

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the approach, findings and lessons learned from a collaborative resilience project between Melton City Council and Wyndham City Council in Victoria. The project sought to educate community leaders about disaster resilience through participation in an 'Emergency Ready Communities' forum. As part of the forum, members participated in a workshop to assess the resilience capacity of their communities using the Torrens Resilience Institute Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard. This was a valuable exercise in community engagement as well as in resilience. The exercise highlighted key areas for future improvement.

Developing 'Emergency Ready Communities': a tale of two Victorian councils

Andrew Mason and Eleanor Crofts, Melton and Wyndham city councils, and Dr Malinda Steenkamp and Imogen Ramsey, Torrens Resilience Institute, describe a workshop to assess resilience in two local council areas.

Introduction

Application of a resilience-based approach is not solely the domain of emergency management agencies; rather, it is a shared responsibility between governments, communities, businesses and individuals... communities need to be empowered to take shared responsibility for coping with disasters. (Council of Australian Governments 2011)

Being 'emergency ready' is a shared responsibility between emergency services and everyone in the community. Being 'emergency ready' enhances disaster resilience. This entails having the information, knowledge, tools and social connections to be better able to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from all types of emergencies (COAG 2011). Empowering communities is a fundamental step in resilience-building, which is discussed prominently in theory but is often viewed as a herculean task in practice because of the perceived scale of community engagement and resources required. Although all members of communities cannot be identified all of the time, communities often have existing formal and informal leaders, respected elders and trusted informants who can be relied on to convey information and link their communities into the wider community (Haddow & Haddow 2013). By identifying existing networks and group leaders, connections and support can be given to their leadership and they can be provided with the skills and tools to understand the risks to their communities from hazards and help them implement initiatives for long-term resilience.

'Emergency Ready Communities' is a collaborative resilience project between Melton and Wyndham City Councils in Melbourne's outer west. These council areas are two of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia (Newton & Glackin 2014). With 89 km of peri-urban interface (54.5 km Melton, 34.5 km Wyndham), rapid population growth and residential development in fire-prone environments (Foster *et al.* 2013), bushfire and grass fire threats are a concern. Other hazards of concern to Melton and Wyndham include hazardous material release from major industrial facilities as well as storms and flooding, extreme weather, and heatwave (City of Melton 2014, City of Wyndham 2015). The identification of these hazards highlights the need for communities to be active and ready for such events.

The aim of the 'Emergency Ready Communities' project is to strengthen partnerships among communities by fostering ongoing collaboration with and between community groups, and embedding long-term emergency

management engagement structure. By creating inclusive and connected leadership, the project builds an active group who are capable of helping their communities prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

This paper describes an important step in the initiative: the 'Emergency Ready Communities Forum'. The forum brought together community leaders and representatives (collectively referred to as community members in this paper) from the cities of Melton and Wyndham to hear from extraordinary leaders and emergency management professionals, and participate in a workshop to assess their community's resilience to disasters. The activity used the Torrens Resilience Institute (TRI) Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard. These assessments established a baseline community resilience score while connecting and fostering future collaborations among key stakeholders from the various communities with a focus on continued community resilience.

Assessing resilience

All Australian communities have a degree of vulnerability to large-scale emergencies and it is widely recognised that recovery is a difficult and complex process (Alesch, Arendt & Holly 2009, Aldrich 2012). A component of building community resilience involves building the capacity of local networks to reduce the effects of disasters and emergency events in the response and recovery phases (Pommerening 2011, COAG 2011). To identify gaps in resilience across the municipalities and develop appropriate approaches for building resilience, a baseline assessment of resilience was conducted. Communities of various sizes and geographic locations were included in the assessment, which was undertaken using the TRI Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard. The Scorecard is specifically designed for use by communities to understand the likely level of risk and the community's resilience in emergency events at a specific point in time (see Box 1 for a description, Arbon *et al.* 2012). The objective for applying the Scorecard was to obtain information specific to each community to inform and direct the councils' emergency management and disaster planning.

The Forum

The forum was a leadership development opportunity for community members to better understand disaster resilience. During the morning session, a range of speakers provided emergency management and leadership information. The workshop using the Scorecard was held in the afternoon.

