

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE HANDBOOK COLLECTION

# Practitioner's Guide: How to choose between community engagement approaches

Companion to *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience* (AIDR 2020)

This document complements *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience* (AIDR 2020). It is available as an online resource on the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub:  
<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-engagement>

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




This document corresponds to Chapter 3: Approaches to Community Engagement, in *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience (AIDR 2020)*.

Community engagement is a critical component of emergency management and action to reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience. Disaster resilience cannot be developed for or on behalf of communities but relies on sharing information, understanding, decision-making, responsibility and resourcing. Contemporary community engagement is based on the belief that communities and partners achieve results by working together in a partnership, each bringing their knowledge and expertise to the process. Partnerships can develop between individuals, groups, organisations or sectors (e.g. the government, non-government, community, business, or emergency management sector).

## Approaches to community engagement

There are five approaches to community engagement set out in *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience* (2020). Each approach to community engagement is appropriate in different circumstances and at different times during the engagement process. It is important to maintain open communication and to remain flexible throughout the process. Plans may need to change as the process develops.

**Table 1.** Approaches to community engagement for disaster resilience

| Who leads the process  | <br>Partner designs and delivers to community  | <br>Partner leads with community input  | <br>Community and partner work together  | <br>Community leads with partner support  | <br>Community designs and delivers   |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Basis of engagement</b>   | Partner provides community with information, options, solutions or services for a given situation or issue.   | Partner provides leadership to community.<br>Community provides input to the process.  | Community and partner form a partnership.<br>They co-design and develop options and solutions.  | Community provides leadership to partner.<br>Partner provides input to the process.  | Community designs, decides and implements all actions.<br>Minimal or no engagement necessary from any partner.  |
| <b>Stated or implied contract between external partner and community</b> | Partner understands the issue or situation, provides community with what they need and keeps community informed through the process.  | Partner provides guidance, listens to community concerns and issues and takes them into account.<br>Community input is considered necessary to ensure success.   | Both community and partner bring expertise to the relationship.<br>Mutual participation or collaboration contribute to success.   | Community understands its own context and situation.<br>Partner offers expertise and knowledge.<br>This input is offered to support community-led action.  | Community has a thorough understanding of its own context and situation and the hazards that may affect them.<br>Community will ask for support when and if needed.<br>External organisations may not be aware of projects at all.  |
| <b>Methods of engagement</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Training and seminars</li> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Letter box drops</li> <li>• Door knocks</li> <li>• Online instruction videos or information</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Seminars</li> <li>• Consultations</li> <li>• Online or analogue surveys</li> <li>• Partner-led workshops and focus groups</li> <li>• Partner-led projects</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-chaired committees and working groups</li> <li>• Deliberative, participative and co-led workshops and focus groups</li> <li>• Online collaborative spaces</li> <li>• Shared research projects</li> <li>• Collaborative community-based projects</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Seminars</li> <li>• Consultations</li> <li>• Forums</li> <li>• Online or analogue surveys</li> <li>• Community-led workshops and focus groups</li> <li>• Community-led projects</li> <li>• Informal conversations</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Information sessions</li> <li>• Training and seminars</li> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Brochures</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Letter box drops</li> <li>• Door knocks</li> <li>• Online instruction videos or information</li> <li>• Community-led working groups</li> <li>• Community-led projects</li> <li>• Traditional media</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> |
| <b>Examples of actions or activities that reflect methods</b>            | Briefings by specialists in disaster preparation, response or recovery.<br>Information based public safety campaigns.   | Partner-led planning and recovery focus groups and workshops.<br>Partner-led surveys and feedback sessions.  | Collaborative disaster planning and preparation projects.<br>Joint working groups to implement particular projects.   | Community-led planning processes, recovery committees, meetings and projects.  | Community-led, resourced and implemented resilience and recovery based activities, processes and programs.  |

**NB: Many of the methods of engagement can be either online, face to face, or both.**

## Choosing the most appropriate community engagement approach

The following checklists will assist practitioners when choosing between approaches to community engagement. Each checklist highlights circumstances that might apply and that make each option more likely to support the desired outcomes and to build community resilience.

