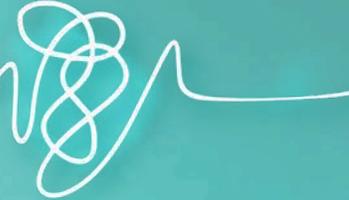


CRISES AS A CATALYST 2.0

A Toolkit for Thriving 
Through Uncertainty

THRIVING TOGETHER

A workbook to support leaders with navigating crises by
BUILDING TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS

WORKBOOK 2

proinspire.org



PURPOSE

In times of crisis, relationships are essential for collective resilience and lasting change. When leaders invest in building trusting relationships, their work reflects the wisdom, creativity, and power of their communities. These connections help organizations weather uncertainty, navigate division, and support creating conditions where we all can thrive.

The crises we are navigating are designed to separate us. They reinforce mistrust, competition, implicit bias, and hierarchical thinking. In this context, building relationships is more than a leadership skill. It is an act of resistance. Choosing connection over isolation and curiosity over fear helps us counter narratives that dehumanize and divide us.

This workbook is designed for social sector leaders who are:

- Feeling isolated or unsupported
- Committed to collaboration and shared leadership
- Seeking to strengthen relationships across differences
- Working in organizations committed to inclusion and belonging
- Partnering with community members and wanting to deepen trust

This workbook offers reflection prompts and practices that help leaders build relationships grounded in trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility.

Building trusting relationships is essential to collective liberation and to creating a world where all people have what they need to thrive.

“None of us are free until we all are free,”

- COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE

Navigating Crises by Building Trusting Relationships

We are navigating multiple interlocking crises across the social sector and within our communities. These challenges can destabilize relationships, weaken coordination, and reinforce narratives of division. In moments like these, trust becomes essential. Trust allows us to share power, coordinate more effectively, and care for one another with intention.

Building trusting relationships requires time, consistency, and commitment. It calls for deep listening, a willingness to share resources, and openness to new ways of working. Trust grows when leaders practice perspective-taking, broaden their viewpoints, and navigate conflict with care and compassion.

Trusting relationships can transform surveillance into safety, isolation into belonging, and competition into shared power. When leaders prioritize trust, they strengthen the ecosystems that sustain individual and collective well-being.

Three Crises Through the Lens of Trust Building

Trust helps leaders respond to crises with connection rather than isolation.

Crisis of Disinvestment and Downsizing

Disinvestment and shrinking resources often create pressure to compete for limited funding. Organizations serving the same communities may feel pitted against one another while community needs continue to rise. These conditions strain relationships and reinforce scarcity. Relationship-centered leadership interrupts this pattern. Trust encourages resource sharing, mutual aid, and collaboration. When organizations build trust with one another, they can create shared strategies, combine strengths, and coordinate efforts for greater collective impact.

Crisis of Political Weaponization and Retaliation

Political weaponization and retaliation aim to divide communities by reinforcing harmful stereotypes and fueling discriminatory behaviors. These forces encourage distrust, hypervigilance, and disconnection. Trust building helps leaders examine and challenge internalized bias and discriminatory beliefs. By naming and addressing these patterns, we create relationships rooted in belonging, equity, and shared purpose. Trust appreciates differences as sources of wisdom. It supports understanding different lived experiences and honors the full humanity of others. Trust reminds us that our struggles are interconnected and that solidarity is a source of protection and power.

Crisis of Uncertainty and Volatile Change

Rapid and unpredictable change can create defensiveness and guide leaders toward control, rigidity, or withdrawal. Under uncertainty, relationships can become transactional rather than rooted in care and connection. Fear often fuels a desire to return to what is familiar, even when conditions have shifted. Trust helps leaders stay open. It supports curiosity, experimentation, and the willingness to try new approaches. Trust encourages leaders to take risks together, adapt to evolving conditions, and remain grounded in shared purpose. With trust, we can navigate uncertainty with creativity and wisdom rather than fear or control.

Day-to-Day Trust Building Practices for Leaders

Listen deeply. Make space in meetings for personal connection and invite diverse perspectives.

Name limitations and be transparent. Admit mistakes, share what you know, what you do not know, and why decisions are being made. Transparency builds credibility and trust.

Practice reciprocal appreciation by acknowledging the contributions, effort, and care you experience from colleagues and community members, with consent and specificity.

Discuss feelings, needs, and well-being and invite check-ins about emotional labor, workload, and stress. This reduces stigma and strengthens connections.

Model shared leadership and distribute power intentionally through rotating roles when shaping agendas or co-facilitating processes.

Close the loop by following up on input and feedback with clear next steps; this helps people see how their voices shaped decisions or understand when something cannot be incorporated.

TRUST BUILDING PRACTICES

STORY LISTENING CIRCLE

Purpose: Host a session where community members or staff share stories, needs, or hopes while others listen without presenting or responding.

- What are we hearing across stories?
- What surprised or moved us?
- What actions are now more clear?

SHARED TIMELINE OF COMMUNITY WISDOM

Purpose: Co-create a visual timeline of community wins, losses, moments of resistance, and your organization's role.

- What patterns do we notice?
- What lessons guide us moving forward?

RESOURCE EXCHANGE GROUPS

Purpose: Engage small groups of staff and community on what you need and can give, coordinate resources, and offer support.

- What resources are we willing to share?
- How can we ensure reciprocity?

COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION SESSION

Purpose: Invite community members and staff to imagine the future together.

Ask: "What does a flourishing community look like ten years from now?"

Capture themes in writing, drawing, or spoken word.

- What would feel different for us?
- What shared values are emerging?

COLLECTIVE REFLECTION

Purpose: Collect anonymous feedback, concerns, or truths with commitment to reviewing together.

- What are the themes we notice?
- What do these truths ask us to shift or repair?

Structures for Building Trusting Relationships

Building trusting relationships is not about avoiding conflict; it is about creating relationships that can hold and move through conflict in ways that strengthen the collective. Trust is built over time through commitment, consistency, and care.

Groups can normalize connection as essential to mission impact by making space for relationship-building in their shared work. Leaders can model perspective taking, curiosity, and authenticity, showing that trust grows when people feel seen, valued, and respected.

Inclusion and belonging can be reimagined beyond interpersonal and organizational practices to reflect the broader societal changes we seek. Trust-based relationships help us move toward collective liberation by enabling us to honor one another's full humanity in our day-to-day interactions and work environments.

MONTHLY RHYTHM OF RELATIONAL CARE

WEEK	FOCUS	SIMPLE PRACTICES	REFLECTION PROMPT
1	Reach Out	Connect with one trusted person every day	Who strengthens my sense of belonging?
2	Repair	Have one honest conversation you have been avoiding	What needs tending to?
3	Reciprocity	Offer support or resources to a partner or peer	How can mutual care strengthen our shared work?
4	Reimagine	Envision the future of your relationships or partnerships	What would relational thriving look like in one year?

On-going Integration and Alignment

***NOTES:**

Closing reflection:

- What patterns am I noticing in how I build or avoid relationships?
- How does trust shape the way I lead?
- What practice can I sustain to stay connected to my community?

Write a Thriving Intention Statement:

In times of challenge, I choose to build trust with others by showing up as...

Relationships are the foundation of collective resilience. Times of crisis remind us to care more deeply, listen more openly, and show up with greater intention. Trust is built over time. It grows through consistency, authenticity, vulnerability, dependability, and commitment.

Every act of connection is an act of resistance, because we are choosing to care for each other instead of fearing our differences. Every relationship rooted in dignity helps us counter the forces that seek to divide us. We thrive together when we choose curiosity over control, compassion over fear, and collaboration over isolation.