

National disaster recovery principle 3: Use community-led approaches

Speed read

- Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive and flexible, engages with communities and supports them to actively participate in their own recovery and move forward.
- People may need different levels of support at various times throughout the recovery process.
- Community-led recovery builds on community resilience, strengths and local knowledge, and builds collaborative partnerships between the community and those supporting recovery.

Key points

Communities manage their own recovery. Community members are the first responders during an emergency, and take actions to save and protect themselves, their families and their communities. Disaster-affected people, households and communities understand their needs better than any of the professional, government, non-government or corporate supporters. They have the right to make their own choices about their own recovery. Empowering communities to create their own solutions can improve overall social cohesion which is critical to sustainable recovery outcomes.

Recovery requires community engagement. [Community engagement](#) is a term for any process or interaction with stakeholders, community groups or individuals. It can include one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement in decision making, and empowered action in informal groups and/or formal partnerships. Best practice community engagement is underpinned by inclusiveness, commitment, building relationships, mutual respect, integrity, transparency, accountability, feedback and evaluation.

Integrate disaster recovery and long-term development. After a disaster, affected communities need to face their new reality, and identify their needs and priorities. It is important to consider communities' values, aspirations, development plans and patterns of local leadership that existed before the disaster; and support communities to integrate these into recovery processes.

Community development in recovery. Community development is a method of working with people. It starts from the needs and aspirations of individuals and groups and moves to articulate and organise action around those needs and aspirations – placing them at the forefront. To maximise the potential for community development in recovery, it is vital to appoint relevant personnel as a priority.

Understand vulnerabilities within communities. Understanding the vulnerabilities of communities is integral to managing disaster risks and implementing effective emergency planning, preparedness and recovery programs.

Asset-based community development. Refers to the practice of using and building on existing local networks and strengths in communities. Engaging with and complementing the local knowledge and experience of affected communities will best achieve effective outcomes. Although an assets-based approach is the best way to go about disaster recovery community development, local capacities to meet the immediate and ongoing recovery needs should be assessed, monitored and supported.

Have processes to manage conflict. Examples of issues that can cause conflict include differing rates of repair, inadequate or no insurance, community expectations and opposing community values. Opposing values can include rebuilding versus environmental issues, country versus city, safety versus accessibility, and prioritising of needs (such as a focus on employment and the economy versus accommodation and shelter needs). Cash programming and allocation of funds can cause perceived inequity issues, and fundraising appeals that appear to duplicate effort can create confusion within communities.

Recovery presents adaptive change opportunities. Recovery processes can support people to make adaptive changes – that is, to come to terms with their different life circumstances and to move forward into a new, changed reality, which may in time provide new opportunities.

Build resilience through recovery. Resilient communities predict and anticipate disasters, absorb, respond and recover from the shock, improvise and innovate in response to disasters. Building community resilience through the recovery process is a desirable outcome. Achieving disaster resilience requires a long-term commitment to behavioural change and partnerships.

Take action

- Put up the [National Principles for Disaster Recovery poster](https://bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciplesPoster) in your office or recovery centre (bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciplesPoster)
- Use [Toolkit 1 Community recovery checklists](https://bit.ly/RecoveryChecklists): Checklist 3 – Community development worker role statement (bit.ly/RecoveryChecklists)
- Use the [Checklist: Planning for recovery pre-event – applying the principles](https://bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples) (SRRG 2018) (bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples)
- Use the [Checklist: Applying the principles post-disaster](https://bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples) (SRRG 2018) (bit.ly/RecoveryPrinciples)

More information

- [Community Recovery Handbook](#) (AIDR 2018)
- [National Principles for Disaster Recovery](#)
- [The public participation spectrum developed by the International Association of Public Participation](#) (IAP2)
- [Australian Red Cross: Recover from disasters resources](#)