LINKS GLOBAL
Communicating with Purpose. Powered by Insight.

COURSE PROSPECTUS

Learn to Read the Room Before You Write the Message

The Trust Audit Practitioner Course: a prospectus

A Links Global white paper. Developed by Links Global from 25 years of field practice and evidence-based research in strategic communication, public engagement, and institutional trust.

Most communications training teaches you to do the work better: sharper segmentation, stronger messages, smarter channels, faster crisis response. All of that matters, and none of it answers the question that decides whether any of it will land. Before we design the message, what is the actual trust condition of the environment we are communicating into?

Most practitioners have never been formally taught to ask that question. The Trust Audit Practitioner Course exists to teach it, and to teach what follows from the answer. This prospectus describes what the course is, who it is for, what it covers, and what you leave with. The course itself, its exercises, and its workbook are delivered to enrolled participants and licensed organizations.

The One Skill the Course Teaches

The course teaches one primary skill: how to diagnose the trust condition of your communications environment before you design a single message, choose a single channel, or launch a single campaign.

That skill rests on an instrument, the Links Global Trust Audit™, and on a finding that runs through everything Links Global publishes. Every strategic communications framework you have ever been trained in shares one assumption, so fundamental it is rarely stated: your audience is available. Not just reachable. Available, meaning open to receiving a well-designed message, weighing it, and changing position based on what it learns. When that assumption holds, the tools work. When it fails, the tools fail too, and in some cases using them makes things worse.

The course teaches you to test the assumption instead of inheriting it. Once you can read the trust condition accurately, you know which communications approach fits, what the first move should be, and why so many well-designed campaigns fall short. The two approaches you will learn to choose between are Narrative Stewardship Infrastructure™ (NSI), for environments where a fair hearing is still available, and Epistemic Re-Regulation Architecture™ (ERA), for environments where it is not.

Who It Is For

The course is built for communications practitioners who work inside organizations:

- Internal communications staff at public agencies, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, and civic institutions
- PR and public affairs professionals who manage institutional narratives
- Government communications officers at the federal, state, and local level
- Program staff who oversee communications functions within larger organizations

It is not designed for general audiences or for people new to communications. It assumes you already know how to segment an audience, develop a message, choose a channel, and run a campaign, and it builds from there into trust-condition diagnosis. If those skills were the whole problem, you would not need this course.

What You Will Be Able to Do

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Administer the Trust Audit Short Self-Assessment with any client, stakeholder group, or internal leadership team
- Interpret Trust Condition Index (TCI) scores and explain their implications in plain language
- Distinguish first-failure trust environments, where standard communications tools apply, from chronic trust-deficit environments, where they do not
- Apply NSI principles to audience architecture, narrative sequencing, and crisis-ready governance
- Recognize the conditions that indicate ERA work is needed before communications work begins
- Make a confident, evidence-grounded recommendation to senior leadership about which approach fits a specific initiative, including when the finding is unwelcome

How the Course Works

The course is self-paced and organized into eight modules plus an orientation, with a total learning time of six to eight hours. Each module contains a core concept section, a case illustration drawn from the public record, a practice exercise applied to your own organization, a reflection prompt, and a downloadable tool or template. We suggest one module per sitting, with at least a day between Module 4 and Module 5, because the diagnostic work in Module 4 benefits from reflection before you move on to applying a framework.

The Curriculum

MODULE	TITLE	TIME
0	Before You Begin: A Diagnostic Orientation	20 min
1	The Assumption That Keeps Failing	45 min
2	What Trust Actually Is	45 min
3	Reading the Room: The Trust Audit Instrument	60 min
4	Scoring and Interpreting Your Results	45 min
5	When NSI Applies: Building the Architecture	60 min
6	When ERA Is Needed: Working Upstream	60 min
7	Communicating the Diagnosis to Leadership	45 min
8	Capstone: Your First Trust Audit	60 min

MODULE 0: BEFORE YOU BEGIN

An orientation to the course's diagnostic approach, and a short written reflection you will return to at the very end. The three questions are worth five minutes of your time now, whether or not you enroll:

1. Think of a communications initiative you worked on that did not produce the results you expected. What was your honest diagnosis of why it failed?
2. How do you currently assess whether your audience is ready to receive your message before a campaign launches?
3. If someone asked you right now to rate the trust condition between your organization and its primary constituency on a scale of 1 to 10, what would your number be, and what would you base it on?

