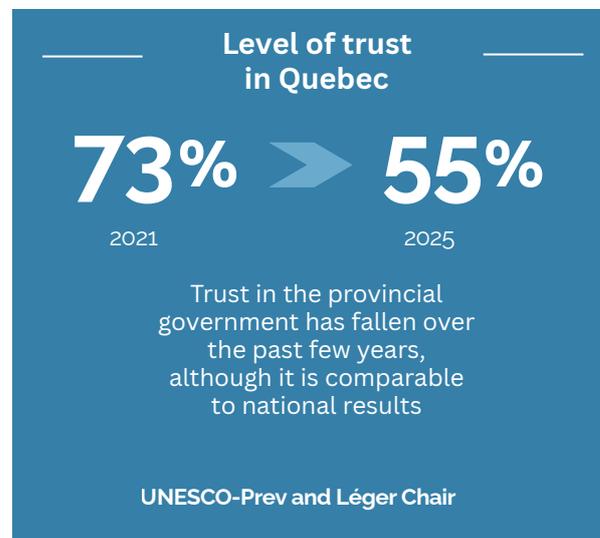# TRUST-BASED LEADERSHIP

## BENCHMARKS FOR EXECUTIVES

In contemporary democracies, citizens' trust in public institutions remains a fundamental foundation of governmental legitimacy and social cohesion. However, eroding trust is a global phenomenon confirmed by several studies.

Despite satisfaction with the administrative services they receive (69%), only **one Canadian in two** has a high or moderate trust in government (OECD, 2024)

### Level of trust in Canada

**53%** 2019 ➤ **49%** 2024

The level of trust in government is lower among the **indigenous**.

**28%**

Edelman Trust Barometer

### Level of trust in Quebec

**73%** 2021 ➤ **55%** 2025

Trust in the provincial government has fallen over the past few years, although it is comparable to national results

**UNESCO-Prev and Léger Chair**

The erosion of trust is a result of a particularly complex social context. A series of crises, including social, health, environmental and economic, have weakened certain societal foundations, affected the quality of life of citizens and increased polarization and discontent among the population. Furthermore, the rise of disinformation and artificial intelligence has made it increasingly challenging for citizens to distinguish between what is true from what is false.

A society where trust in public institutions is low risks experiencing a rise in cynicism and social divisions, along with greater distrust of institutions, experts and the media. It also creates the risk that citizens will be less inclined to comply with laws, administrative rules and the social contract, participate less in democratic processes, or resist reforms proposed by government.

**The erosion of trust is a real threat to the foundations of democratic societies.**

# TRUST-BASED LEADERSHIP
## BENCHMARKS FOR EXECUTIVES

Governments must place public trust at the core of their actions and their leaders must adopt a leadership style that focuses on trust.

By serving as a bridge between institutions and the public in implementing policies, programs and services, executives have the capacity to act and have concrete levers to help strengthen that trust.

*Establishing public trust is the responsability of all public servants.*

*It is partof our responsability to manage this through our actions and our day-to-day decisions*

*This is an essential condition for a functioning democratic society.*

**- Thao Pham,** former senior public servant of the federal government

## 5 BENCHMARKS to increase public trust toward governments.



**1** Transparency and communication

**2** Accountability and integrity

**3** Reliability and efficiency of the public service

**4** Participation and engagement

**5** Representativeness

# TRUST-BASED LEADERSHIP
## BENCHMARKS FOR EXECUTIVES

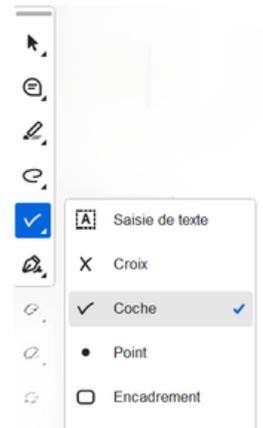To help you identify potential actions to take as part of your work, you are invited to assess your practices.

By checkingthe appropriate box, **the following practices** are :

✳ Already core to your priorities

✳ To strengthen

✳ In your blind spot

You can check interactively.

| | | |
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| | Ａ | Saisie de texte |
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| ✓ | ✓ | Coche ✓ |
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| | ☐ | Encadrement |

## Transparency and communication

*What matters is not the quantity of data made public, but the clarity of the narrative that accompanies it. Transparency that is understandable, presented in accessible and contextualized language, strengthens trust (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2021).*

| | ✳ | ✳ | ✳ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do I know my **target audiences** well and **adjust** my communications accordingly? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the information and data from policies, programs and services under my responsibility **accessible** to the public? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Is the public information **accurate** and presented **clearly** to users? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are clients and citizens informed of the stages and **progress** of their applications or projects? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I help **make visible** the internal efforts and processes that are deployed to provide a service to citizens? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| In my communications and decisions, am I being **open** and **transparent** with my teams or clients? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I promote information **sharing** by limiting exceptions only when necessary? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Is public information **easy to find** and available in a **userfriendly** format? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# Accountability and integrity

