

A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery



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Preamble

Each year the impacts of bush fires, floods, storms, cyclones and other disasters sees communities faced with the difficult and distressing task of negotiating the journey of recovery.

This resource explores some of the challenges likely to be encountered by community leaders and practitioners working to engage and support communities in recovery. It offers a series of helpful recommendations or 'principles' for effective engagement that draw on the experience and expertise of emergency management and community engagement professionals from around Australia and New Zealand.

This guide is intended for anyone involved in a disaster recovery situation; community leaders, politicians, engagement practitioners, workers from specialised agencies, those without prior recovery experience, or for recovery engagement professionals who have experience in this work but who may be working in a new community that they are unfamiliar with.

The content focuses on the 'human' element of recovery, examining the importance of effective engagement, and identifying useful strategies that maximise the potential for sustained, strategic disaster recovery that is genuinely community-led. While the focus of the guide is on the recovery phase, the information has relevance for communities before, during and after a disaster, and may prove equally valuable to those working with communities through all stages of emergency management.

Methodology

In May 2014 The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Australasia hosted a Masterclass as a part of the New Zealand Leadership Forum with Anne Leadbeater OAM, an independent national consultant who specialises in disaster recovery and community resilience. A further series of Master classes were held in early 2015 in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide and Hobart

As part of each workshop, attendees participated in a World Café session that explored a series of questions in relation to community engagement and disaster recovery:

- Why is this work hard to do? (What are the barriers and challenges for participation? What gets in the way?)
- What could help? (What knowledge, strategies and approaches would make it possible?)
- What is success? (What do we measure? When do we celebrate?)
- What are the pitfalls?

The responses from each of these Master classes were compiled and following an expression of interest process, a working group consisting of 15 expert practitioners from across Australia and New Zealand, was formed to analyse the information and create this resource.

Principle #1

Any emergency management process should begin with a thorough understanding of the drivers and values of a community.

All communities, even smaller ones, are complex in their own way, and may consist of smaller micro communities within. While the shared experience of the disaster may have a galvanising effect for a short time, no two people will experience the event in exactly the same way, and just as before the disaster, there will always be differing views. It is important that the demographics, values, drivers, tensions and aspirations of a community are identified so that what mattered before the disaster is reflected in recovery. These 'soft facts' can be obtained through detailed discussions with a broad range cross-section of the community.

Creating a community profile and stakeholder map can be a useful way to ensure that 'hard facts' such as demographic data, lists of local service providers and resources can be accessed and shared between relevant agencies and with the community. This information is particularly useful for people coming to help from outside the area and is a practical document that can be prepared before disaster strikes. Working to develop a community profile can be a great way to engage a community in disaster preparedness and resource-sharing initiatives

IAP2 resources can provide guidance to practitioners on community profiling and stakeholder analysis – whether these activities are undertaken in the preparedness phase or in recovery, it is worth investing the time to understand the community you are working to engage.

Connecting with community aspirations and values is particularly important in recovery. For example, if a community was fundraising to build a childcare centre before the disaster, the summary replacement of an under-utilised community hall without consulting the community and without regard for the need for childcare is unlikely to be considered a good outcome in recovery. Similarly, if large numbers of trees are removed after a fire to reduce the risk for next fire season, this will likely be at odds with community values if the main reason people live in that location is for the bush setting.

Principle #2

Emergency management plans should include an ‘engagement plan’ that reinforces the importance of effective community engagement before, during and after emergencies.

Effective engagement must always take into account five elements: context, project scope, people, purpose, and influence.

