



Organization for Responsible Governance
**Understanding Public Trust Public
Consultation Report**

2023

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Executive Summary

The Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with a mission to promote the principles of good governance while actively engaging government, citizens, the private sector and civil society. The organization seeks to explore the extent of public trust across the diverse landscapes of The Bahamas and its influence on civic participation. As part of a comprehensive study, ORG conducted twelve community-based focus groups with local stakeholders, providing highly insightful sessions that revealed a profound narrative regarding the interconnectedness of trust within communities, in government, and among private sector entities. This study underscores the paramount importance of understanding the dynamics of public trust for the socio-political fabric of The Bahamas.

The qualitative findings of the report highlight the crucial and pressing need for transparent governance, consistent communication, and community engagement as essential elements in rebuilding and sustaining public trust in the government. The insights from the focus group participants also underscore the pivotal role that trust plays in fostering positive relationships between institutions across the private sector and civil society and the communities they serve. These findings have implications for policy development; corporate social responsibility; transparent business practices; and community engagement and development programs serving as tools for building enduring trust.

ORG presents this report on the focus groups as a valuable resource to assist policymakers, civil society, community leaders, and businesses in cultivating a culture of trust that forms the foundation of a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable Bahamian society.

Introduction

ORG believes that public trust serves as the cornerstone of societal harmony and effective governance. The findings from the twelve focus groups underscore the nuanced intricacies that shape trust within communities. It emphasizes that a deep understanding of historical contexts, migration patterns, and political affiliations is indispensable for cultivating and preserving trust among Bahamians. This conclusion carries far-reaching implications for fostering unity, social cohesion, and collective prosperity.

This report synthesizes findings from twelve public trust focus groups conducted across five islands in The Bahamas, aiming to evaluate the levels of trust within communities, private sector entities, and government.

Participants, representing diverse demographics, shared insights on community and institutional trust, transparency, and the factors influencing their perceptions.

Key findings highlight varying degrees of trust, often linked to transparency and communication effectiveness.

Recommendations include prioritizing transparent communication, strengthening community engagement, and promoting media literacy.

These insights and recommendations provide a foundation for enhancing public trust, fostering a more transparent, responsive, and accountable relationship between institutions and the Bahamian community.

Methodology

Location/Dates of Focus Groups

The focus groups were strategically conducted across multiple islands in the Bahamas to ensure diverse representation.

Island	Number of Focus Groups
New Providence	2
Grand Bahama	3
Andros	2
Eleuthera	2
Cat Island	3

This distribution aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of regional perspectives.

Personnel Involved in Focus Groups:

The focus groups were facilitated by a team, consisting of 2 ORG team members. One team member led the discussions, guiding participants through the topics, while the other team member was responsible for documenting key insights and participant responses.

Description of Consent Process:

Prior to the commencement of the focus groups, participants were advised of the process and informed that the groups would be recorded. Explicit consent was obtained. Participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and that any data collected would be used solely for research purposes. This transparent consent process ensured respect for participants' privacy and anonymity throughout the study.

Facilitator's Guide:

Source of Facilitator's Guide:

The facilitator's guide utilized during the focus groups was internally developed by the ORG team before the focus group initiative. This comprehensive guide provided a structured framework for the discussions, outlining specific questions designed to elicit valuable insights on trust-related topics.

Topic Areas Covered by the Facilitator's Guide:

Qualities Fostering Trust in the Community: Exploration of qualities that contribute to trust in interpersonal relationships within the community.

Government Trust: Inquiry into general qualities influencing trust in the government.

Private Sector Trustworthiness: Examination of the qualities that make companies within the community more trustworthy.

Private Sector's Role: Understanding of the private sector's role within the community.

Trust in Companies: Determination of how community members discern trustworthy companies.

Trust in Nonprofits, NGOs, and Community Organizations: Participants' views on nonprofits, NGOs, and community organizations, and how they determine the trustworthiness of such entities.