*Trust is based on the belief that the administration acts fairly and does not take advantage of its position. Transparency is not sufficient if it is not accompanied by consistent and explainable behaviour (Wang and Guan, 2023).*

| | 🟢 | 🟡 | 🔴 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Are the **criteria** for selecting or assessing programs or services under my responsibility **clear** and **fair**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are **decisions** explained **clearly** and in understandable manner, including the reasons behind the choices made? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are **decisions** communicated **proactively** rather than in response to an issue? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the **results** of policies, programs, services or consultations **communicated**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the unachieved **outcomes** or persistent challenges **explained** transparently? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the achieved or exceeded **results highlighted**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Is the **reporting** done in a **timely** fashion to remain relevant? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| In my team, do I **share** successes and lessons learned to demonstrate that I am learning? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I know the **values** of the public service and have the instinct to embody them in my daily actions? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I take **responsibility** for my **mistakes** while looking for solutions? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I use **artificial intelligence** in a way that maintains public trust (e.g. security of personal data, accuracy of information, etc.)? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# Public service reliability and efficiency

*Trust could be enhanced by increasing the speed and ease of administrative service delivery, as well as the responsiveness of public services to feedback from users or ideas from frontline public employees (OECD, 2024).*

| | 🟢 | 🟡 | 🔴 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Are the **effectiveness** and **reliability** of services provided to the public core to my **priorities**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Is my team continuously looking to **increase efficiency** and **reduce the administrative burden** on clients? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## Public service reliability and efficiency

| | 🟢 | 🟡 | 🔴 |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Does my team provide service within a **reasonable** time frame? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do we anticipate what could put the **continuity** of service at **risk**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do we know if our services **meet the needs** of citizens or our clients? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do we **adjust** our practices based on **feedback** received? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the **gains** made and **innovations communicated** to the public? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Within my team, do I have the instinct to question the **status quo** and encourage **innovation**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## Participation and engagement

*Trust is enhanced when citizens perceive a link between their involvement and the decisions that result from it. Participation produces lasting effects when it leads to tangible results (OECD, 2024).*

| | 🟢 | 🟡 | 🔴 |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Are we providing **real opportunities** for citizens, partners and clients to provide **data**, be **heard** and **contribute** to decisions? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do our clients and partners **know** to what extent and on which matters they can **contribute**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are the **expectations**, **objectives** and expected **results** of the participatory exercises **clear**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are we using participatory practices and **tools** that are **adapted** to different audiences? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are we **showing** citizens that their contribution is **taken seriously**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I personally create opportunities to **interact with clients** and collaborators? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Am I willing to change or **adapt** my decisions based on the ideas and **perspectives heard**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# Representativeness

*Diversity builds trust when it is embedded in governance. This involves building teams that are representative of the society being served, or promoting diverse experiences and perspectives.*

| | 🧭 | 🧭 | 🧭 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do my **recruitment** practices contribute to **fostering** diversity in the public service? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are we **inclusive** in who is invited to participate in **public engagement exercises**? Are we going beyond our usual clientele base? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I Do we incorporate the **perspectives** of equity-deserving groups so that everyone feels fully and legitimately considered? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do we know what **barriers** are preventing some citizens from **participating** or access our services? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Are we taking any concrete measures to **remove** or reduce those b**arriers**? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Do I welcome and value **different perspectives** and diversity within my team? | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## What concret commitments would you be prepared to make to strengthen public trust?

**For more information :**

Edelman Canada (2024), *Trust Barometer*

Edelman Canada (2024), *Bridging the Trust Gap : Insights from Edelman Canada's Indigenous Peoples & Trust Study*

Government of Canada (2024), *Government of Canada Trust and Transparency Strategy*

*Government of Canada (2012), Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector*

Gouvernement of Québec (2022), *Référentiel de compétence du gestionnaire-leader de la fonction publique québécoise*

*Gouvernement of Québec (2025), L'éthique et les valeurs dans la fonction publique québécoise*

Institut de la confiance dans les organisations (2020), *Indice de la confiance sociétale*

OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*

OECD (2025), *Government at a Glance 2025*

Statistics Canada (2024), *Quality of Life Indicator : Confidence in institutions*

Statistics Canada (2023), *Confidence in institutions and the media*

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