

Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods: From informed and aware to engaged and prepared



How Tasmania Fire Service used evidence-based practice to transform community education

AFAC RESEARCH UTILISATION CASE STUDY

Key success factors:

- A clear need to improve their approach to community education.
- A collaborative action-research method that built trust and shared understanding of the context.
- A commitment to re-engineer existing processes and practices to support implementation.

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Photo by TFS, Flinders Island Community Forum, 2014.

1 Synopsis

Bushfire season after season, emergency services agencies urge householders in bushfire prone areas to plan and prepare. Yet, despite increasing investment in risk awareness and education campaigns, agencies and research bodies continue to report that many people do not do either. Typically, according to post-fire studies, many householders do not have a plan of action, and wait until the last minute to leave¹. This conundrum has continued to vex and confuse agencies. What might it take to get people to prepare to survive, protect their properties and safeguard their livelihoods?

In 2009, against a backdrop of calls for shared responsibility for disaster resilience, the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) set out to investigate. In partnership with the Bushfire CRC and University of Tasmania researchers, they started researching and developing a more effective and sustainable approach to their own community bushfire education programs. Their main aim was to understand how householders interpreted risk and what influences drove their decisions on whether to plan and prepare. These new insights would, in turn, help TFS refine and target messaging, resources and interventions. Over the next few years (2009-2013), from that initial concept, the agency-research partnership co-developed, piloted and refined a new practical community engagement model, which ultimately transformed TFS's thinking and approach to bushfire mitigation.

Under the new approach, the agency takes on a facilitator role, connecting, supporting and enabling communities and householders to take the necessary steps to plan and prepare. TFS provides guidance, tools and templates, as well as resources and targeted interventions. But in many cases they remain in the background so that the community can lead and drive the action. In this context (Paton 2006), agencies "act as consultants to communities rather than orchestrate the change".

By 2015, the new TFS community education approach, entitled **Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods**, had been integrated into operations and rolled out to over 40 communities across Tasmania. Along the way, TFS earned the support of the three tiers of government for the initiative, and was recognised by the Australian Government in 2014 with a State and National Resilient Australia Award for its contribution to promoting and building disaster resilient communities. In 2015, TFS's Community Development Coordinator, Peter Middleton, detailed the program at the International Association of Wildland Fire Conference in the United States.

This case study describes how TFS contextualised, piloted, implemented, adopted and evaluated research, from the initial concept through an adoption pathway to integration within its core operations. The case provides a brief outline of the research, details the stages of adoption, subsequent wider implementation and evaluation. Importantly, it highlights the obstacles and opportunities encountered by TFS and the factors it considered critical to the project's success and sustainability.

This case is part of a series of research utilisation cases co-developed by AFAC and its member agencies and partners to capture and share examples of good evidence-based practice and principles.

For further information on Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods, contact Mr Peter Middleton, Community Development Coordinator, Tasmania Fire Service Peter.Middleton@fire.tas.gov.au or visit www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au For further information on research utilisation for emergency management, contact Dr Noreen Krusel, Manager Research Utilisation, AFAC, Noreen.Krusel@afac.com.au or visit: www.afac.com.au/services/research

¹ Capturing community bushfire readiness: Post-bushfire interview studies 2009 – 2014
Hazard Note 004, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

2 Background

In 2008, TFS reviewed the impact of its then bushfire education campaign, *Bushfire Prepare to Survive*. Based on contemporary thinking and practice at the time, the program had campaigned around building risk awareness, promoting planning and preparedness, and used traditional media, such as printed brochures, online materials, advertising and community safety broadcasts for messaging.

On reflection, explains Peter Middleton, TFS's Community Development Coordinator, the bushfire campaigns proved successful in raising awareness of risk. However, the scale of change in preparedness at the household level was not enough to improve community safety more broadly.

At the time, new research was also emerging from the Bushfire CRC, led by international disaster and community safety expert, Professor Douglas Paton of the University of Tasmania. The research focused on how individuals interpreted hazard risk, such as bushfire, and the influences that motivated them to act on the risk. The Paton studies indicated that a mix of personal/individual factors, together with a range of social factors, such as a sense of community responsibility, influenced householder decisions to prepare. The insights provided crucial clues on potential opportunities to bridge the gap between risk awareness, householder intentions and preparatory action.

“The scale of change in preparedness at the household level was not enough to improve community safety more broadly.”

In a move to link this research with their practice, TFS engaged Dr Paton's then Bushfire CRC PhD student, Mai Frandsen, as a research partner. Her brief was to help TFS understand the motivations and influences that drove householder decisions on whether and how to prepare. For the purposes of their research, they defined preparedness as all the intellectual elements or thinking involved in the lead up to deciding to make a plan to prepare, and the actual physical implementation of the plan, including structural modifications to the property and immediate surrounds.

