrepreneurs in their ecosystems.

Finally, a big thank you to Kevin & Erin, who dreamt big, started small, went step by step – and made this playbook happen!

*"Trust is the glue that binds people together and converts routine work interactions into effective teamwork. Trust is also a lubricant because when it is present, things move faster with less expense."*

– David Hanna, Partner at HPO Global Alliance

# Who benefits from this playbook?

## The main beneficiaries of this playbook are:

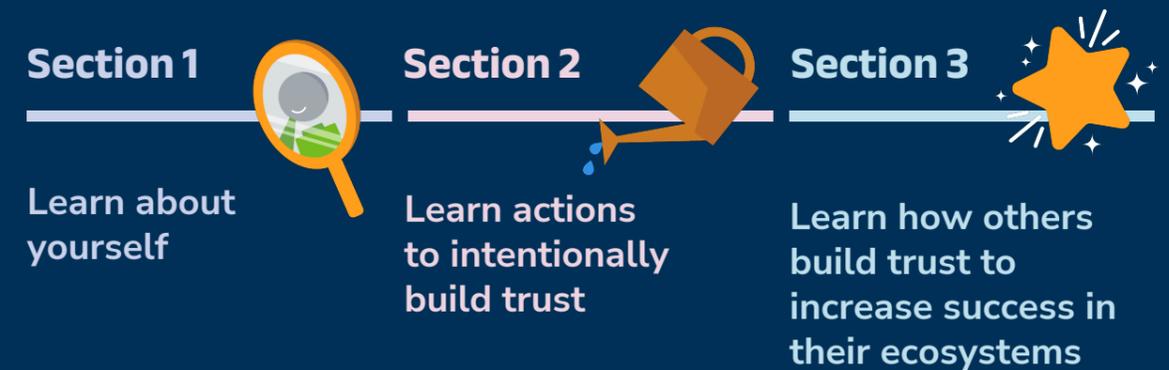
- Individuals working with entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs)
- Ecosystem builders searching for tools to connect the various resources in their community or region
- Ecosystem facilitators expanding existing networks by connecting to new resource ecosystems
- Economic development professionals and policy-makers interested in building, growing and strengthening support for entrepreneurs and the local community
- Donors and funders supporting entrepreneurial growth

## The playbook is designed for use by leaders and facilitators as a roadmap for:

- Professional development
- Workshops
- Policy-making
- Planning
- Defining ways to measure success

# How to use this playbook

## Intentional trust building in 3 parts



### Are you here because you have a general interest in trust building?

Great! We recommend you start with the overview on trust on the pages 6 - 11 and work your way from Section 1 on page 12 to Section 3 on page 34.

### Do you have a specific interest in actions to build trust?

Start with the overview on trust on the next pages and go directly to Section 2 on page 20.

### Want to know how others did it?

Go directly to Section 3 on page 34.

# The intersection of trust and purpose

Empowering entrepreneurs to reach important milestones more swiftly is the purpose that unites all of us within the ecosystem. This is a common bond and the basis on which trust is founded and grows.

*“When you help someone, you may not expect them to repay the favor directly, but you do expect that someone else will repay the favor in some other way. It is as if individuals are making a transaction with the Rainforest as a whole, based on faith that it ultimately rewards people who are helpful to others.”*

– The Rainforest, Victor Hwang



# Why is trust important?



Trust is the invisible bond between the visible infrastructure of places, people, and programming.

Connections, collaboration, and cooperation are the **invisible trust infrastructure** that links the physical assets and determines the resiliency and effectiveness of the ecosystem.

This playbook focuses on ways to build the invisible infrastructure of trust in a targeted manner.

Trust has an impact on many different levels ...

- **Humanity**  
Trust cements relationships; oxytocin in the brain stimulates feelings of trust
- **Innovation**  
Trust inspires creativity
- **Economics**  
Trust saves time and reduces costs

# Chemistry

**By encouraging actions to increase the brain chemical oxytocin, you can increase trust within your ecosystem.**

According to research by Paul Zak, Ph.D., oxytocin released in the brain has been proven to inspire feelings of trust for others.