Trustworthy Organizations: Examination of the criteria used by community members to assess the trustworthiness of organizations.

Information Accessibility: Assessment of community members' awareness of credible information sources and their ability to access them.

Main Sources of Information: Identification of the primary sources of information within the community.

Role of News Media: Exploration of the role and prominence of news media in the community.

Island-Specific Factors: Investigation into whether factors specific to each island influence community members' trust in the government's ability to deliver.

Participant Recruitment:

Methods of Recruitment:

The recruitment strategy involved selection based on island specific community outreach. Event flyers were distributed to advertise the focus group sessions so that interested individuals could sign up for participation. Additionally, collaborative outreach efforts were undertaken by partnering with organizations or schools to address specific groups or demographics, enhancing the diversity of participants.

Criteria and Methods for Selecting Participants:

Outreach materials were crafted to promote inclusive participation. The sessions were open to all individuals interested in attending with accommodation provided as needed. Interested individuals signed up by responding to the event flyer, and in some cases, direct partnerships with organizations or schools facilitated group discussions with specific demographics.

Enrollment Process and Number of Participants in Each Group:

Participants filled out a registration form and attended the scheduled venue. Across the islands, participant numbers varied. For instance, in Grand Bahama, the first group comprised 9 youth participants (all boys), while the second had 6 adults. In Eleuthera, the first group included 10 participants from the One Eleuthera Foundation, the second had 15 students from the Harbour Island Green School, and the third had 2 elderly

participants. Similar variations were observed in New Providence, Andros, and Cat Island, with groups ranging in size from 3 to 15 participants.

Participant Overview

77 stakeholders from five islands actively participated in the focus groups. The participant demographics portrayed a diverse cross-section of the Bahamian community. Across the islands, participants encompassed youth, adults, and elderly individuals, presenting a representative mix of genders. Notably, group compositions differed, as some sessions were tailored for specific organizations or schools, contributing to a rich and multifaceted dataset. This diversity guarantees a stronger representation of perspectives on trust within the Bahamian community, spanning various age groups, professional backgrounds, and educational experiences.

Island in The Bahamas	Focus Group	Number of Participants	Description of Participants
Grand Bahama	1st	9	Youth boys
	2nd	6	Adult participants
Andros	1st	4	Adults from BAMSI
	2nd	3	Adults from BAMSI
Eleuthera	1st	10	Adults from One Eleuthera Foundation
	2nd	15	Students from Harbour Island Green School
	3rd	2	Elderly participants
New Providence	1st	8	Adult women participants from Princess Court Ministries
	2nd	5	Young adults from FLO Volunteer Bahamas organization
Cat Island	1st	8	Adult participants
	2nd	4	Adult participants
	3rd	3	Adult participants

This tabulated representation provides a detailed overview of the participant demographics across different islands and focus group sessions.

Key Findings:

In a comprehensive analysis of diverse focus groups representing different Bahamian communities, many perspectives emerged, offering unique insights into the intricate dynamics influencing trust at various levels—from intimate community relations to perceptions of governmental efficacy, private sector practices, and the operations of non-profit organizations. Across these dialogues, a consistent thread underscored the paramount importance of qualities like reliability, consistency, accountability, and reputation in fostering trust within communities.

Within the microcosm of communities, participants acknowledged the foundational role of positive behaviors and personal connections in building trust among neighbors. Conversely, distrust tended to take root when participants perceived negative behaviors and a lack of personal connections within the community. This emphasis on the personal and behavioral dimensions of trust illuminates the nuanced social dynamics that underpin the fabric of communal relationships.

Shifting the focus to government trust, the articulated perspectives outlined a delicate interplay of qualities that either cultivate or erode public trust. The virtues of honesty, consistency, reliability, and accountability were identified as trust-building elements, while concerns crystallized around issues of neglect, inconsistent leadership, and a perceived sense of being marginalized. This balancing act between citizen expectations and governmental actions forms the backdrop against which trust in public institutions is negotiated.