The forum and workshop were an opportunity to test the Municipal Community Profile and Engagement Framework (MCPEF) (Mason & Crofts 2015), which incorporates a modified version of the Community Engagement Framework outlined in the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* (COAG 2011). The MCPEF provides

Box 1: The TRI Community Disaster Resilience Scorecard

The TRI Scorecard assesses four dimensions of community resilience, being:

1. connectedness within a community
2. the level of risk and vulnerability
3. the procedures that support planning, response and recovery (PRR)
4. the emergency PPR resources available (Arbon *et al.* 2012).

Three to seven items are used to assess each of the four dimensions. A score from 1-5 is given for each item and scores are added for a subtotal for each dimension. The four subtotal scores are combined for an overall resilience score. For each dimension, as well as for the overall score, a community can identify whether a particular dimension falls in a 'Red zone', a yellow 'Caution zone', or a green 'Going well' zone.

The Scorecard and the process of completing it are available at www.flinders.edu.au/tri/toolkits/community-resilience-toolkit.cfm.

a conceptual model for identifying new and emerging, community groups with a social connection or a responsibility to one or more neighbourhoods in a municipality. Using the framework was helpful to identify and contact leaders of these groups and involve them in emergency management activities and events.

A total of 124 people attended the forum, including community members, emergency management professionals, facilitators and special guests. Personal data was collected from attendees during the online event registration. A number of groups were represented including youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, business owners, and people from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds. A small number of people who registered did not attend the event and sent representatives where possible. Of the community members who did attend, there was a reasonable gender cross-section represented, with 44 males (59 per cent) and 31 females (41 per cent) attending (the gender balance of each municipality is 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female (Profile.id.com.au 2016)). The age range for the sample was 14 to 79 years with 34 attendees (45 per cent) aged between 50 and 79 years. Community group representation was diverse.

The number of participants who identified as belonging to specified groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants identifying as belonging to specific groups

Group	Number of participants
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	10
Environment and Heritage	4
Cultural	3
Interfaith and Ecumenical	3
Local emergency services	15
Residents' associations	7
Service/Social clubs	7
Women's groups	2
Youth	8
Animal/Agriculture	1
Neighbourhood houses	1
Schools	2
Other group leaders	12

Thirty-eight participants (51 per cent) belonged to more than one group, and 13 (17 per cent) were in one group only. No data was available for 24 participants (32 per cent).

The Scorecard workshop

The workshop commenced with a presentation by TRI staff on the Scorecard to 72 community members who participated in the workshop. The presentations included instructions on how to score across four resilience dimensions. The participants were organised into seven groups with broad and diverse community representation



related to age, gender, background, social connection, life experience, knowledge about resilience, and local government experience. Group sizes ranged from 6 to 13 members and were decided by the number of attendees from the specific suburban regions. There were three groups from Melton (two from Melton and Melton south, and one that represented smaller communities within the municipality including Burnside, Caroline Springs, Hillside, Taylors Hill, Eynesbury, Exford, Rockbank, Diggers Rest and Toolern Vale). There were four groups from Wyndham (two representing Werribee and Wyndham Vale, one representing the smaller communities of Laverton North, Point Cook, Truganina and Williams Landing, and one representing Hoppers Crossing and Tarneit).

Eighteen volunteers from local community groups (Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches, Victorian State Emergency Service, and local government) facilitated the small group discussions and the assessment. These facilitators had attended a Scorecard training session a week prior to the workshop. At the training session they were briefed on the Scorecard exercise, provided with facilitator skills training, and participated in a hazard identification exercise. This same exercise was used as an icebreaker for the workshop prior to commencing the Scorecard component. The hazard exercise incorporated identification of important community assets and the point of impact on the community for each identified hazard. During the workshop, 17 emergency management professionals from Wyndham and Melton Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees were on hand as subject matter experts and answered questions in relation to emergency response planning.

The assessment process

The process described by the Scorecard developers involves the working groups to meet three times over a period of four to six weeks (Torrens Research Institute 2012). Previous feedback on the Scorecard process showed that meeting more than once was unrealistic to some, while others who met three times found it difficult to get all participants to attend. The first



Resources were provided to help participation in the exercise and gather the relevant information from participants. Images: Torrens Resilience Institute, Flinders University

meeting is designed to establish a group leader and for the participants to conduct research and collect data. The researchers of that assessment concluded that the groups had an inability to gather the required data to undertake the assessment (Singh-Peterson *et al.* 2014).