*Reference: Paul Zak, The Neuroscience of High-Trust Organisations, Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research, Vol. 70, No. 1, pp 45-58.*

## WHY TRUST IS IMPORTANT

### Things to consider to increase oxytocin production

- Celebrate successes
- Listen with empathy
- Have open, transparent conversations
- Get to know the person behind their work

# Humanity



**Trusts cements relationships by enabling people to live and work together, feel safe and have a sense of belonging.**

## WHY TRUST IS IMPORTANT

### Within an infrastructure of trust people are:

- Happier and more confident to interact with each other and more eager to be part of a community
- Excited about having a shared purpose
- Willing to depend on each other
- Willing to contribute what is needed – including talent, dedication, energy, and honesty
- Feeling safe even when they are in a vulnerable position

# Innovation

**Trust inspires creativity and accelerates innovation.**

Trust is the social fabric that facilitates collaboration and knowledge transfer. In high-trust situations, people are more willing to share and more eager to explore potential collaboration and to conclude transactions. This, in turn, accelerates innovation.

## WHY TRUST IS IMPORTANT

### Innovation thrives with

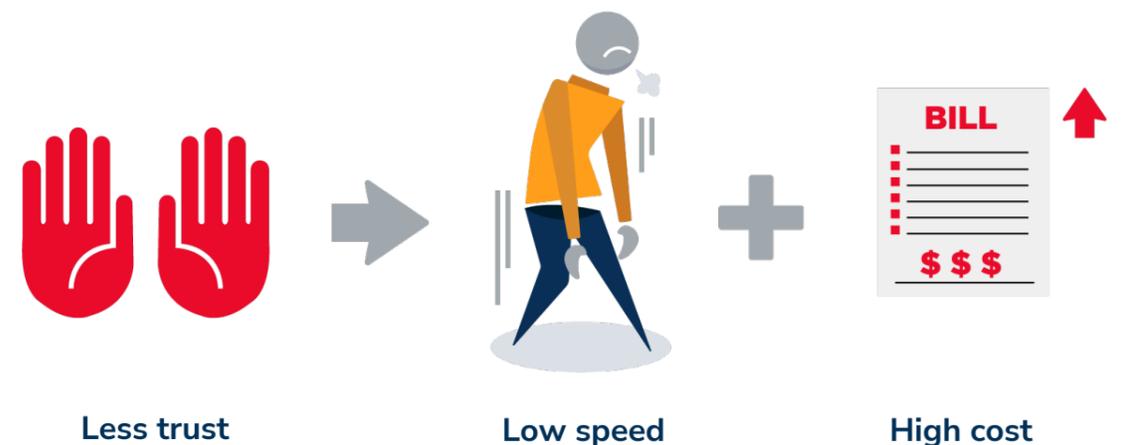
- Peer learning & networking
- Working together & reinforcing one another
- Fast flow of information & resources

# Economics

**Trust makes economic sense; it saves both time and money.**



Systems that are low on trust tend to be expensive and inefficient.



# 1



*"He who does not trust  
enough will not be trusted"*  
— Lao Tzu

## Section 1: Learn about yourself

**Now you have learned why trust is important ...**

In the following section we will look at how knowing yourself, your strengths and abilities but also your weaknesses is relevant for your work as an ecosystem actor.

### **How to use this toolkit**

- Lead a group through these exercises and discuss the responses after each question. Define the behaviors valued by your ecosystem partners.
- Work through it individually to understand your own trust personality.

# Be trustworthy



**What does it mean for someone to trust you?**

Trust emerges from patterns of behavior in which words align with actions.

- Do you keep information confidential?
- Do people ask you for advice?
- Are you willing to give and receive?

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. Who trusts you? Make a list.

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2. Why do they trust you?

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# Trust others



**What does someone do that makes you trust them?**

**Do they keep their commitments in word and deed?  
Do they think about how everyone can win?**

Finding resources at the right time helps entrepreneurs move forward faster. Entrepreneurs will more likely follow a referral when you show trust in that person.

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. Who do you trust? Make a list.

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2. Why do you trust them?

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# Know your strengths



**When an entrepreneur asks about your unique offering, what do you say?**

Every part of the ecosystem has a clear role to play. This means knowing where each of us is strong so we can supplement our weaknesses with those who are stronger.

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. What does your organization do best?

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2. What do you wish you did better?

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3. What organizations do you compliment? In what area?

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4. What organizations compliment your weaknesses?

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# Support the entire venture lifecycle



**When an entrepreneur graduates from your program, where do they go for the next level of support?**

Referring entrepreneurs to other organizations gives them the additional information they need to continue their journey and achieve success.