In the arena of private sector trust, both government and private entities were recognized as earning trust through the exhibition of consistency, positive reputation, and a demonstrable track record of community support. Economic challenges and perceived hindrances in governmental policies was acknowledged as potential barriers to the private sector's effective contribution to community well-being.

The trust placed in the private sector was contingent on proximity, ethical business practices, and active community involvement. Participants lamented the impact of economic challenges on businesses' ability to support communities effectively, pointing to government policies as potential obstacles.

In the realm of non-profit organizations, trustworthiness was associated with tangible results, transparency, and a visible presence within the community. The call for increased understanding, inclusivity, and adherence to operational standards echoed through these discussions, suggesting a collective yearning for enhanced accountability within the non-profit sector.

As the lens expanded to the broader information landscape, the sources of knowledge varied—spanning social media, community meetings, and traditional news outlets. Word

of mouth, social media, and community networks emerged as influential channels in disseminating information. The multifaceted factors influencing trust encompassed historical elements, migration patterns, and political affiliations. Distrust, in turn, was fueled by perceptions of a lack of transparency, political biases, and ineffective governance within the government. Notably, concerns were voiced about misinformation, information overload, and short attention spans, especially among older demographics reliant on local news outlets.

The depth and nuance of these perspectives were undoubtedly shaped by an array of factors such as age, religious affiliations, political experiences, generational dynamics, local economic context, community engagement levels, educational awareness, and cultural nuances. These diverse lenses collectively paint a detailed portrait of the complex interplay of forces that mold trust within Bahamian communities.

Recurring Themes:

Transparency and Accountability:

- Community Trust: Consistent emphasis on the importance of dependability, regularity and responsibility as foundations for cultivating trust in communities
- Government Trust: Repeated acknowledgment of openness, truthfulness and responsibility as pivotal elements fostering trust in government.

Role of Reputation:

- Community and Private Sector: Frequent mention of trust linked to positive reputations, underscoring the importance of a proven history of community support.

Media and Information Channels:

- Information Flow: Consistent acknowledgment of the role played by social media, community networks, and word of mouth as influential channels for information.
- Media Challenges: Repeated concerns across all groups about the dissemination of misleading information

Challenges with Governance:

- Distrust in Government: Consistent recognition of a lack of transparency, political biases, and ineffective governance as factors eroding trust in the government.

Unanimous Opinions/Shared Perspectives:

Trust within Communities:

- ✓ Unanimous consensus on the crucial role of personal connections and positive behaviors in nurturing trust within communities.

- ✓ Collective agreement on the adverse impact of perceived negative behaviors on trust in neighbors.

Governmental Trust:

- ✓ Acknowledgment of the significance of honesty, consistency, and reliability in building trust in government.
- ✓ Shared expression of concerns regarding inconsistent leadership and a perceived sense of neglect.

Role of Information Sources:

- ✓ Unanimous agreement on the pivotal role played by social media, community networks, and word of mouth in disseminating information.

Media's Influence:

- ✓ The focus groups unanimously recognized and expressed concerns regarding several challenges related to the media's role, particularly in the areas of misinformation, information overload, and limited attention spans. Concerns about misinformation reflected a shared awareness of the prevalence of inaccurate or misleading information in media channels, leading to potential distortions in public perception. Information overload was acknowledged as a common issue, where the sheer volume of information available through various media sources could overwhelm individuals, making it challenging to discern relevant and accurate details. Additionally, the shared concern about limited attention spans highlighted the collective understanding that, in a fast-paced media environment, people may have difficulty dedicating sufficient time and focus to absorb comprehensive news content. The unanimous acknowledgment of these challenges emphasizes the importance of addressing media literacy and adopting strategies to enhance the quality and impact of information dissemination in the community.