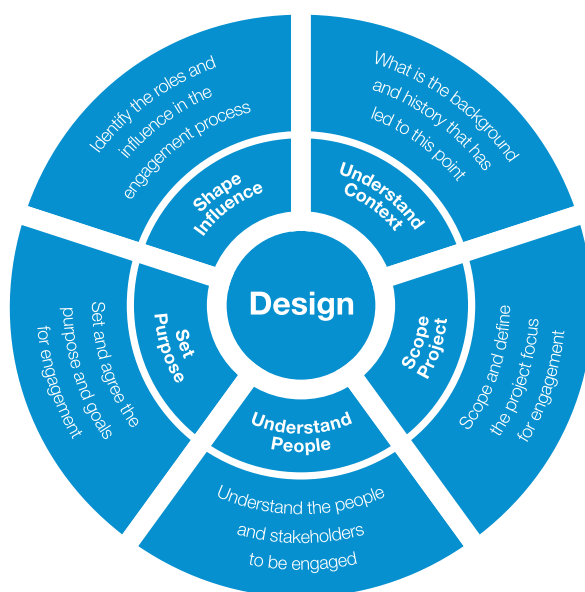
1. Context: As a practitioner, you need to understand the context of the engagement, and the background and history that has led to this point. How critical is the current situation? What else might be happening? What other factors or influences need to be considered?

2. Project Scope: What needs to happen or be resolved? As an engagement practitioner, you need to ensure clarity of scope of the project or decision including what is negotiable and what is not, what resources are available and how much time is needed to attend to the matter.

3. People: Who is affected and passionate about the matter? Which people need to be considered and who has strength and influence in the situation?

4. Purpose: Has the purpose of the project been established, and is there agreement with all stakeholders about the purpose and goals for the engagement? The purpose statement sets out how the involvement of the community and stakeholders will contribute to the scope of the work or decision.

5. Influence: A statement about influence will identify roles for the community and the organisation, and shape what influence they will have on the outcome. These five elements are interdependent and must align and connect for effective engagement design. Changes in the profile of the stakeholders and people may change the engagement purpose; changes in the purpose will change the profile of the stakeholders and people; and changes in the purpose or profile of the people will change the level of influence or the role in decision making or action.



Principle #2

Community engagement following a disaster is both critically important and extremely challenging. The effect of grief and trauma can make it hard to absorb information or to make decisions, while the effort involved in clearing debris and attending to recovery issues can be both exhausting and overwhelming. It is likely that normal communication channels and networks will be disrupted, and that people may have been displaced from the area, making it difficult to participate in engagement activities. There will often be considerable pressure for decisions to be made and outcomes delivered in time frames that may not reflect the needs of the impacted community.

It is important to approach the community with respect and honesty, understanding that people will move through different stages of the grief process in their own time. Processes may need to be simplified and timetables slowed down to enable participation by those who have been impacted. Building trust and forming genuine relationships with the community will ultimately lead to better outcomes. Planning, in advance, how best to engage the community in recovery as part of a broader emergency management plan will help to overcome these challenges and serve to emphasise the importance of this work



Principle #3

Strive for continuous improvement for the sake of affected communities.

Sometimes there is a reluctance to talk about areas for improvement following a disaster – it can even seem disingenuous, given the immense contribution by so many to the response and recovery efforts. But it should be emphasised that this is not a time to lay blame but to be honest about what could be changed or improved for next time. Quite often these ideas take time to be fully developed and approved before policy or training can be adapted so it is important to act on the lessons learned relatively quickly after an event.

Strong inter agency relationships, collaboration and trust are important to enable shared learnings. Tactful open dialogue reduces the risk of offence and creates the opportunity to work together to find solutions.

Following any emergency event, each agency should be encouraged to think about what they think they did really well and what could have been done better, and to share this information with the other agencies and the community. A well-facilitated community discussion exploring the emergency experience and lessons learnt from the community's perspective, including what might be done differently next time, can encourage a sense of ownership and the formulation of locally relevant strategies.



Principle #4

Identify, recognise and support vulnerable members of the community.

A 'vulnerable' person can include anyone who might find it difficult to receive, understand or act on information before, during or after an emergency.

In any community there will be people who may require extra support in recovery; e.g. the elderly, people with a disability, people at risk of domestic violence, those with mobility issues, parents with young children, tourists, people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and others depending on the communities affected.

In some States, Red Cross has a 'Vulnerable Persons Register', which may be accessed by an Emergency Manager Coordinator in special cases. Each State has different mechanisms in place to help identify people who are more vulnerable in the event of an emergency/disaster, it is important to find out how your State accesses such information.

'Knowing your Neighbours' is another important strategy initiated by Red Cross and other emergency services as part of preparing for an emergency.