For these reasons a different approach was adopted to that prescribed by the Scorecard developers. Only one meeting was conducted and all the data and resources required for the assessment was provided at each workshop table. This included a copy of the relevant *Municipal Emergency Management Plan* with all relevant sub-plans, a history of events in the region, large-scale maps of the municipality, the municipality's Municipal Risk Register, and a community profile handout that had been developed specifically for the activity using public data available from the website <http://home.id.com.au/>. This website provides demographic information for local governments. A benefit in providing this information was that each group had the same resources to complete the assessment thus limiting any bias related to access to materials. A copy of the Scorecard was available that contained pre-populated data about the community sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These resources fast-tracked the process of completing the Scorecard as participants could quickly identify and refer to the relevant information required.

Observations of the workshop process

The group dynamics of the workshop participants was diverse. Most people found it easy to get along, but for some, circumstances seemed more challenging. What appeared to draw people together was being previously acquainted with others in the group, coming from a similar background, and sharing ideas and experiences. The positive aspects of inter-group cooperation were the robust discussion stimulated by the questions, active listening, accepting new or different viewpoints, contributing experiences and opinions, and working with others to reach consensus. There were groups where members appeared disconnected, divided or disengaged. This may have been due to clashing personalities, different backgrounds (e.g. a significant age difference), opposing perspectives, or an incomplete understanding of the purpose of the task.

Some groups appeared to find the Scorecard exercise more challenging than others and took more time to complete the questions. One group adopted a pragmatic approach, whereby members paired up to score the items. They completed all four sections of the Scorecard ahead of schedule. Another group experienced problems with understanding and interpreting some of the questions and content and were observed to have difficulty making progress beyond that point.

The facilitation style influenced each group's approach to responding to the items. There was little consistency in terms of whether groups followed a formal order or structure when completing each item, whether everyone

was expected to contribute, and how disagreement was resolved. Some groups had people take it in turns to explain the score they had allocated to a question, while others led a group discussion and then asked for a show of hands for each score allocated at the end. Other groups took an unstructured approach preferring to allow people to speak up whenever they had something to say. On the whole, the facilitators were able to start conversations, encourage contributions from all group members, and oversee the scoring of the Scorecard.

Resilience scores

Table 1 shows the scores for each of the Scorecard components, as well as the overall resilience scores for each of the seven workshop groups. Due to the range of risks of each municipality and because most of the community members and the interest groups they represent had not previously been involved in the process of developing emergency management plans, it was expected that no community would score in the 'green' zone for overall resilience. Three scored within the 'yellow' zone and four in the 'red', highlighting the importance of ongoing initiatives and collaboration aimed at building community resilience across the municipality. The area that received the lowest scores on average was 'Procedures'. Many participants voiced uncertainty about emergency management practices in their community. This lack of knowledge suggests that comprehensive, community-based education about emergency management processes and municipal risks should be adopted. An integrated approach to involve the public in this process of developing emergency management practices in planning, response and recovery is required.

These preliminary scores provide a good baseline assessment that can be a benchmark for future scores and foster a cycle of continuous improvement. The communities are extremely well positioned to build upon their scores, given the proactive nature of the councils involved (as evidenced by their support for the current project) and the high level of on-the-ground support from community members.

Evaluation results

Of the 52 participants who completed the forum evaluation, 37 (71 per cent) filled in paper forms and 15 (29 per cent) completed the evaluation online. Overall, the results indicate that the forum was well received, with 98 per cent of participants agreeing they had an improved understanding of emergency preparedness as a result of attending the forum. Similarly, 94 per cent reported they felt better able to work in their community to encourage others to accept a sense of shared responsibility in emergency management. The same number indicated they felt better able to help their community understand emergency risks. A total of 90 per cent of participants said they would discuss what they had learned at the forum with others in their

Table 1. Community resilience scores from the forum.

Resilience component	Group (number of participants)						
	Wyn-1 (10)	Wyn-2 (11)	Wyn-3 (13)	Wyn-4 (6)	Mel-1 (12)	Mel-2 (9)	Mel-3 (12)
Connectedness	6	6	8	10	11	10	8
Risk/Vulnerability	9	9	10	17	15	14	8
Procedures	4	4	5	6	4	4	5
Resources	8	7	9	11	12	12	9
Total Score	27	26	32	44	42	40	30
Score range	22-33	22-33	22-33	34-98	34-98	34-98	22-33

community. The same proportion agreed they would help their community to implement emergency-ready initiatives in the future. A high proportion of respondents (89 per cent) agreed they had developed a better understanding of the level of risk and vulnerability in their community. Approximately 85 per cent indicated they had developed a better understanding of the procedures that support disaster planning, response and recovery, with the same proportion agreeing they had developed a better understanding of the degree of connectedness in their community. Finally, more than 84 per cent of participants felt they had improved their understanding of the emergency planning, response and recovery resources available in their community.