Challenges in the Private Sector:

- ✓ The focus groups consistently acknowledged that the private sector faces notable challenges in effectively supporting the community, and these challenges were predominantly attributed to economic constraints and government policies. Economic challenges encompassed issues such as financial limitations, market fluctuations, and economic downturns, which collectively hindered the private sector's ability to allocate resources for community support initiatives. Governmental policies were also identified as barriers, with regulations and policies perceived as imposing constraints on businesses' philanthropic activities or community engagement efforts. The collective recognition of these economic and policy-related challenges underscores the complex external factors influencing the private sector's role in community support and emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between businesses and policymakers to address these hurdles.

Recommendations

Observation	Recommendation
Trust in communities is rooted in qualities such as reliability, consistency, accountability, and reputation.	Encourage community-building initiatives that foster positive behaviors, interpersonal connections, and transparency.
Trust in neighbors and people is built on positive behaviors and personal connections, while distrust arises from perceived negativity and a lack of interpersonal bonds.	Facilitate community events and programs to enhance positive interactions, communication, and mutual understanding among neighbors.
Trust in government relies on transparency, honesty and a proven track record of keeping promises	Advocating for transparent governance, consistent communication, and community engagement to build and maintain trust in government involves implementing specific strategies and initiatives. Here are some practical ways to achieve this: 1. Formalize processes for public, private sector and civil society engagement and consultation in legislative processes, policy development, decision making processes and public service delivery. 2. Implement civic education programs in schools and communities to enhance public understanding of governance structures, democratic processes, and the role of citizens in decision-making. 3. Establish online platforms that provide easy access to government data, budgets, and decision-making processes. This fosters transparency and allows citizens to track government actions. 4. Organize regular community forums where government representatives can engage directly with citizens, listen to concerns, and gather feedback. 5. Conduct campaigns to raise awareness about government initiatives, policies, and the importance of community participation in the decision-making process. 6. Provide training programs for government officials on effective communication, active listening, and public engagement techniques. This ensures that officials are well-equipped to interact with the

	community
Trust in the private sector is earned through a track record of community support.	Encourage corporate social responsibility (CSR), community engagement, and transparent business practices to enhance trust. 1. Companies should conduct thorough assessments to understand the specific needs of the communities they operate in. This ensures that CSR initiatives are tailored to address genuine concerns. 2. Collaborate with non-profit organizations and NGOs that specialize in community development. These partnerships can enhance the impact and effectiveness of CSR programs. 3. Invest in local infrastructure projects that benefit the community at large. This could include contributions to schools, healthcare facilities, or public spaces, demonstrating a commitment to long-term community well-being.
Trust in the private sector is influenced by ethical business practices	1. Establish channels for open communication between businesses and local communities. Forums can provide a platform for expressing concerns, sharing information, and building mutual understanding. 2. Maintain transparent communication about business operations, policies, and decision-making processes. 3. Clearly articulate company values and commitments to the community. 4. Prioritizing local hiring strengthens ties between the company and the community. This not only contributes to the local economy but also demonstrates a commitment to community development. 5. Private sector can involve community members in decision-making processes related to business operations that may impact the local area. This collaborative approach helps build trust and ensures that community voices are heard. 6. Establish mechanisms for collecting feedback from the community. This can be done through surveys, suggestion boxes, or online platforms, allowing businesses to respond to community needs and concerns.
Non-profit organizations are deemed trustworthy when they	1. Nonprofits should provide clear and accessible financial statements, detailing how funds

have a visible presence within the community.	are raised, allocated and spent. Regular audits by independent agencies can further validate financial integrity. 2. Share detailed reports on the impact of programs and initiatives. Demonstrating tangible results helps build confidence among donors and community members about the organization's efficacy. 3. Collaborate with other local community groups and organizations to strengthen ties. This collaborative approach ensures that nonprofits do not duplicate work, are embedded in the community fabric and are responsive to local needs. 4. Provide regular updates on organizational activities through various channels, including newsletters, social media, and community meetings. Keeping stakeholders informed fosters a sense of involvement and transparency. 5. Conduct workshops and interactive activities for community members. Empowering individuals with knowledge and skills enhances their capacity to participate in and benefit from non-profit programs which will enhance the individual's trust in the non-profit.
Information is obtained from sources that are not credible	Implement educational programs on media and information literacy, ensuring that community members are equipped to navigate the modern information landscape.

