Reshaping Ecosystem of Trust in Science: EU initiative launches new protocol to reconnect science, policy, and society

As science continues to influence major public policies and social priorities, from climate policy to public health and use of artificial intelligence (AI), the trust the public places in scientists, scientific institutions and practices is more vital than ever.

The EU-funded **VERITY Project** is almost over and has launched its comprehensive **Protocol of Recommendations**, offering a practical, evidence-informed framework to rebuild and reinforce societal trust in science through policy, communication, education, and engagement.

The Protocol positions **policymakers** as core **Stewards of Trust (SoT),** with a central role in bridging gaps between science, society, and governance in the Ecosystem of Trust in Science. It responds to the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative models that can navigate today's fragmented information landscape and complex scientific environment.

Why Trust in Science matters

The traditional Ecosystem of Trust in Science, previously led by established institutions and governed by fixed norms, is being reshaped by **new actors, including influencers, community leaders, citizen scientists, private enterprises, and public-private partnerships.** At the same time, **social media, digital platforms**, and **rising mis- and disinformation** complicate the relationship between scientific integrity and public confidence. While surveys show that trust in science remains generally high across Europe, this trust does not always translate into public support for science-based policies. The VERITY Protocol helps address this gap, offering a systemic approach to understand, along with specific recommendations to reinforce, the evolving Ecosystem of Trust in Science and the roles of various actors as Stewards of Trust (SoT).

- VERITY reshapes the 'ecosystem of trust in science', a dynamic conceptual space where societal trust in science is formed, shaped, negotiated, and influenced. We broaden the scope of trust in science, including new stakeholders like companies, influencers, and peers, and build joint responsibility for maintaining, enhancing, repairing, and nurturing societal trust in science - wrote **Agata Gurzawska,** VERITY Project Coordinator.

A new approach: Co-Creation with over 500 stakeholders

Developed through **citizen media labs, focus groups, workshops, and surveys** involving more than **500 stakeholders**, the VERITY Protocol identifies six core strategies to build trust in science:

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- **Trustworthy Science -** Foster open science, research integrity, ethical standards, inclusivity, and transparent funding practices.
- **Public Engagement -** Involve citizens as co-creators across the research cycle. Promote recognition of their contributions to science.
- **Education & Awareness -** Strengthen digital and science literacy through curricula and public campaigns. Counter mis/disinformation and echo chambers.
- **Science Communication -** Enhance transparency, accessibility and relatability in conveying scientific knowledge.

- **Supportive Policy Frameworks -** Craft inclusive, transparent, evidence-informed policies. Avoid cherry-picking science to support political agendas.
- **Cross-sector Collaboration -** Encourage partnerships across disciplines, sectors, and borders to foster a resilient, innovative science ecosystem.

Collaboration is key: Stewards of Trust in action

Each Steward of Trust (SoT) plays a distinct yet interconnected role in implementing the VERITY recommendations:

- Scientists conduct research, produce new knowledge, and develop scientific innovations.
- Educators engage openly with the public and young people, communicate clearly, promote critical thinking, and support inclusive, responsible research practices.
- Science communicators and journalists bridge the gap between complex research and public accessibility.
- Policymakers and funders design the structures and incentives that ensure trust, transparency, and impact.

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To effectively combat challenges such as mis/disinformation, growing distrust, and fragmented science governance, these actors must work in synergy across domains.

This includes integrated efforts between Science Production, Education, Communication, Policy, Implementation, Oversight, Funding and Citizen Science - all mapped in the VERITY's ecosystem-based framework.

This ecosystemic model promotes ongoing feedback loops between societal needs, scientific research and innovation, and policy responsiveness. Embedding new research into curricula, ensuring ethical oversight of applications, aligning funding with public values, and democratising research processes all reinforce the trustworthiness and relevance of science.

Moreover, context matters: the VERITY Protocol stresses the need for tailored interventions based on local and demographic variables such as political affiliation, socio-economic conditions, age, and gender. Effective trust-building strategies must consider how different communities engage with science and how global polarisation and digital media shape perceptions.

What comes next for VERITY?

To ensure the Protocol's real-world impact, VERITY developed an accessible, flexible, and **interactive online tool.** This tool is designed for Stewards of Trust, such as policymakers, researchers, educators, funders and communicators, to explore strategies based on their roles and needs.

Accompanying materials, such as 1-2-page policy briefs and infographics, meet stakeholder preferences for clear, concise, and interactive communication, and are fully aligned with frameworks like the European Research Area, Horizon Europe 2025–2027 and UNESCO's Open Science Recommendations.

An **interactive visualisation platform** will be launched in August 2025, allowing users to explore and apply the VERITY recommendations dynamically across sectors and societal challenges.

As VERITY concludes, its legacy begins

As the project comes to an end, we look back with pride on the achievements made possible through collective effort, co-creation, and critical reflection. At the same time, we look forward with determination. The VERITY Protocol of Recommendations is not an endpoint: **it is a foundation**. A foundation for more effective science policies, trustworthy and participatory research, responsive science communication, empowered education, and a collaborative Ecosystem of Trust in Science.

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We warmly thank all our partners, participants, and supporters who have joined us on this journey. Let us continue to build the Ecosystem of Trust in Science, together.

Goodbye from the VERITY Project, for now. But our work continues.

Stay connected. Stay engaged. And help us carry forward the mission of trust in science. For more information, visit: www.verityproject.eu.

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