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. Which resources outside your organization are available to help the entrepreneur make progress?

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2. Which organizations and programs refer entrepreneurs to you?

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3. To whom do you refer entrepreneurs?

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# Connect with experts



**If an entrepreneur has a question you can't answer, what do you do?**

As an advisor to entrepreneurs in your ecosystem, you are an important source of information for their growth.

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. Do I have the right people in my network? Make a list.

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2. Am I willing to look for an answer outside my network and ecosystem?

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3. How many other ecosystem networks am I connected to? Make a list.

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# Connect the ecosystems



**If an entrepreneur applies to join your program and does not fit your goals, what would you do?**

It takes an ecosystem to raise, nurture and grow an entrepreneur. Successful ecosystems provide the necessary services to support entrepreneurs at all stages of development.

## REFLECTION:

**Write down your answers**

1. What type of entrepreneurs do you excel at helping?

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2. Which entrepreneurs do you struggle to help?

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3. What actions do you take if you don't know the answers?

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# 2



## Section 2:

# Learn actions to intentionally build trust in your ecosystem

**You have now learned how you approach trust and why that is important for your work ...**

In the following section we look at specific actions you can take to intentionally build trust within your ecosystem.

### How to use this toolkit

- Lead a group through these exercises and discuss the responses after each question. Define activities that all agree to adopt.
- Work through it individually to understand your own trust personality. Study the actions and practice them in your daily work.

# Start slow. Gather, talk, share and compare notes

## Identify champions and like-minded ecosystem builders.

Start with one person, bring in a friend, then another and another over time. Building trust takes effort and time.



### INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

#### Take action

- Just start!
- When was the last time you had a discussion with another ESO from outside your ecosystem?
- List the names of ecosystem actors from across ecosystems that regularly talk to many different people.
- Set up a meeting to learn about them and their organization.
- Ask what motivates them to work with entrepreneurs. Ask what they are best at and what they would rather not do.

# Be vulnerable

## You and the other champions are on a learning journey, moving outside your comfort zone to create new connections.

Being vulnerable together starts the trust-building process. The oxytocin released in a person's brain when someone expresses caring (about their work) increases feelings of trust.<sup>1</sup>

### INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

#### Take action

- Ask: What is challenging you today?
- Meet frequently.
- Ask: What type of startups and entrepreneurs are you uneasy helping?
- Discuss common challenges and positive outcomes ("wins").

<sup>1</sup><https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-increase-oxytocin#talking>

# Be inclusive, work around barriers

**Make it easy for everyone to participate. Think about timing, transportation, external responsibilities, associations, and the ease with which people can join in.**

Intentionally create an inviting and welcoming environment. Welcoming environments increase trust and accelerate knowledge sharing through the ecosystem.

## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- What barriers have you encountered when trying to engage with other organizations?
- What barriers keep other ESOs from working with you?
- Do you meet at times that suit other groups? Is it easy, safe and inexpensive to travel to meetings? Are there cultural and social barriers?
- Search for neutral, physically and socially accessible spaces.
- Bring together entrepreneurs and ESOs that represent many different types of ventures.

# Agree on a common language

**The use of a common language facilitates understanding, eliminates barriers and makes it easier to address the real issues facing the entrepreneurs we serve.**

Agreeing on definitions is a first step toward common goals and building trust.



## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- Use your time together to agree on common definitions that everyone understands.
- What is your definition of an entrepreneur? What other definitions have you heard?
- What is your definition of an entrepreneurial ecosystem?
- What is the most misunderstood term or phrase in your ecosystem?

# Learn something together

**Gaining new knowledge creates a shared accomplishment simply because you have gone through the learning process together.**

This provides a starting point for new conversations.

## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- Co-host a workshop with experts who discuss topics that increase your ability to guide entrepreneurs.
- Find a topic that you want to learn about that also benefits other ESOs.
- Make education available to all ecosystem partners; include time for discussion.
- Share your knowledge with other ESOs.
- Learn from other experts in your ecosystem.

# Share leadership

**Recognize that there is no single ecosystem leader.**

Distributed leadership enables those with the appropriate expertise, interest and resources available to address current needs.



## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- What special knowledge do you have that would benefit other ESOs?
- Feature leaders from other organizations as facilitators and teachers.
- Rotate the ESOs hosting the events.
- Give all ecosystem partners access to education, preferably on a collective basis.