Write your answers down. In Module 8 you will compare them with what the instrument tells you.

MODULE 1: THE ASSUMPTION THAT KEEPS FAILING

You will identify the availability assumption underneath the Communication Wheel, SBCC, crisis communication, social marketing, and every segmentation and message-testing method you have used, and you will learn the specific conditions under which it fails. The case is Anderson County, South Carolina, where three redesigned proposals produced three defeats and opposition that hardened from 53 to 79 percent. The exercise audits the assumptions behind a current initiative of your own.

MODULE 2: WHAT TRUST ACTUALLY IS

A structural understanding of institutional trust: how it is built, how it is damaged, and why messaging alone cannot repair it. You will learn to place an institution in one of three trust states, intact, stressed, or chronically damaged, and you will see why corrections and clarifications so often backfire in the third state. The exercise assesses the trust state of your own organization with its primary constituency.

MODULE 3: READING THE ROOM: THE TRUST AUDIT INSTRUMENT

The core of the course. You will learn the seven dimensions the full Trust Audit examines and administer the four-dimension Short Self-Assessment to a real initiative, producing a Trust Condition Index score on the 50-point scale with documented evidence behind each rating. Evidence, not judgment alone, is the discipline the module instills.

MODULE 4: SCORING AND INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

The four TCI tiers in depth: Strong (40 to 50), Moderate (28 to 39), Low (16 to 27), and Severely Degraded (10 to 15), and what each means for framework selection and for the first move.

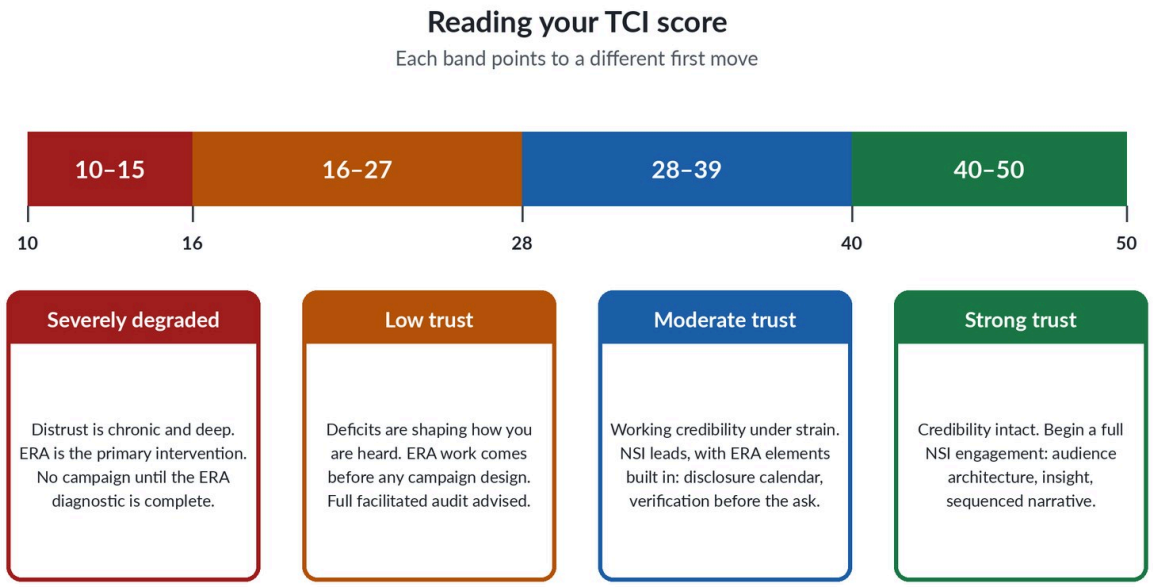


Figure 2. The four TCI tiers and what each one asks of you

Figure 1: The four Trust Condition Index tiers taught in Module 4

The module also addresses the hardest part of interpretation: what to do when the score is lower than leadership expects.

