



Campus and Community Trust-Building in Rural Settings



The Council of
Independent Colleges

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2025 Presidents Institute

January 4–7, 2025 ● JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Resort & Spa ● San Antonio, Texas



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Presenters

Douglas Palmer, President, Siena Heights University (MI)

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Chair

Emma Jones, Executive Vice President, Credo



Why talk about Trust?

Trust-building was identified as the most important presidential competency in post-pandemic leadership.

Burmicky et al.



What is Trust?

The promise of a meaningful, **mutually beneficial relationship** between **two or more people**.

Reichheld et al.

What's the state of rural higher education?

In the Rural Context...

1/3 of K-12 schools are **designated as rural** nationally, but in rural areas:

- 29% of 18-24-year-old students enroll in college, compared to 48% from urban areas

Rural counties with the lowest levels of educational achievement have:

- Highest levels of poverty
- Highest levels of unemployment
- Highest levels of population loss

In the Rural Context...

69% of college students attend college within 50 miles of their home:

- As community colleges and regional public institutions close or are consolidated, “education deserts” are impacting rural communities disproportionately.

National programs to recruit and support rural students are growing:

- STARS (Small Town and Rural Students) Network
- 32 national public and private universities and \$150 million in philanthropic dollars

In the Rural Context...

Since 2020, **more than a dozen** rural independent colleges have closed.

But others have thrived, reaching deeply into their communities to build trust, strengthen relationships, and articulate value...

– even in a **low-trust higher education environment**.

**What's the state
of trust in higher
education?**

Higher Ed is
losing ground
in the national
narrative

Is College Worth It?

As economic outcomes for young adults with and without degrees have improved, Americans hold mixed views on the value of higher education.

Poll finds only 36% of Americans have confidence in higher education

Public Opinion on Value of Higher Ed Remains Mixed

New public opinion survey shows Democrats and Republicans alike are pessimistic of the long-term benefits of a college degree. Partisan divides still exist in solutions to address the rising cost of education and the role race plays in limiting access to college.

Is College Worth It? Consider These Factors Before Enrolling

Active Devaluation of Educational Achievement

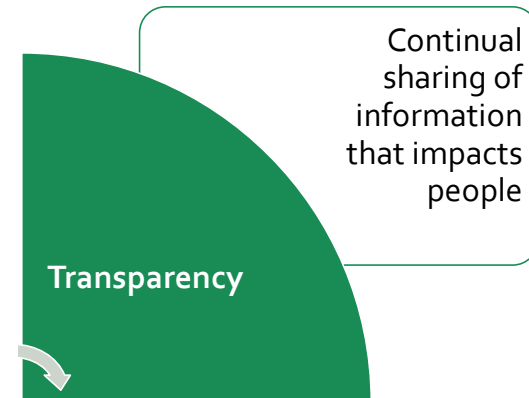
- Preparing children for college as an expectation the general public has of K-12 education has plummeted from the **10th-highest priority to the 47th**.
- Having a four-year degree is no longer perceived as a marker for a successful life, with ALL educational degrees ranking in the lowest quartile of.



Four Factors of Trust:

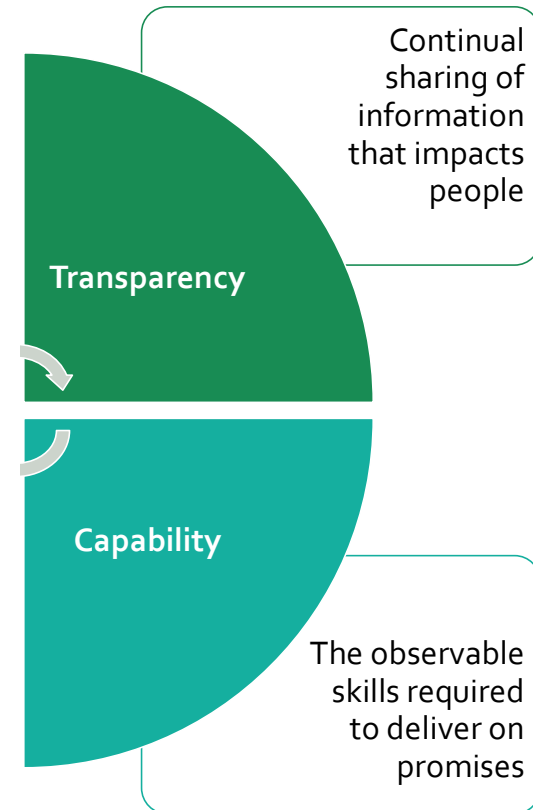
How can we nurture a culture of trust?