# Inspire change

## Convince and cajole, don't command and control.

Strive to demonstrate leadership that inspires others to align interests for the benefit of entrepreneurs.

### INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

#### Take action

- Within an ecosystem, no individual is in control.
- Ecosystem change occurs when the network perceives a mutual benefit.
- No one commands actions or results; each person and organization determines their own path based on their organizational goals.
- Give examples of when you worked with a team on a project that benefitted both the team and your organization.

# Solve problems together

## Entrepreneurs depend on many experts to provide the information they need when they need it.

Involving other ecosystem actors early in the support process can lead to better outcomes.



### INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

#### Take action

- Come together to discuss the challenges.
- Describe a situation where you were unsure about how to guide a specific startup. How could another ESO have helped your entrepreneur? Is there something you are struggling to initiate or complete?
- Use a forum to present challenges – with rules that support constructive discussion.
- Mentor each other in small groups then switch groups to address another problem.

# Work together - but separately

**Work towards the universal goal of helping entrepreneurs launch and grow their ventures.  
Work separately on your own organizational goals.**

Organizational goals guide decisions, often at the expense of others. The exercise of aligning ecosystem goals leads to individual organizational goal alignment over time.

## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- How is your organization's success measured? Give examples of the missions of at least two other ESOs and how they differ from yours. What do you have in common?
- How can you align your interests with the larger ecosystem?
- Use a common brand for events, workshops and training tools while keeping content aligned with each organization's own separate mission.
- Respect each ESO's need to measure and report on its achievements.

# Acknowledge failures

**Failures are a vital part of the learning process for human beings.**

Mistakes happen from time to time. How well we learn from them and help each other to learn will determine our future success.



## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- Gather to share mistakes and failures. Laugh and vote on the best.
- Learn from the mishaps; yours and others.
- Discuss what to do different next time.
- When something didn't go right, did you tell anyone? Why not?
- How can you celebrate what you learned from the mistake?

# Repeat over and over

The goal is building relationships, building trust and working comfortably with each other. This takes time and repetition.



## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- Identify ecosystem outcomes and measure those over time.
- Build the foundations of strong relationships that are based on trust using the activities in this playbook.

# Celebrate together

Working with entrepreneurs can be challenging and the outcomes are sometimes ambiguous.

It is often several years before you know the impact of your collective ecosystem building efforts.

## INTENTIONALLY BUILD TRUST

### Take action

- Come together to celebrate wins.
- Congratulate another ecosystem member when one of their entrepreneurs reaches an important milestone.
- Do you notice when another ecosystem member achieves success?
- What are some of the ways in which you can acknowledge that success?
- How have others celebrated your work?



## Section 3:

**Learn from others:**

# Learn how trust boosts success in an ecosystem

**You have now learned how you can intentionally build trust in your ecosystem.**

In the following section you can read how others have built trust to boost success in their ecosystem and some of the programs that have proven successful in their community.

### **How to use this toolkit**

- Read how experienced ecosystem builders have used intentional trust-building to achieve important results.
- Think about how you can duplicate the activities in your ecosystem.

## Arta Istrefi

- Role: Ecosystem Facilitator
- Organisation: Swiss Entrepreneurship Program
- Country: Kosovo

“ A community builder will lead to trust. Those who build great communities are people-oriented, proactive, and care about people. Be patient enough to wait for the result and passionate enough to keep going an extra mile. ”

### What concrete action steps do you take to build trust in your ecosystem? What activities were most successful?

Talk, talk, talk. But make sure you know what you are talking about and know the language. Do your research about the founder and the startup before the first meeting. This shows respect. Learn the terms common in the startup space. This sends a signal of sincerity.

The first step always involves individual, face-to-face meetings with founders as a first attempt to create a personal relationship, to learn more about the founder and the startup, and introduce the specific mission and approach of our program. The next step is meet-ups with a smaller group of founders, creating an informal and neutral environment, introduce themselves, and start conversations. At the meetups, our role is to facilitate, moderate the conversation, and to make sure the dialogue involves topics such as common challenges, market opportunities, and what is missing (lean needs analysis).

Most of our program activities originate from the founder-led conversations at the meet-ups. We always try to mix the more structured dialogue with socialising in a more informal setting (happy-hour drinks) as this always helps the bonding and relationship building. To succeed in building and managing such a community and build trust, we must ensure to keep balance, stay neutral, and not have a preferred company and/or person, but rather facilitate and create linkages among all participants.