### PARTNER DESIGNS AND DELIVERS TO COMMUNITY

Partner has considerable expertise, resources and capacity to design and deliver the most useful information, support or service to the community.

Community does not have sufficient expertise, resources and capacity to lead or to provide input into this process at this time.

Community has little knowledge or awareness of their hazard risk.

Community is experiencing significant levels of long term or systemic disadvantage or disruption to effective functioning.

Community is temporarily overwhelmed due to a recent or current disaster or emergency event.

Community is asking for support or services to be provided by the partner.

### PARTNER LEADS WITH COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Partner has expertise, resources and capacity to lead the community engagement process.

Community does not have sufficient expertise, resources and capacity to lead the community engagement process.

Community has sufficient expertise, resources and capacity to contribute to the community engagement process.

Community leaders and members are willing, able and available to provide input into the process.

Community has knowledge, expertise or capabilities that the partner does not have (e.g. local context and history, and local understanding of the community).

### COMMUNITY AND PARTNER WORK TOGETHER

Both partner and community have expertise, resources and capacity to contribute to the community engagement process.

Both partner and community are willing and able to work together rather than either leading the community engagement process.

Both partner and community are willing, able and available to provide input into the community engagement process.

Partner and community either have an existing relationship that will lead to an effective partnership or believe that such a relationship is feasible.

Both community and partner recognise they will benefit from the expertise, resources and capacity of the other.

### COMMUNITY LED WITH PARTNER SUPPORT

Community has expertise, resources and some capacity to lead the community engagement process.

Partner has expertise, resources and capacity to contribute to the community engagement process.

Both community and partner recognise they will benefit from the expertise, resources and capacity of the other.

There are community leaders and members who are willing, able and available to lead the process.

### COMMUNITY DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Community has the expertise, resources and capacity to design and deliver the most useful information, support or service to meet their community needs.

Community has experience in previous community engagement processes and is confident about designing and delivering processes to meet the community needs.

Community has strong existing networks of relationships across the community.

There is no need for a partner to lead or to provide input into this process.

Community feels capable and willing to proceed on their own.

## Underlying considerations

In addition to choosing the most appropriate approach for community engagement, there are other factors that also need to be considered. Additional issues affect the choice about the best approach to community engagement. It is most effective to discuss these issues between the community and any potential partners, before deciding on the best approach to any engagement project or process.

### LOCAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND HISTORY

It is important to understand the local community context and history before choosing the best engagement approach. The community may have a history of previous community engagement with organisations other than your own, or a history of previous emergencies and disasters.

- Have previous community engagement processes been successful or unsuccessful with this community? If appropriate, how can your organisation engage through this engagement?
- Which approaches have been used? Did these approaches work well at the time?
- Does the community have a history of trauma, disaster or emergencies?
- Did these experiences make the community more or less resilient?
- Could this history influence our approach to community engagement now?
- What is the community profile? Are there groups within the community that require further support or alternative methods of engagement?

### TIMING

The most appropriate approach to community engagement often depends on timing, particularly in relation to community priorities and activities, and any disaster or emergency event.

- Is the community objective to prepare for a future disaster or emergency, or is an event imminent? Has the disaster or emergency already occurred?
- How urgent is this engagement process? If it is urgent, does this make a difference to the approach that suits best? Will this urgency change during the engagement process?
- What are the current priorities for the community?
- Is it a busy season for agriculture, tourism, education or another aspect of community life?
- Is the community focused on social, cultural or faith-based events or celebrations at this time?
- What impact does this have on community motivation and capacity?

### FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY

Partners and communities benefit from the regular practice of reviewing the engagement process, paying attention to what is working, and remaining flexible and adjusting the approach.

- How is the community engagement process going? If one approach is not working as well as originally hoped, could another approach be more effective?
- Do we need to use a different approach for different stages, groups, or phases of the process?



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