Four Factors of Trust



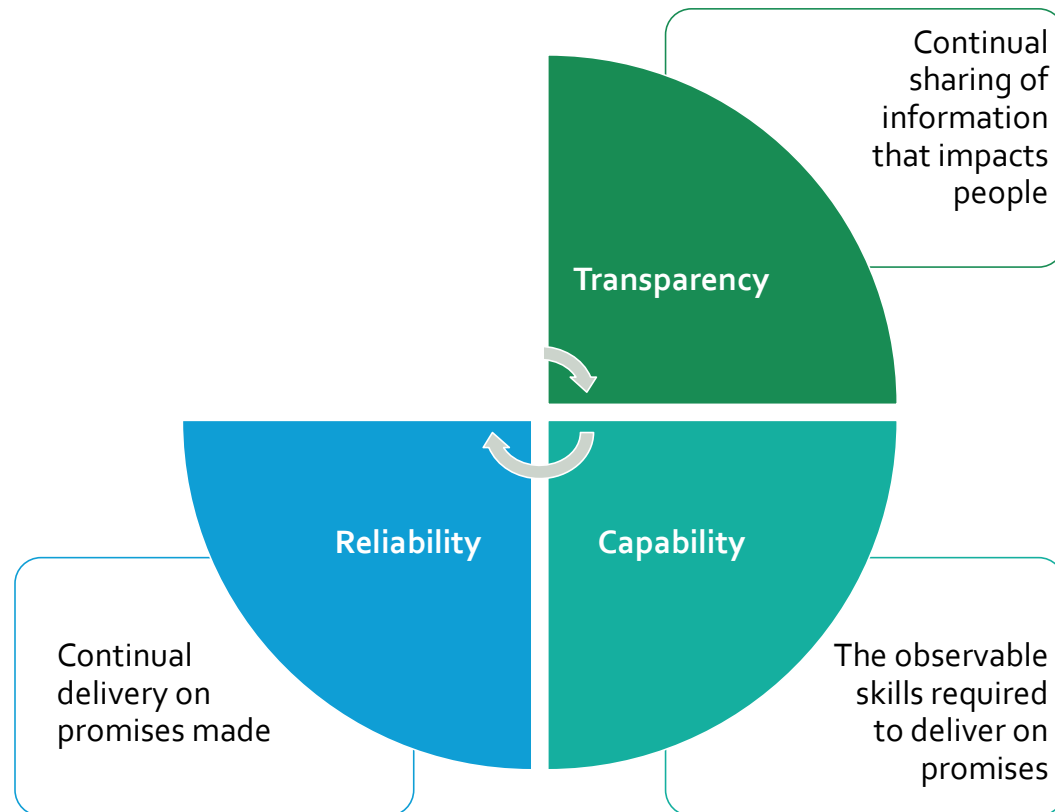
[Reichheld et al.](#)

Four Factors of Trust



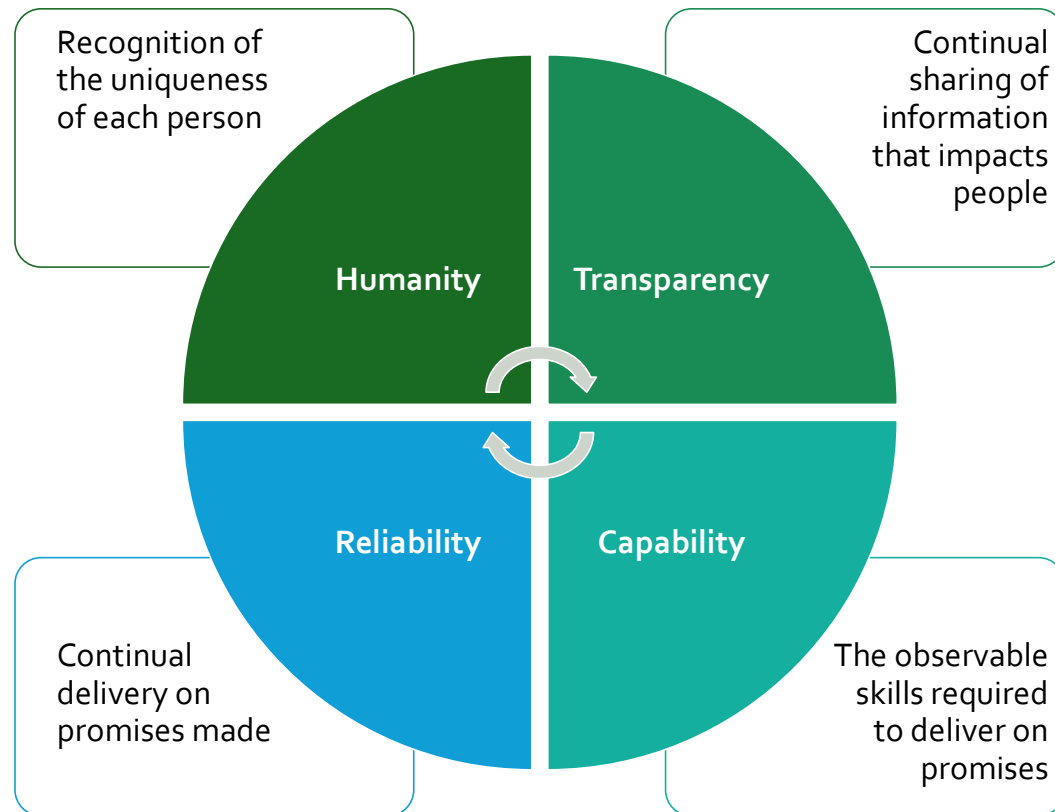
Reichheld et al.