### How did trust change the way your entrepreneurial community interacts today?

Wherever there is no trust among founders there can be no entrepreneurial community. So, getting the trust-building right is crucial. This is particularly fundamental in smaller places. We are in a small country and trust is highly related to integrity. It doesn't take much time to understand who is doing what in our ecosystem and who has been doing what until now.

Integrity means you have a strategy which you execute on, you have skin-in-the game, and you have principles, so people understand your limits. All this is very much linked to your personality. However, to build trust, one must spend quantity time with these types of actors and together bring the ecosystem to the next level.

We are now at a stage where founders come together in various community activities on a regular basis. Where once the outcome of such meetups was dialogue and peer learning, we now see more and more collaboration and even business cooperation among the founders. This would never happen without trust.

### Your tips for other ecosystem builders on how to build trust...

A few things.

1. Be patient. Trust-building takes time. Be prepared for a rollercoaster ride.
2. Make sure you bring 'value' to every activity and meetup. Building trust will never be the 'thing' that brings founders together. Trust is the positive outcome of your facilitation and activities, so make sure that every founder feels that they get something out of what you propose to them.
3. Ecosystem building is not an 9 to 5 activity, be prepared to go the extra mile and make sure to meet the founders on their terms (time and place). The best way to build trust is to get to know each other in different environments, coffee-time, office meetings, group meetings and one-on-one.
4. Be very professional in communication as you will hear confidential information as the founders open up to you.

In conclusion, it is the 'give before you get' approach that gets an ecosystem builder closer to the community and builds trust.

## Andrea Mazariegos

- Role: Ecosystem Builder
- Organisation: Swisscontact
- Country: Guatemala

“ Ecosystem building is about understanding. You need to be able to observe, connect on a human level and be able to recognize entrepreneurial ecosystems are made of people. ”

### What concrete action steps do you take to build trust in your ecosystem? What activities were most successful?

1. Defining the “who is who”. It is important to have and communicate a clear understanding of the different actors that are active in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and their roles.
2. Understand motivations and align expectations. Often, ecosystem building is approached from the perspective of collaboration. However, why that collaboration is not occurring is not usually addressed. It might be because ESOs perceive each other as competitors, because they don't know about each other, and many other reasons. As an ecosystem builder, you can facilitate conversations by finding common ground and creating connections between actors. Introducing people in non-structured environments can ease the process of trust building.

### How did trust change the way your entrepreneurial community interacts today?

People are leaning towards more collaborative initiatives, such as multi-ESO programs that are open for the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem. Unlikely partnerships have formed (such as a government incubator creating an alliance with an investment fund to promote investment readiness trainings for entrepreneurs), and traditional actors, such as banks, are actively engaging with the ecosystem to create more flexible financial and non-financial services for entrepreneurs. There's still a lot of work to be done, but overall, great things happen when people trust each other and work together.

### Your tips for other ecosystem builders on how to build trust...

Don't be afraid to be vulnerable with people. Ask them to have skin in the game, empower them and make them feel a part of the ecosystem building process.

Avoid the infamous overpromise and underdeliver. It's best to be conservative about what you can do, since a lot of things will be out of your control. You're working with people and organizations whose top priority is not likely to be ecosystem building. As such, you will need a lot of flexibility, resilience, and quick wits for many last-minute fixes. I am by no means suggesting you don't plan (quite the contrary!) but be prepared for the unexpected.



## Gabriela Gandel

- Role: Board Director – Policy & Partnerships
- Organisation: Impact Hub Network
- Country: Austria

Trust is a dynamic concept, particularly in multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural, socially and historically complex situations. Therefore, a leader's and organisation's ability to quickly identify when trust has been broken and rebuild it through open communication, realignment and effective conflict resolution is key to success.

### What concrete action steps do you take to build trust in your ecosystem? What activities were most successful?

We see trust as a function of competence, reliability, and honesty overlaid on our values of trust, collaboration, and courage. We build trust through conscious practices such as our onboarding process, community events and active community hosting, and the curated spaces, content, partnerships and programs offerings in the community. We also unconsciously extend the culture to the profile of people we hire and develop, and the way we work together so that we role-model our own values.

We invest in the cultural side of ecosystem building – aligning values. This is a long-term process of constant communication, openness to other views and, most importantly, of always seeking collaboration even when it's difficult. So we strive to constantly expand our collaboration “muscles”, knowledge and practice.