Lessons learned

The Emergency Ready Communities Forum was an excellent platform from which to engage community members in conversations about resilience. Incorporating the Scorecard exercise into the forum showed that people had a sound understanding of community resilience, having listened to presenters speak about its application in various contexts. People also understood its relevance and importance, after being able to personally relate to and connect with the speakers. A number of valuable lessons from the forum were documented and will be useful to future groups seeking to implement the Scorecard process.

Firstly, it is important to have a diverse cross-section representation of community members to encourage discussion and improve the accuracy of responses. Some groups noted that there were often very different perceptions about Scorecard items. Having representation from diverse groups yielded many benefits, including robust discussion, highlighting knowledge gaps and perceptions between groups, and minimising biased responses. After each discussion, where there remained a difference in the score, the

lowest number to score was used as prescribed by the Scorecard instructions.

Secondly, the role of the facilitator is critical. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, a few aspects of successful facilitation stood out as important. These were confidence, previous experience, effective listening and communication skills, preparation style, and a good understanding of the Scorecard. Although there was a training and discussion session on the Scorecard beforehand, this aspect could have been strengthened with a second training session to better prepare facilitators.

Finally, if completing the Scorecard in a single workshop, preparation to ensure that participants are equipped with the relevant information is important. Providing participants with the information required to answer the Scorecard questions ensures they give informed responses and that they leave the workshop with an improved understanding of their community's resilience.

Conclusion

The workshop allowed community members to explore and interact with the concept of resilience, build their knowledge and understanding, and identify areas for improvement. It was important to have a diverse representation from the community to encourage discussion and improve the accuracy of responses.

From the evaluation, it was evident that participants found the exercise worthwhile and useful. The observations of the process will feed into planning for future workshops and resilience-building-based initiatives. With a baseline assessment now complete, future scores can be benchmarked against this starting point and promote ongoing development. Melton and Wyndham city councils will conduct a similar Scorecard workshop with their Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees to assess the perceptions of community resilience for each of the same geographical

locations. Community members will attend as observers. The results provide a comparison of the perceptions of resilience held within the communities with those of emergency management professionals.

Attendees at the forum were asked if they would like to take on a resilience activity, task or initiative for themselves, their family, group or community. Within eight weeks following the forum, 54 (60 per cent) of participants had commenced a resilience initiative. This includes a community group researching how to conduct a township emergency management plan and two groups forming a working group to conduct a community emergency risk assessment.

With 90 per cent of participants saying they would implement emergency-ready initiatives in the future, the councils will continue work in this area and introduce new and emerging community leaders to the process to enhance the community's resilience and improve their disaster resilience score. Both councils plan to adopt community-based education processes in emergency management and municipal risks to ensure public involvement in the process of developing emergency management, response and recovery plans and practices.

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About the authors

Andrew Mason works across Melton and Wyndham city councils in emergency management. He is completing a degree in Emergency Management at Charles Sturt University. Andrew has been an operational member of the Country Fire Authority for 25 years and is a member of the Victorian State Emergency Service. He is a recognised and awarded community leader and has worked on the other side of local government for many years in this capacity advocating for community groups.

Eleanor Crofts has a social science degree from RMIT University and has studied development theory at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. Her studies focused on why people think and act the way they do when it comes to environmental and social issues in highly politicised and globalised environments. Eleanor is the Community Resilience Project Officer for the cities of Wyndham and Melton. She provides community leaders with education and information to take ownership of their emergency management message.

Malinda Steenkamp is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Torrens Resilience Institute at Flinders University, Adelaide. She has a background in epidemiology, public health and extensive experience in managing projects, including those related to community resilience.

Imogen Ramsey is a Research Associate at the Torrens Resilience Institute at Flinders University, Adelaide. She has Honours in psychology from the University of Adelaide and has experience in working on projects related to community resilience.