

Resilience building: timing and messaging matter

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The Six C's



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Lessons learnt from large disasters continually highlight that community education and engagement programs are key to informing and empowering individuals and communities to plan and prepare for disasters.

While there is evidence of many community programs being delivered, the continual mention and recommendation of their importance suggests previous methodologies are not significantly successful or simply miss the mark.^{1, 2, 3}

As a sector, and as practitioners, we understand the principles of successful community engagement methodologies and communication theory, however, we are often time poor, inadequately resourced or fail to recognise all the complexities within the communities within which the programs are being delivered. Sometimes programs are just 'delivered' with little regard of the importance of understanding the community, which results in poor attendances and wasted resources.

This is problematic as government and emergency services agencies are putting more emphasis on a shared-responsibility approach where community play important roles in all phases of emergency management. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) state that:

All sectors of society make disaster risk informed decisions, are accountable for reducing risks within their control and invest in reducing disaster risk in order to limit the cost of disasters when they occur.⁴

Having worked alongside communities for over 17 years and appreciating the difficulties in developing communication strategies using communication theory, we developed a process that has the potential to increase community engagement participation, build the capacity and capability of people within communities and provide efficiencies for practitioners. The process uses in-depth community profile data analysis that categorises segments of the community and uses profile modelling to develop a strategy that can be used by practitioners to successfully communicate with communities based on their profile needs.

This process was tested during the 2018 Victorian South-west complex fires⁵ where recovery communications had to be delivered to diverse cohorts including rural and remote farming communities. Our process provided a clear plan on how and when to engage with the different segments of the affected communities and which channels to use. This implementation was recognised in the 2019 Resilient Australia Awards and the EMPA Award for Excellence in Emergency Communication.

Being provided with an easy-to-follow report that identifies segments of the community, how they prefer to receive information, at what time they prefer to receive the information and through what channels will increase the development of disaster resilience building capabilities and pave a way forward in how we work in partnership to strengthen all segments of the community.

Endnotes

1. Victoria. Parliament 1939, *Transcript of evidence and Report of the Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of and measures taken to prevent the bush fires of January, 1939, and to protect life and property and the measures to be taken to prevent bush fires in Victoria and to protect life and property in the event of future bush fires*, pp.25. At: <https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/30d8df79-9377-5392-af30-6eacc9e0c3/content>.
2. Parliament of Victoria 2009, *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report Summary*, pp.6. At: http://royalcommission.vic.gov.au/finaldocuments/summary/PF/VBRC_Summary_PF.pdf.
3. Commonwealth of Australia 2020, *Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*, pp.246. At: <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/royal-commission-national-natural-disaster-arrangements-report>.
4. National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, at <https://nema.gov.au/about-us/policies/strategies-and-frameworks#Overview>.
5. Victorian South-west complex fires, at <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/2018-bushfire-vic-south-west-complex-fires>