Until this point, according to the researchers, a considerable proportion of the available research on bushfire mitigation had been based on qualitative case studies focused on the US and south-eastern Australia. These had been valuable in developing an understanding of householder and community bushfire mitigation problems, but had limited application to “larger populations or diverse social, cultural and management contexts”.

Despite increasing awareness, information and messaging, there was no indication of any resulting increased preparedness activity, according to Paton and Frandsen². At the same time, there was a growing sense that the intensity of bushfire education campaigns may have had the unintended consequence of generating a sense of “preparedness fatigue” among those who had prepared. There was also a sense of disempowerment among those who felt that being forced to make structural changes to their properties and surrounds would spoil their natural environment. The research also highlighted that certain people perceived that responsibility for hazards remained with the authorities rather than individuals, communities and agencies.

² Frandsen M. (2012) Promoting community bushfire preparedness: Bridging the theory – practice divide. PhD thesis, University of Tasmania.

3 Research in action

For the study, Dr Frandsen developed a new conceptual Social Attachment Model of Bushfire Preparedness and used a variety of research methods to test and validate its underlying theory. One of the key aims was to determine if and how the model could be practically and sustainably integrated into TFS’s approach to community education.

The main thesis of the model was that people considered their social environment, together with their own sense of social responsibility, in deciding to prepare for bushfire risk. This included their personal social relationships, as well as relationships between agencies and community residents. The main gist was that perceptions of threatened risk, or information about threatened risk, did not determine whether people decided to take action to reduce or eliminate those risks. Instead, decisions whether to take action were based on how residents interpreted the risk, and were made in the context of their personal experiences, beliefs and expectations. These personal values and attitudes were also directly influenced by their social relationships, together with the degree to which they felt a sense of responsibility to their neighbours, neighbourhood and community.

