

Designing for Trust

The sharpest lines on trust in public digital services, gathered from the GovTech 4 Impact World Congress 2026.

Trust was the most repeated word during the Govtech 4 Impact World Congress 2026. Rather than let it dissolve into a slogan, we went back through the Congress and highlighted the moments where speakers gave it real shape, as a design requirement, a measurable outcome, and a test that public digital services either pass or fail.

What follows is a collection: the ideas worth sitting with, organised by theme, in the words of the people who raised them.

01

Trust as Design, Not Communication

On why trust cannot be added to a service afterwards through better messaging.

"The biggest bug in democracy today is low bandwidth. Traditional systems gather public input only intermittently, and cannot process complex, fast-moving questions."

— **Audrey Tang**, Taiwan's first Digital Minister

[Fireside Chat: Trustworthy Public Systems in an Age of Rapid Change](#)

"Trust begins with whether services actually work, end to end. A beautiful digital front door that leads to a six-week wait for a decision does not build trust. It destroys it."

— **Christine Bellamy**, Interim Director General, UK Government Digital Service

[Fireside Chat: Trust at Scale — Building Citizen-Centred Services in the Age of AI Agents](#)

02

Trust as a Measurable Outcome

On treating trust as a performance indicator, not an aspiration.

"We measure trust as a core performance indicator, alongside uptime and cyber incidents. It is not a vague aspiration. It is a measurable service outcome."

— **Christine Bellamy**, Interim Director General, UK Government Digital Service

[Fireside Chat: Trust at Scale — Building Citizen-Centred Services in the Age of AI Agents](#)

"Only around 40% of respondents trust governments to regulate technology in the public interest, and fewer than 54% trust governments to use data for its intended purpose."

— **Carlos Santiso**, Senior Advisor on Digital Government and AI, OECD

[Expert Committee Plenary / GovTech Compass launch session](#)

03

Trust and the Rise of AI Agents

On what governments risk losing as citizens increasingly reach public services through commercial intermediaries.

"As AI agents increasingly mediate citizens' interactions with public services, governments risk losing the visible accountability that trust depends on."

— **Christine Bellamy**, Interim Director General, UK Government Digital Service

Fireside Chat: Trust at Scale — Building Citizen-Centred Services in the Age of AI Agents

"If you do not define your place in this ecosystem, the ecosystem will define it for you."

— **Christine Bellamy**, Interim Director General, UK Government Digital Service

Fireside Chat: Trust at Scale — Building Citizen-Centred Services in the Age of AI Agents

04

Trust and Transparency

On the gap between stating a value and enforcing it.

"Transparency is a prerequisite for accountability. But it is rarely operationalised. Only a minority of countries have enforceable transparency standards for public-sector AI."

— **Carlos Santiso**, Senior Advisor on Digital Government and AI, OECD

GovTech Compass launch session

"People trust systems when they can see who accessed their data, understand their consent, and revoke it easily, and when governments are candid about failures rather than hiding them."

— **Jana Krimpe**, Founder and CEO, B.EST Solutions

Panel Session: Digital Identity and Public Infrastructure

05

Trust and the Human in the Loop

On the difference between a human who is present, and a human who is genuinely in control.

"Human in the loop of AI reduces people to hamsters on a wheel, scrambling to keep up with systems they neither steer nor understand. AI in the loop of humanity means the technology serves communities and goals that already exist."

— **Audrey Tang**, Taiwan's first Digital Minister

Fireside Chat: Trustworthy Public Systems in an Age of Rapid Change

"True transparency is achieved not by policy statements but by giving citizens concrete visibility and control. That is the heart of an agentic state that keeps humans firmly in the loop."

— **Ott Velsberg**, Client Engagement and Delivery Lead on Data, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change; former Government Chief Data Officer of Estonia

Keynote: From AI Policy to Public Value — Building an Agentic, Trusted, and Human-Centric Digital State

Trust as a Long Game

On why trust takes years to build and can disappear quickly.

“Trust takes years to build and can be lost very quickly. Infrastructure should be designed not merely to digitise bureaucracy, but to create practical, trusted systems that improve access, reduce friction, and enable broader participation in society.”

— **Pramod Varma**, Co-Founder and Chief Architect, Networks for Humanity; Co-Chair, CDPI India
Fireside Chat: Digital Public Infrastructure as a Means to Transform Economy and Citizen Services

“Government technology should not merely work. It should become a love mark: beautiful, modern, intuitive, and desirable to use, competing with the best private-sector experiences rather than asking citizens to tolerate bureaucratic tools.”

— **Valeriya Ionan**, Independent Strategic Advisor, Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation and Ministry of Defence

Keynote: Innovating Under Pressure — From Digital State to Agentic State

The Thread Running Through All of Them

Read together, these lines describe the same conviction from six different directions. Trust is not requested. It is built - into the speed of participation, into the measurement of a service, into the visibility of an algorithm, into the authority of a human reviewer, into the accountability of an institution when an AI agent stands between it and a citizen. It is earned slowly, through consistent design choices, and it can be undone quickly by a single one that goes unnoticed.

These quotes were gathered from the following sessions and speakers at the GovTech 4 Impact World Congress 2026 that took place on 5 – 7 May 2026 in Madrid, Spain.