See; http://redcross.org.au/files/03561_RediPlan_Emergency_step4_Sept2011.pdf

Flood



Pictorial signage can assist with communicating messages of importance

Principle #5

Consult broadly to identify legitimate local leaders and influencers.

A critical strategy for those working in recovery is to identify and connect with existing community structures and local networks. The community's ability to return to 'pre-disaster' functioning will be best supported by identifying and working with legitimate community leaders and champions. Those who held leadership roles at the time of the disaster will likely have local knowledge and connections that will prove invaluable to the recovery effort. In regional and rural areas, advice on identifying local leaders could be sought from a range of sources including:

In cities and suburbs, local community networks may be based more on 'areas of shared interest' than on geographic areas. However, the value of engaging with local leaders, who will resonate with the recovering community is just as important. 'Emergent' leaders and groups are another common aspect of disaster recovery whose efforts and potential can represent a valuable resource, particularly when linked into existing community networks.

Service Clubs
Churches
Pub
Post Office
Local Members of Parliament
Sporting Clubs
Local Council
Business Associations
Hospital / Health / Community Services
Local Media
School/Pre School / Youth Group
Local Store
Police and Emergency Services
Cultural Services
Library
Senior Citizens
Indigenous Services
Social Media
Men's Sheds / Community Houses
Resident and Ratepayers Groups
Neighbourhood Watch Groups

Principle #6

Adopt a community responsive approach.

While a top down approach may be necessary in the initial period following a disaster where decisions must be made quickly by those with authority, ultimately the community need to be empowered to develop their own goals and strategies and to regain a sense of control. This will make the period of transition from short to longer term recovery and beyond easier and will also lead to a more flexible, adaptable approach driven by the needs of the community. Such an approach will also help to avoid, or at least challenge any reliance on templated, one-size-fits-all approaches to recovery by recognising and celebrating the unique qualities of each community.

A community responsive approach can be important in preventing over-reliance on temporary recovery processes and programs, which will ultimately be discontinued, and in avoiding restrictive, externally imposed time frames that may be out of step with those of the community.

A genuinely consultative approach reminds people that they don't need permission to help others and will actually encourage their input.

The IAP2 Quality Assurance Standards are an important resource in helping to define a community responsive approach:



In many recovery projects there are likely to be elements that cannot be influenced by stakeholders. This may be due to budget, viability, safety or legislative requirements. These elements are the “non-negotiables” and need to be clearly communicated to stakeholders at the commencement of the engagement exercise.

Principle #7

Be mindful of the political implications.

This issue was raised in most forums throughout Australia and New Zealand. It pertains predominantly to different levels of understanding and uncertainty about what can and can't be done or delivered- particularly between the three levels of government. 'Hidden' agendas or interference that can steer recovery efforts off track were also considered a common challenge.

Adopting clear, transparent processes for all leaders and levels of government to observe is considered a positive way forward, along with harnessing the opportunity that their willingness to be involved represents. Being clear on 'who is funding what' is considered important along with being realistic about what each level of government can do. Likewise, it is important that all agencies and the community are clear on which agency is leading each particular aspect of recovery, and what the protocols are for bringing in new agencies or programs.

Politically charged relationships can be challenging to manage but their effectiveness is critical to recovery, nonetheless. Political interest often increases depending on the level of publicity surrounding the disaster and the recovery, and because the community expects their leaders to be across the issues and actively demonstrating their involvement.

'Politics' between agencies can also be an issue for practitioners to be mindful of when working to support recovering communities.

Principle #8

Adopt an 'assets based' approach to recovery.

A lack of capacity and resources is often cited as a challenge in disaster recovery - government budgets are tight and people's needs can be significant and complex. It is necessary for those working to support recovery to identify and manage the personnel, skills, products and services required for the short, medium and long term future.

If we are to connect with the natural resilience within communities, it is important to begin from a position of strength by considering the inherent skills, capacity, experience and expertise of the community itself – what does the community have to draw on? What recovery initiatives has the community already been able to organise, and how can they be supported? A genuine, asset-based approach can positively influence recovery priorities and strategies, and promote a strong sense of self determination and confidence in the community.

Such an approach will help to identify the local products or services that can be procured and utilised during the recovery effort to help put money back into a community, provide jobs, economic growth and support people to feel they have a future to work towards.