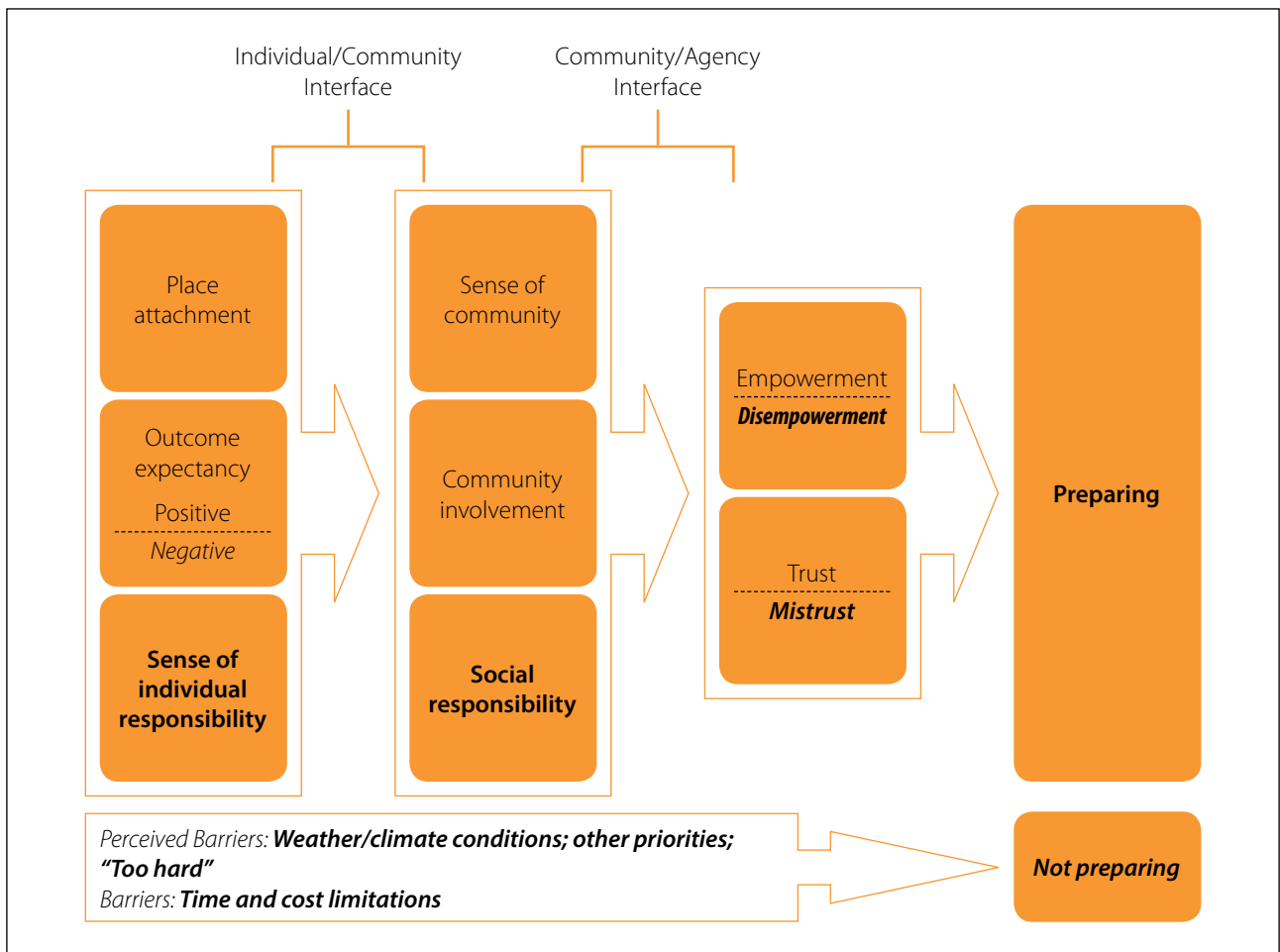


Figure 1: New Conceptual Social Attachment Model of Bushfire Preparedness. New variables highlighted in bold; factors that facilitate decisions not to prepare highlighted in italics. (Frandsen 2012)

“ The aim was to tease out the factors or influences that motivated people to intend to plan and prepare, together with the influences that compelled them to act or follow through on their intentions to prepare”.

3.1 Phased approach

The research schedule comprised three phases (from 2009 to 2013) to test and pilot the new model for interpreting and predicting bushfire preparedness decision making.

The first phase tested the practical application of theoretical model, applying an analysis of data from householders living in four bushfire prone Tasmanian communities: Bagdad, Binalong Bay, Fern Tree and Snug.

The second drew on qualitative data, gained from telephone interviews of 34 residents in fire prone communities. The aim was to validate the model and lay a foundation for the long-term evaluation of a community engagement based risk communication program.

During this phase, a thematic analysis method was used to gain additional insights into bushfire preparedness decision-making processes. The analysis examined relationships between individuals and communities, together with the relationships between agencies and their communities. This involved determining the role and impact of people's sense of belonging or attachment to their community (Place of Attachment), as well as their sense of responsibility to others in their social networks within their social environment. The aim was to tease out the factors or influences that motivated people's intentions to plan and prepare, together with the influences that compelled them to act or follow through on their intentions to prepare.

The third phase involved application of the findings of the Social Attachment Model and development and administration of a pilot for TFS. The pilot, conducted between 2009 and 2013, was applied in nine communities. This action research approach enabled the model to be piloted and progressively evaluated at the same time. Real-time information gathered from forums and field days was fed back to the TFS Community Development Officer so that the pilot could be adjusted to the needs of each community.



Photo by Peter Middleton, TFS, Dulcote Bushfire Ready Property Assessment Workshop.



Photo by Lesley King, TFS, South Hobart Bushfire Ready Property Assessment Workshop

<i>TFS pilot: Early phases of engagement</i>	
Bagdad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community Forum (15/11/09). ■ House assessments by Brigade Chief, 1x resident who attended forum; 1x neighbour of participating resident. ■ Field Day – 5 properties assessed (15/11/09). ■ Field Day – 6 properties assessed (30/10/10).
Binalong Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community Forum (13/9/09). (House assessment conducted by District Officer as a result of forum). ■ Focus group (31/9/09). ■ Field Day – 3 properties assessed (1/10/09). ■ Field Day – 5 properties assessed (18/1/10).
Fern Tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community Forum (1/11/09). ■ TFS Community Development Officer gave presentation regarding the pilot to the Binalong Bay Rate Payers AGM (17/1/10). ■ Field Day – 6 properties assessed (18/1/10).
Snug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community Forum (18/10/09). (TFS Community Development Officer and Snug Fire Chief conducted house assessment; 3 other requests for house assessments as a result of the forum). ■ Field Day – 5 properties assessed (13/3/10).

Table 1: An example of the research schedule from Frandsen M (2012) *Promoting community bushfire preparedness: Bridging the theory – practice divide*. PhD thesis, University of Tasmania.

3.2 The findings and implications

The pilot provided evidence and insights for TFS to formulate an approach that would enable them to focus on closing the gap between people’s intentions to prepare and actual preparedness behaviours, according to Peter Middleton.

The project team also referred to additional, separate but related human behaviour social science studies to inform their work. These included research from James Cook University (Cottrell 2011) , RMIT and the University of Sydney. These studies indicated that agencies should understand the diversity of audiences and their different motivations, values and terms of reference when interpreting and responding to risk.