MODULE 5: WHEN NSI APPLIES: BUILDING THE ARCHITECTURE

For strong and moderate trust conditions. You will apply the four pillars of NSI, audience architecture, predictive insight integration, programs and operational stewardship, and partnerships and crisis-ready governance, to a real initiative, and build the first draft of an audience architecture for it.

MODULE 6: WHEN ERA IS NEEDED: WORKING UPSTREAM

For low and severely degraded trust conditions. You will learn the five ERA mechanisms from a practitioner's perspective, what ERA work looks like in practice, and how to communicate ERA's timeline and resource implications honestly. The exercise assesses your organization's readiness to begin.

MODULE 7: COMMUNICATING THE DIAGNOSIS TO LEADERSHIP

How to present a Trust Audit finding to senior leadership in a way that is honest, grounded in evidence, and actionable, especially when the finding is that the planned campaign should not launch yet. You will produce a one-page leadership brief.

MODULE 8: CAPSTONE: YOUR FIRST TRUST AUDIT

You will complete a full Short Self-Assessment for a real current or upcoming initiative, interpret the result, and produce a one-page Trust Condition Profile: the score and tier in plain language, key findings by dimension with the evidence behind them, a framework recommendation, and three concrete actions for the next 30 days. Then you return to your Module 0 answers and write one paragraph on what has changed in how you see the work.

The Workbook and Course Materials

Enrolled participants receive seven working documents, each introduced in the module where it is used:

1. **Trust Audit Short Self-Assessment Workbook.** The formatted scoring instrument with space to document the evidence behind every rating.
2. **TCI Interpretation Guide.** A one-page reference card for the four tiers.
3. **Audience Architecture Template.** A structured worksheet for mapping constituencies and their trust profiles.
4. **Disclosure Calendar Template.** For the ERA mechanism of predictability-first disclosure.
5. **Crisis Response Protocol Template.** For NSI's crisis-ready governance pillar.
6. **Leadership Brief Template.** The one-page format for presenting Trust Audit findings.
7. **Trust Condition Profile Template.** The capstone document.

The Short Self-Assessment questions themselves are public, on the Trust Audit page, and you are welcome to try them before enrolling. What the workbook and the course add is the method: how to gather and weigh the evidence, how to score without flattering the institution, and how to turn the number into a decision.

Delivery Options

Self-paced. The course as described above, taken individually online.

Organizational delivery. Organizations can license the curriculum for internal delivery with a facilitator guide and three formats: a half-day workshop (Modules 1 to 4, with participants completing the Short Self-Assessment and debriefing their scores in small groups), a full-day workshop (all modules, with Modules 5 and 6 run as facilitated case discussions), and a two-day intensive (the full curriculum with extended practice time and a facilitated Trust Audit of a real initiative the organization brings to the room). The capstone is assessed against a rubric covering evidence quality, interpretation accuracy, recommendation fit, and the usability of the leadership brief.

After the Course

Completing the course equips you to administer the Short Self-Assessment with confidence, interpret scores, select the right framework for a specific trust condition, and make an evidence-grounded recommendation to leadership. It also equips you to recognize when the situation calls for more than the short instrument. If your capstone produces a score in the Low or Severely Degraded range, or surfaces issues that need the depth of the full seven-dimension audit, Links Global works directly with organizations to administer the complete instrument, produce a full Trust Condition Profile, and design the NSI or ERA intervention that fits.

Enrolling or Licensing the Course

To enroll as an individual practitioner, to license the course for your organization, or to ask whether it fits your team, talk with us. If you would like a sense of the material first, start with the three questions in Module 0 above and the Short Self-Assessment.

Ask about the Practitioner Course

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