Conclusion

Understanding public trust is paramount for effective governance, sustainable business practices, and the success of community-driven initiatives. The nuances uncovered in these focus groups highlight the need for tailored approaches that consider the unique characteristics of each community.

In conclusion, the insights gathered from the twelve ORG focus groups conducted across various islands in The Bahamas provide a nuanced understanding of public trust within communities, government, private sector entities, and non-profit organizations.

The diversity of focus group participants underscores the complex interplay of influences shaping trust across different facets of Bahamian communities. To foster and

maintain trust, the importance of transparent governance, effective and efficient consistent communication, corporate social responsibility, community engagement, and media literacy education were consistently emphasized.

As The Organization for Responsible Governance navigates its path forward, these findings offer valuable insights to inform initiatives aimed at strengthening trust and fostering resilient and interconnected communities.

Annex 1: Public Trust Community Surveys

In addition to running community focus groups, the Organization for Responsible Governance crafted & circulated two surveys for the public to:

1. Create a standard tool and baseline questions using information from the research and literary review on public trust
2. Increase the amount of data collected from the public on matters related to trust
3. Increase the reach of the information gathering exercises to individuals that were unable to participate in the focus group sessions
4. Triangulate data from multiple sources overtime to increase the validity and credibility of the data, its analysis and its application

Both the focus groups and surveys used the literary reviews and desk research conducted. ORG's team along with a professional data analyst crafted a survey instrument for two public trust surveys. The survey instrument can be found [here](#). Kindly request access at the link for document security purposes.

Both surveys are currently available at orgbahamas.com/communitysurvey

An overview of the surveys is below:

Survey 1

Objective: To understand the fundamentals of public trust in communities, government, private sector and civil society. This survey sought to examine the influence of the following factors on trust including:

- Public Governance Drivers
- Cultural Drivers
- Political Drivers
- Socioeconomic Drivers
- Basic Media & Information Literacy

Preliminary High-level Findings:

- Number of respondents at time of preliminary report: 101
- Generally, preliminary survey data supported finding of the public trust focus groups
- Trust in government (at all levels) was moderately to very low with approximately 75% of respondents
 - Respondents felt negatively about the proper provision of public services, and adherence to drivers of good governance within government
 - Respondents felt corruption was very present, whether or not they had personally witnessed acts of corruption
 - Respondents felt political polarization and influence negatively impact the provision of service and performance of the government

- Trust in the private sector and civil society was equally neutral to positive, with roughly 40% of respondents feeling neutral about their trust in institutions and 40% feeling the institutions were trustworthy
 - This ratio was consistent with the number of respondents who felt mission and vision of these institutions in their communities were generally clear
 - The perception of corruption in these institutions was mixed with roughly 40% neutral about its prevalence, 30% agreeing that it was prevalent and 30% feeling it was not prevalent
 - Respondents were less divided on the view that both private sector and civil society institutions could take clearer, tangible steps to build trust that include more community engagement, clearer benefits to local communities and referrals from trusted family members and friends

Survey 2

Objective: To understand more detailed dynamics of media & information literacy and other skills determined complimentary to building public trust. This survey sought to gauge:

- Sources of information, data and credible news
- Level of participation in public forums
- Level of use of digital, web-based tools for participation and information gathering
- Level of understanding of government function and parliamentary proceedings
- Level of engagement with public officials and officials of civil society

Survey 2 is live and at the time of this report, a level of response preliminary data was not yet available.

Both surveys will continue to run and be promoted throughout the duration of ORG's upcoming Public Trust project that is tentatively scheduled to run from Q2 2024 into Q2/3 2025. A comprehensive report will be provided at the closure of the project.