In the past, risk communication assumed residents to be passive receivers of information. This research and the associated pilot confirmed that people’s sense of belonging (i.e. Place of Attachment) played a key role in motivating them to prepare for bushfire, according to Dr Frandsen. Her work found that the bond or connection that people felt was an extension of themselves or their identity. Depending on the degree of attachment, it could also operate as a barrier to, or opportunity for, successful agency mitigation efforts. The message for agencies, according to Dr Frandsen, was to ensure they recognised and understood the role and influence of the degree of attachment, and considered it fully in preparedness messaging and interventions.

3.3 Insights and intelligence for community engagement

Place of attachment

The research and pilot showed that in some instances householders were so attached to the natural environment (Place of Attachment) that they were reluctant to undertake any modifications, regardless of the risk. In this situation, residents consciously chose to live with the risk, based on the perception that modifications, such as clearing bush, would spoil the aesthetics that they valued.

In these situations, practical information and recommendations could be used to turn around perceptions that all mitigation efforts ruined the environment. For example, during a Pilot Field Day activity in Binanlong Bay (where a high degree of attachment to place was identified), the community engagement team members tailored their preparedness messaging tactics to account for the high value on aesthetic qualities. Instead of focusing on clearing bush, they emphasised other mitigation initiatives, such as removal of overhanging branches and clearing ground fuels in and around the property.

The main idea was that bushfire safety didn't have to undermine or be incongruent with environmental values, according to Dr Frandsen. By acknowledging residents' place attachment values and focusing on preparedness recommendations congruent with this view, TFS could work on changing perceptions that mitigation spoiled landscapes.

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Dr Mai Frandsen

Social responsibility

In another key finding, the research and pilot showed that social relationships were the catalysts or drivers that compelled people to follow through with their intentions to prepare. These influential social relationships included individual and shared connections between community members, as well as their relationships and interactions with agencies. The nature and extent of interactions between agencies and community members, as well as the degree to which they had developed a shared sense of trust, directly influenced whether householders prepared.

Qualitative and quantitative components of the study provided evidence to suggest that when faced with uncertainty and risk, people drew on their “community capacities” to make decisions. These capacities included their sense belonging to and responsibility for their community. Significantly, the researchers found that these capacities stemmed from “everyday experiences”, rather than from any “specific training in bushfire risk management”. Further, the pilot highlighted differences between and among communities in terms of intentions to prepare and actual bushfire preparedness results. This underlined the need to “engage on a case-by-case basis” in at-risk communities, rather than force a one-size-fits-all model of community engagement.

The findings strengthened the case for a new approach to community education.

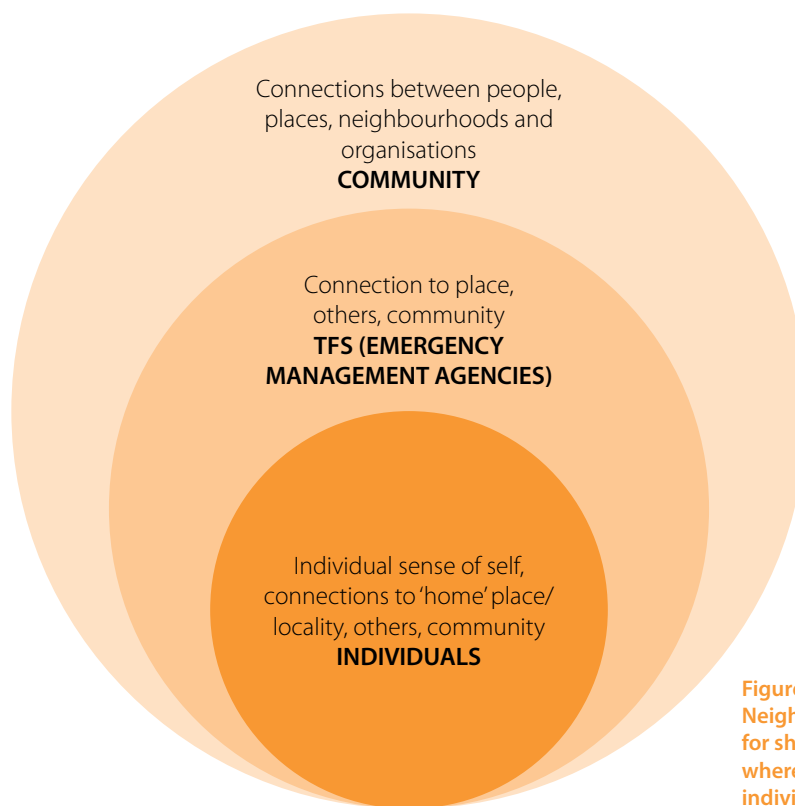


Figure 2: Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods framework for shared responsibility, where we all play a part – individuals, agencies and communities.

3.4 Trial key findings: At a glance

The pilot research reflected and identified how to mobilise and develop local bushfire planning resources to empower and support community members to take collective responsibility for their bushfire risk. The forums, for example, addressed questions that TFS hadn't contemplated in their current education interventions and provided important feedback that was used to adjust and refine the program.