We do not shy away from recognising and addressing challenges in our ecosystem-building efforts. We fail often, but we pick ourselves up and improve. We have developed a strong codification, sharing, and learning function to capture these lessons and help us improve.

### How did trust change the way your entrepreneurial community interacts today?

Since 2017, we started measuring trust as a dimension of our impact measurement and have been positively surprised to see that over 80% of our community members trust the other community members and are willing to share, support, and engage with others. Every year our members voluntarily provide hundreds of thousands of hours of support to other members – in the form of mentoring, sharing, opening contacts, etc. – and over a third start new projects with each other.

Trust has been a core ingredient of our community from the beginning, in 2005. This is because our core impact approach always focused on what leads to impactful collaborations and we have intentionally chosen to focus on the community as an agent of change and not just the individuals. We believe this is essential to the long-term sustainable transformation of our ecosystems to a more just and sustainable world.

This native collaboration ability based on trust is also a key dimension that has allowed us to create an inclusive offering that attracts many entrepreneurs from vulnerable backgrounds – in particular women, youth and migrants – as well as build local communities that are truly representative of the local diversity and actively challenge inequality issues.

### Your tips for other ecosystem builders on how to build trust...

Sometimes in our ecosystems, given the entrepreneurship drive at the core, it is easy to forget that going at an issue together is, in the long term, the most sustainable way, even if in the short term it may pose additional challenges.

At this point we have developed a partner network of over 3,000 collaborators locally, nationally and internationally, who are contributing to developing the ecosystem practice in various national and international environments, and have recently developed intentional pathways of sharing our knowledge and approach with similar players that are not part of our network – i.e. through a Community Partnership model.



## Erin Ouzts

- Role: Upstate Entrepreneur Ecosystem Facilitator
- Organisation: Ten at the Top
- Country: USA

Trust removes friction for founders as they look for the appropriate resources to support their development. Ecosystem building is about smoothing the process from startup to success.



### What concrete action steps do you take to build trust in your ecosystem? What activities were most successful?

My role is a little different in that I work with entrepreneur support organizations (ESO), and anyone interested in supporting entrepreneurship in Upstate South Carolina, USA. The ecosystem meets quarterly to Connect, Learn, and Empower. We Connect with each other with a “table talk” discussion where a question relevant to how well the ecosystem functions is discussed. We Learn about something new that helps us function as either entrepreneur support providers or as a regional ecosystem. Lastly, we Empower ourselves to take the results of the meeting back to our own organizations and communities.

Two recent examples of the “table talk” are “what needs do you have now that would help you serve your founders better?” and “what weaknesses are you seeing in the founders and business owner clients you work with?”

We have affinity groups, such as the innovation leaders and rural entrepreneurship leaders, that meet quarterly to discuss issues specific to their areas. The participants represent multiple organizations across a large geographic region.

This year we launched an orientation to the Upstate Entrepreneur Ecosystem for people new to the ecosystem. We intentionally include participants from different geographic regions and types of support provided. This ensures new members of the ecosystem meet others outside their normal network and begin building relationships.

The orientation also builds on trust as the primary culture, explaining how we came together as region searching for ways to support the founders with very few resources.

### How did trust change the way your entrepreneurial community interacts today?

Because the entrepreneur support providers know each other, are familiar with each others' types of services and know the target group of founders served, they regularly partner on programming, events, and PR. They refer, co-counsel, and follow founders on their journey through the ecosystem.

There is a level of cooperation, collaboration and recognition of the need for these behaviors rather than competitive actions. I see this regularly in meetings when ecosystem members discuss ways to address issues. They include other organizations that are appropriate to participate, and they recognize those who should be made aware of the discussion.

Often one community has already solved a problem that occurs in another community. The experienced community regularly takes the lead on sharing their learning so that other communities can use that information to address their own challenges.

### Your tips for other ecosystem builders on how to build trust...

Live the abundance philosophy every day: talk about how we are growing the pie, not taking out slices. Remember the single common reason we are all together: to support founders. Keep asking the question: how does this help entrepreneurs?



We hope you have found the playbook useful for your work building ecosystems and networks.

Share the book with colleagues who are starting on their ecosystem building journey, it will support them with the invisible infrastructure building.

If you have any feedback – we would love to hear from you.

### Contact details

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