Principle #9

Identify and utilise the most effective ways to communicate

It is important to ask a community how they want to receive and contribute information. Effective, consistent, two-way communication is the lifeblood of recovery but it may mean different things for different people and parts of the community. Using as many, varied channels as possible and utilising existing networks will be vital.

Open and honest communication is cited as the most important consideration in building trust and collaboration. If there is a difference of opinion, let people know. If there is uncertainty about when a service will be restored, explain the situation. Even in the most difficult of circumstances, people can be remarkably stoic and patient, providing they know what is happening.

Recovery information must be timely, relevant, consistent, and accessible to those who need it. Consideration must be given to the needs of people with a disability, and those with cultural or language barriers. Having strategies to work with the media will be an important aspect of effective communication.

A simple and useful communication model for recovery was developed following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York:

What we know; what we don't know; what we are doing; what we need you (the community) to do.

Engaging openly with the community, responding to questions and receiving information and feedback will ensure that the communication content and processes are relevant to 'where people are' on their recovery journey.

Principle #10

Manage expectations

Be mindful of over promising and raising the expectations of the affected community or recovery workers. Don't promise what can't be delivered – no matter how well intentioned, this will lead to further disappointment and can erode trust within and between recovery services and the community.

Recovery work is challenging for volunteers and paid workers alike. Knowing what you can influence and accepting what you cannot is one key to reducing stress and fatigue, and maintaining a positive approach.

It can sometimes be hard for recovery workers when a community no longer 'needs' them but it is important to celebrate this achievement and remind workers that this outcome is the very nature of recovery work and something to be proud of.



Principle #11

Have a holistic view of progress

It is rare for 'success' in recovery to be well defined, particularly in the early stages. The need to maintain flexible, responsive approaches is at odds with the establishment of firm goals and benchmarks, and progress can take many shapes and forms.

It will be important to assess recovery in a holistic way and to remember to celebrate achievements – both large and small. Some indicators of effective recovery include:

For individuals:

- People are able to think beyond the disaster (and every conversation doesn't start with the event)
- An ability to look forward to things again
- Steps to move forward – even small steps – are evident
- Resuming an interest in hobbies and leisure activities
- Being able, once again, to live a life that you value

For families:

- Re-emergence of routine, e.g. school, work, sport
- Being together again (co-located)
- In secure, sustainable housing
- Celebrate rituals, re-establishing or creating new rituals to celebrate together
- Shared leisure activities

Community:

- People returning to the community
- Stakeholders working together collectively
- Self-governance and a regained sense of control
- Recovery centres close down or go back to their ordinary purpose, e.g. churches, community centres
- Recovery work is absorbed by local workers and services
- Development and implementation of local strategies

Built and Natural Environment:

- Re-establishment of utility services eg water, electricity, sewerage
- Disaster clean-up and removal of debris completed
- Vegetation management, e.g. dangerous trees, erosion, pest plants
- Waste management services resumed
- Repair and rebuilding work commenced / continuing

Economy and Infrastructure:

- Supplies able to be delivered (relies on transport, roads, etc)
- Communications restored
- Business restoration and/or renewal and a return to pre-disaster functioning
- Resumption of employment
- People willing and able to spend time and money in their own community
- Ability to provide community with the goods and services they need

For more information on Community and Stakeholder engagement visit www.iap2.org.au

Thank you to everyone involved in the development of this guide- particularly the Working Group members;

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Resources

<https://iap2.org.au/resources/iap2-published-resources/>

<https://iap2.org.au/training/foundations-in-public-participation/>

<https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/e55c443d-53e1-4022-98b8-65ad339ab11f/Psychological-First-Aid-An-Australian-Guide.pdf.aspx>

<https://www.ag.gov.au>

http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/Disaster-Resources/Documents/Queensland_Recovery_Guidelines.pdf

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/selfrecovery/id942944983?mt=8>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.munities.gov.au.disasterrecoverydroid&hl=en>

<https://getready.qld.gov.au/>

http://www.resorgs.org.nz/images/stories/booklet_guides/leading_in_disaster_recovery_.pdf

http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Communicating_in_recovery_resource.pdf

<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/cptutorial?opendocument&navpos=230>

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Notes

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