Specifically, it found:

Homeowners/community members

- The majority of forum participants indicated that they intended to become more prepared as a direct result of participating in a forum/interacting with their brigade.
- Just under half (42 per cent) of forum participants indicated that their perceptions of their own roles and responsibilities, as well as those of their volunteer brigades, had changed.
- For those whose perceptions had changed, they reported that they had:
 - Understood, to a greater extent, the limited resources of fire brigades and how this might relate to their own roles and responsibilities.
 - Recognised, to a greater extent, that home owners were responsible for their own preparation.

Brigade/volunteers

Surveys of 42 volunteer brigade members found that the majority (41) believed that two-way interaction between community and brigade members was:

- Beneficial to tactics geared to increasing bushfire preparedness.
- Enhanced their ability to facilitate the preparedness goals of their communities.

4 Implementation: Mapping the way forward

Based on the sound evidence base for a new approach to community education, TFS's Community Fire Safety Division moved to adopt and apply the model more broadly as the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program. This involved developing a plan to roll it out to communities while integrating it within TFS's core operations.

Timing was also a key factor that enabled the initiative to gain traction, explains Peter Middleton.

On the homefront, in January 2013 Tasmania had endured the worst bushfires since its fatal fires of 1967. More than 200 houses were destroyed across the Tasman Peninsula in the 2013 fires. Only four years earlier on the mainland, Victoria had experienced the notorious Black Saturday fires of 2009. Motivation, he says, to build disaster resilience and find new ways forward was, and continues to be, high up on the local and national policy agendas.

Planned implementation

A clear planning and implementation phase was developed and a Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods' Advisory Committee established to spearhead its implementation. The committee consisted of key stakeholders, both internal and external to TFS, including local government together with research bodies and land management representation, as well as community groups.

Phased rollout

Communities initially were chosen in 16 areas across fire-prone areas in Tasmania's north, north-west and south for the first phase of the rollout (2014-16). Selection was based on a range of criteria developed by the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods' Advisory Committee with input from the community. Some areas were selected to maximise potential networking and connection opportunities between neighbouring communities due to factors such as their close geographical proximity.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement was identified early in the pilot as critical to the effectiveness of the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program. Key stakeholders were identified and engaged using the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework, a methodology which guides all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation. The aim of using this approach was to ensure the long-term support, impact and sustainability of the program and best practice in community engagement. In particular, it had to guide the integration of the program into TFS's Community Fire Safety Division, as well as implementation at the grass roots.

Resourcing

At the outset in 2013, four positions were committed to staff the program. This included three regional Community Development Officers and a state-wide Community Development Coordinator (program coordinator). The pilot provided essential evidence to secure initial resources and support from TFS's leadership and other key stakeholders keen to explore the new direction for disaster resilience. Dedicated Community Engagement Volunteers within some participating brigades and communities were also appointed to assist with the implementation.

“There’s one truck and 500 homes. You do the maths”.

Communications

TFS also supported the rollout with an intensive communications program aimed to engage staff and volunteers. This included formal and informal communication methods, such as a dedicated program website (www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au) that is front and centre on the TFS web page (www.fire.tas.gov.au), as well news updates (print and digital), social media campaigns, face-to-face briefings and promotions at conferences and events.

Professional development

A series of professional development workshops was developed to up skill volunteers, operational staff and community leaders essential to the program’s promotion and delivery.

One initiative, launched in 2015, was purpose-designed in collaboration with Tasmania’s tourism industry, to develop targeted bushfire education for tourists.

Tools and templates

A suite of tools and templates has been, and continues to be, developed to allow the program to be easily applied and adapted by local brigades and volunteers in identified target locations. The aim of the suite is to continue to extend the program’s reach and impact.

4.1 Replicating the model – setting up for success

A set of practical and easy to use program templates were developed and tested through the pilot to give agencies and communities ready-made tools and resources to conduct their own engagement activities.

Templates included plans and procedures for field days, together with guidelines and formats for launching and overseeing Bushfire Ready Neighbourhood Groups, property assessment guidelines, community engagement fact sheets, as well as standard templates for householder bushfire survival planning.

The bushfire ready property assessment guidelines template, for example, was designed to assist TFS staff and volunteers to run successful local field days to update householders on bushfire risk, while also helping build capacity of individuals to prepare for bushfires.

The aim of the field day template was to encourage further social networking and build connections and bonds that could potentially generate increased positive peer pressure within at-risk communities. These were held locally, rather than at council or municipal venues, to inspire community and agency interaction as well as collaborative and practical problem solving. These forums enabled deeper engagement around issues such as assessing risk (to people, properties and local assets), assisting with complex householder decision making and planning processes for bushfire risk, and assisting with strategies to implement the structural or physical aspects of preparation.