Four Factors of Trust




Reichheld et al.

Four Factors of Trust



Reichheld et al.



Rural Campus & Community Trust-Building in Practice





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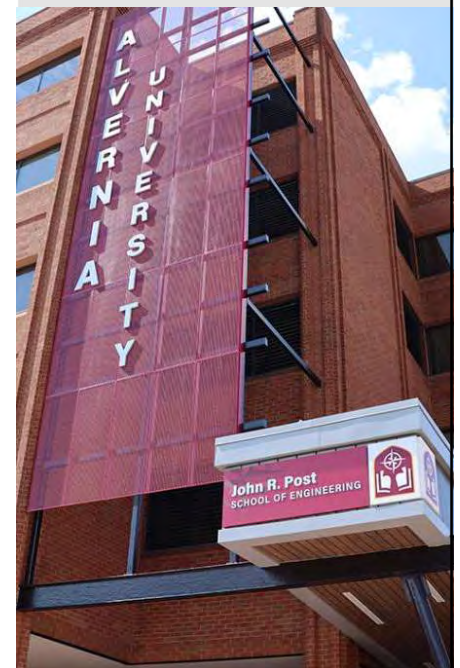
Get to Know Alvernia University

- Nationally Ranked Doctoral University in Eastern Pennsylvania
- 1 of 23 Franciscan Colleges and Universities
- Academic Structure in Four College Model
- 1,700 Undergraduate Students and 1,000 Graduate and Online Students
- Main Campus & 2 Community-Based Resource Centers
- 1 of 23 universities in the country to receive the Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation



Exploring Downtown: CollegeTowne

- Alvernia's innovative approach to town-gown relationships
- New CollegeTowne Facilities
 - John R. Post Center at Reading CollegeTowne, American House, Pottsville CollegeTowne
- Assisted over 150 small and established businesses and entrepreneurs
- 27 Jobs Created; 2,871 Full-Time Jobs Retained
- Over 1.7 million square feet of transformation projects along the downtown corridor
- Community Engagement through Cultural Coalition
- Over 100 and continually growing economic and academic partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations to enhance the local community and grow experiential learning opportunities



Expanding Experiential Learning

- Student experience at forefront of decision making
- O’Pake Fellows Program
- Apprenticeship to Degree Program



Economic Development

- Using trustees and community connections to focus workforce development efforts
- Attract businesses, entrepreneurs and innovators
- Academic integration into economic development spans from recruitment to graduation



Maximizing Partnerships

- Multi-layered partnerships connect university talent and capability with various community needs
- Revisiting partnerships often as community needs change and university resources change
- Academic integration into economic development spans from recruitment to graduation



Lessons Learned

- Align Vision with Faculty and Staff Support
- Secure Public Support (Awareness and Funding)
- Become a Catalyst, not a Savior





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Tri-State Development at C-SC

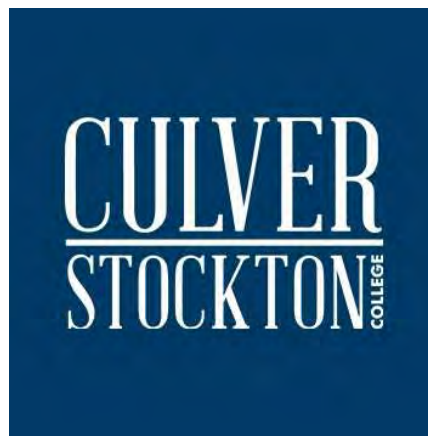
- 3 states (Missouri, Illinois, Iowa), 42 counties
- Coordination of taskforces and workshops
- Host site for relevant organizations
 - Corn Belt Ports, Port Commissions
- Annual summit with 200+ attendees
- Research projects
- Grant-writing initiatives
- Community partnership opportunities
- Internships





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Q&A



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**Thank you for attending
this session!**