From an agency perspective, the local field day format also provided an opportunity for brigades to promote messages about householders sharing increasing responsibility for bushfire risk. For example, in the pilot one brigade used it as an opportunity to demonstrate their limited capacity to defend all properties, showing the ratio of total available firefighting appliances to total local properties.

4.2 Custom initiatives: targeting at risk groups

A Women’s Bushfire Workshop initiative was developed in Molesworth, Tasmania, with the aim of providing more effective education and interventions for this identified at-risk group. The initiative was in response to research findings (from the pilot) that women were significantly less prepared than men and were more likely to decide to leave early, but typically hadn’t prepared any safe exit plan.

5 Barriers and challenges

Given the end goal of a community development program is behaviour change, the project team recognised from the outset that the task wasn't going to be quick or easy.

"We embarked on this journey knowing that there were, and continue to be, barriers and challenges. We were talking about building a community's capacity to be bushfire ready. Essentially, it is and continues to be about facilitating sustained cultural change at an individual, agency and community level," explains Peter Middleton.

He cites two pieces of research that underline the challenges at the community level.

"... in many peri-urban places around Australia the growing mix of people and property with bushland creates the potential for disaster ... The results demonstrated that people have a heavy reliance on the Rural Fire Brigade to protect people and property during bushfire (93%). Those who may rely more heavily than others include those with an urban background, newcomers (<10 years)"³

... the average annual probability of a random home on the urban-bushland interface being destroyed by a bushfire to be of the order of 1 in 6500, a factor 6.5 times lower than the ignition probability of a structural house fire. Thus on average and if this risk was perceived rationally, the incentive for individual homeowners to mitigate and reduce the bushfire danger even further is low.⁴

One of the biggest cultural challenges has been shifting community engagement and development to the forefront of operations.

At an agency level, TFS was, and continues to be, on the path of developing an organisational-wide learning culture, an agency striving to be defined and guided by a shared sense of purpose and direction around values such as open mindedness, learning, flexibility and adaptability to change, discovery-driven enquiry and evidence-based practice.

This whole-of-organisation approach involves a set of crosscutting practices and processes that encourage and integrate fire safety and mitigation into core business alongside operational response. In this way, for example, engagement with stakeholders to help them prepare for bushfire is front and centre of operations, not a sideline activity for fire operations (response), he explains.

The pilot enabled TFS to anticipate and address the cultural change issues and risks upfront and it has been developed to allow for continuous review and improvement, based on mechanisms such as feedback and action learning methods.

Two other key programs at TFS which work hand in hand with the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods approach are TFS Community Protection Planning and the TFS Fuel Reduction Unit.

"TFS recognises that there is no one approach to mitigation and prevention in the bushfire safety space," says Peter Middleton. "The organisation is adaptable and recognises that fuel reduction burning may be appropriate for some circumstances, however protection planning (mapping safety routes and 'Nearby Safer Places'; response planning and mitigation planning) are the approach to take in circumstances where communities may be at a higher risk of experiencing a bushfire.

"The Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program is connected closely to these programs and was designed to take a 'shared responsibility' approach to build communities to take responsibility for their bushfire risk."

³ Understanding Communities Living with Bushfire: The Thuringowa Bushfire Case Study. *Fire Note*, Issue 9. Bushfire CRC. November 2006.

⁴ 100-years of Australian bushfire property losses: Is the risk significant and is it increasing? McAneney J, Chen K, Pitman A. *Journal of Environmental Management* **90** 2009 2819-2822

6 Program implementation outcomes

An evaluation framework and baseline survey for the program was developed by Professors Timothy and Isabelle Skinner in collaboration with TFS.

The evaluation started in 2014. Preliminary results indicate that in a six-month period between September 2014 and 2015 the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program::

- Directly reached 1726 participants.
- Conducted 69 activities in 57 venues, with the longest session lasting four hours.
- Conducted 2986 hours of bushfire and preparedness education activities.
- Attracted more than 200 participants to individual sessions.

A post-program survey of participants at five BRN events during that period showed:

- The majority of a sample of 95 event participants felt they were more bushfire prepared as a result.



Photo by Lesley King, TFS, Lower Longley Preparedness Workshop, 2014.



Photo by TFS, Dulcote Bushfire Ready Property Assessment Workshop.

Feedback from stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive:

TFS Internal stakeholders:

- “Thanks for the opportunity to participate. I thought the program was very real and relevant. The interaction from the public was also a good indicator of their level of engagement.” TFS Officer.

Government and non-government service provider stakeholders:

- “... various partners are able to engage and communicate between and within themselves about their roles in emergency planning and response. This is not just from a strategic government arrangement but right down to the grass roots people on the ground working together as a team ... by attending neighbourhood bushfire ready functions in varied communities all presenters are themselves learning what to expect from other organisations and local people and their animals. All presenters are able to learn from a much broader perspective, and so share ideas, resources and experience in order to grow a confident and more resilient community.” DPIPWV Veterinary Officer.
- “Thanks again for your excellent presentation ... I continue to receive positive feedback from attendees, including from people who are working to make their properties more fire safe – these people say they have been motivated to take steps to prepare their properties ... a number of people have signed up to form a bulk buying group to try to negotiate good prices on purchasing (equipment) ... the momentum is continuing here to ensure people are preparing for the approaching fire season.” North Tasmania group committee member.

Participant/community stakeholder feedback:

- “Very impressive, very good advice, facilitated community engagement ... should be continued and funded indefinitely.” Southern resident.
- “It was more than positive, it was a gift given ... it worked so well.” Northern resident.
- “Practical advice on fire preparation. Increased knowledge about the reality we might face. Made good connections with local community. Excellent day.” Southern resident.
- “... you have brought many of us together in a common goal and shown us more about what it is and means to be a community, so many thanks for that ...” Northern resident.
- “Enjoy the fact that it’s hands on, viewing properties and general discussion.” Southern resident.
- “Well done on a quality job ... this type of program ... can have that self-perpetuating influence we are trying for. The fact you also included other groups ... of issues around the bushfire preparedness continues to be an appreciated strategy. Keep up the good work.” Northern resident.

7 Evaluation

Evaluation continues to be a critical component of the long-term success and sustainability of the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program. It has been designed to capture the impact of the community engagement interventions, providing a longitudinal baseline for where and how the program is facilitating behavioural change.

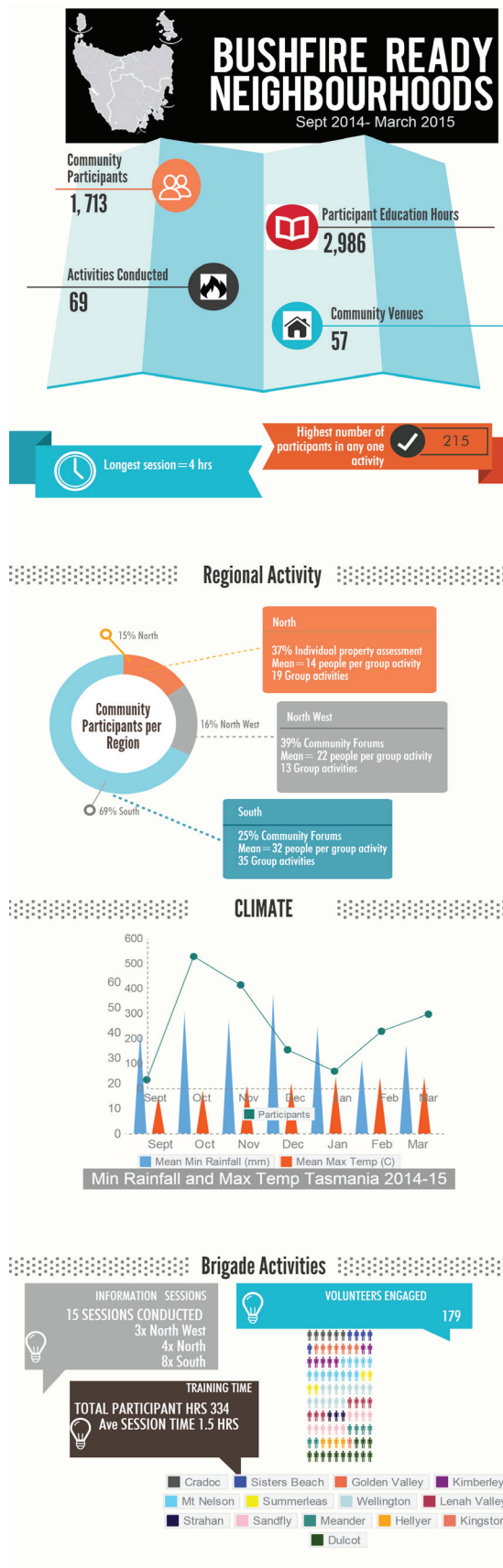
The design and scope of the framework draws on Professor Skinner's 10-year synthesis of community safety research, which he conducted for the Bushfire CRC. The framework builds on the recommendations and approach of the Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods' pilot, valuing the differences between communities, and it aims to aggregate the data in a meaningful way.

For example, the evaluation framework recognises that engagement is one of the objectives of the program, and that behaviour change is individual as well as group focused. The evaluation framework collects data on program activities, incorporating measures of breadth, reach and scope of the activities designed to increase bushfire preparedness.

A final evaluation of the program Phase 1 (2014-2016) will collect and collate pre- and post-program implementation data to both review and refine Phase 2 program implementation.



Photo by Peter Middleton, TFS, Snug Bushfire Ready Property Assessment Day, 2012.



Graphic prepared by Professor Timothy and Isabelle Skinner, 2015.

8 Critical success factors

The launch, growth and development of TFS’s Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods program has been founded on a strong evidence base and guided by best practice principles in areas such as community development and business project planning.

The use of evidence and research has informed all stages of the process, from the initial concept development, through to the design of TFS’s new community development framework and community education approach, its pilot and testing phase, and the final adoption and integration into TFS operations.

In the TFS context, there were a range of key factors identified as critical to the project’s success and sustainability.

Some of these essential factors were:

- The development of a practical **action research** approach to help build a custom solution or framework for TFS’s community development and engagement purposes. This was provided through collaboration between researchers (University of Tasmania, Bushfire CRC and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC) and practitioners (TFS and AFAC).
- **Collaboration** between the researchers and practitioners brought independent expertise to the approach and allowed TFS to develop a path forward for community engagement based on sound evidence and an ongoing evaluation framework.
- **Collaboration** to proactively engage the support of all stakeholders, including within and beyond the agency, to resource and implement the new approach on the ground.
- A **commitment** across TFS to **structure, organise** and **encourage** the model for community development approach into its core business operations, alongside fire and disaster response. This was supported by all levels of leadership and facilitated by targeted communication initiatives.
- Learning from the use of current and emerging best **practice and principles in community development**, such as the IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation, IAP2 Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners and IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

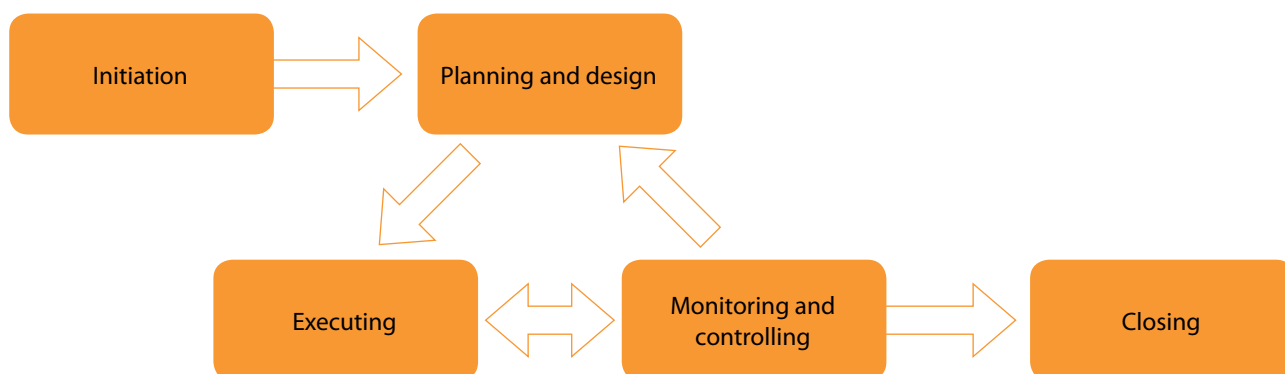


Figure 3: TFS’s standard project planning process.

9 Conclusion

Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods, TFS's community development program, has been built on the premise that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to community resilience and preparedness.

Shared responsibility for community resilience, says Peter Middleton, is a complex challenge that aims to change behavior. "And while we at TFS have come a long way, we know there is still a long road ahead," he explains.

TFS's clear objective has been to help develop, support and grow community resilience to bushfire by empowering communities to plan and prepare. In order to make that happen it has had to re-engineer its practices and operations to engage at-risk communities fully in bushfire preparedness.

The use of evidence and research to support decision making and evaluation, together with the application of best practices in community engagement, project management and organisational learning have been critical to the agency's success to date.

Critical factors include:

Collaborating with and actively involving all stakeholders (internally and externally).

Being innovative, flexible and creative in their approaches, such as considering different modes of learning by developing a suite of various resources and ways of presenting information.

Training and development of TFS staff and volunteer brigade members to expand their skills and knowledge.

Investigating and applying sector research findings, peer benchmarking and presenting the program at sector, state, national and international conferences (e.g. Human Dimensions of Wildfire Conference 2015 – USA), and publications (e.g. <http://wildfiremagazine.org/article/bushfire-ready-neighbourhoods-we-all-play-a-part/>).

Reinforcing the brand of the program "Bushfire Ready Neighbourhoods. Individuals, TFS, Communities. We all play a part."



Photo by Suzette Harrison, TFS, Golden Valley Bushfire Ready Community Gathering, 2014.

References and further reading

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Key contacts

www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au

www.fire.tas.gov.au

www.afac.com.au/services/research

www.utas.edu.au

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