



Australian Government
National Emergency
Management Agency



RECOVERY EXERCISING TOOLKIT
CORE MODULE

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE HANDBOOK COLLECTION

Fundamentals of Community Recovery

Companion to *Community Recovery* (AIDR 2018) and *Managing Exercises* (AIDR 2017)

This document complements *Community Recovery* (AIDR 2018) and *Managing Exercises* (AIDR 2017). It is available as an online resource on the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub: knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/recovery-exercising-toolkit

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Description

Why run this module?

The Fundamentals of Community Recovery module is designed to give participants an overview of the context and complexity of community recovery and how disasters affect individuals and communities. It outlines recovery concepts and what to expect over the long journey of recovery. It is essential learning for everyone who has any role in supporting communities in their recovery from disaster.

Target audience

- Emergency Management Committees/ Disaster Management Groups
- Recovery Committees
- Disaster management and recovery practitioners

How to use this module

Fundamentals of Community Recovery is a core module. It is strongly recommended that it be conducted as a whole group activity with all exercise participants, each time a recovery exercise is run.

Participants will bring a range of disaster recovery experience, with some being introduced to disaster recovery concepts for the first time. While for others the module will help to reinforce and validate previous learning and experience. This module will be of benefit to everyone, regardless of level of knowledge and experience.

Session duration

This module will take approximately 60 minutes to run, including the discussion exercise, however it can also be divided into 2 sessions run at different times throughout the day to suit your exercise agenda.

Aim

The aim of this module is to help participants develop a common understanding of the context and principles of community recovery.

Objectives

Increase participants understanding of:

- disaster recovery concepts and principles
- the impacts of disasters on individuals and communities
- the importance of the community's role and participation in recovery
- the role of local community organisations in emergency management arrangements.

Pre-session planning for facilitators

The module overview, slide deck and video are designed to support facilitation of the session. You do not have to be an expert in community recovery to run this module. Community Development Officers and Community Services Managers in councils can be a good support in facilitation of the module.

The resources at the end of this document will help to familiarise you with the content of this module. The *Community Recovery Handbook* in the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Series is a good source document.

Watch the Video – [Three perspectives from recovery practitioners on community recovery](#)

Introductory exercise

Participants will bring a range of disaster recovery experience to the exercise, with some being introduced to disaster recovery concepts for the first time, while others may have many years of experience. Understanding the breadth of recovery experience in the room is helpful for facilitators and for participants.

An easy way to do this is the following short exercise.

As you ask each of the following questions, ask participants to raise their hands.

Participants who have:

- More than 10 years of experience working in recovery
- 5 – 10 years of experience
- 3 – 5 years of experience
- 1 – 2 years of experience
- No experience

This aim of the exercise is to give everyone a sense of the breadth of recovery experience in the room. This usually reflects the breadth of experience that can be found in members of a recovery committee.

Topic overview - facilitator presentation

Supported by facilitator guide and slide deck.

This module covers:

How disasters can affect people

Disasters can affect people's lives in many ways.

The same disaster can affect different people in different ways. No 2 people will experience the disaster in exactly the same way.

People are different and there will be many variations of experience as well as pre-existing conditions and challenges that will impact how a person will recover.

Common reactions to disasters

People's responses to disaster are typically normal responses to an abnormal event. It's important to remember that reactions to grief and trauma can be confronting.

Common reactions include:

- difficulty absorbing, processing and retaining information
- inability to make decisions, even small ones
- feeling overwhelmed and immobilised
- fearful for the future.

It's important that support services are available for people to access when, where and how they need them. This includes support for emotional distress, mental health, family violence, drug and alcohol use and financial counselling.

Disasters are stressful and can have a profound impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. However, over time, most people recover well on their own or with the help of friends and family.

How disasters can affect communities

Disasters affect communities in many ways, including disruption to normal routines, physical harm and social disruption.¹

Disasters cause temporary and sometimes permanent damage to community networks, including;

- day to day routines disrupted
- people displaced from homes, their local area and community (sometimes permanently)
- services and systems that people rely on are unavailable
- critical infrastructure and the natural environment damaged.

Everyone in the community is affected, even if their home or property was not directly impacted.

However, it's also important to remember that while everyone is affected – this does not mean that everyone is equally affected. People may be affected in different ways and need varying levels of support and assistance.

What is recovery?

There have been many definitions of recovery over the last 20 years. Earlier definitions were characterised by concepts such as “returning to normal”, or “back to proper levels of functioning”. In more recent years the key theme of recovery definitions is that disasters change the way things were, and the way things will be in the future will be new and different.

The *Community Recovery Handbook* describes recovery as “the process of coming to terms with the impacts of a disaster and managing the disruptions and changes caused, which can result, for some people, in a new way

¹ *Community Recovery Handbook (2018) p.5*

of living”.² “Being ‘recovered, is being able to lead a life that individuals and communities value living, even if it is different to the life they were leading before the disaster event”.³

Communities influencing and shaping their own recovery

Communities are made up of social connections and networks. Social connections and networks increase resilience and promote recovery.⁴

We know that one of the best predictors for how well a community will recover after a disaster, is how connected it is and how connected community members are with each other. This can also be referred to as social cohesion.

People in communities will lead their community recovery process in informal and practical ways.

A community leader is not necessarily the person with the loudest voice. It is a person who represents and champions approaches that the majority of the community consider to be appropriate, valid and relevant to them.

The task for Recovery Committees is to identify and work with recognised community leaders and to support and facilitate community led processes.

Recovery Committees and reference groups need to be able to legitimately represent the needs, issues and views of the broader community.

Processes that are ‘government-supported and community-led’ provide a foundation or framework within which communities can work with government and non-government agencies and other recovery stakeholders.⁵

Guiding questions:

- How can your recovery subcommittee identify trusted local leaders within the community and access their knowledge and experience?
- How can recovery committees stay connected with and represent the broader community, using established networks and communication pathways?

² *Community Recovery Handbook (2018) p.4*

³ *Community Recovery Handbook (2018) p.4*

⁴ *Victorian Council of Social Services, Building resilient communities (2017)*

⁵ *Community Recovery Handbook p.33*

Central role of local government

Engaged and effective councils:

- are the closest level of government to community
- provide a broad range of services to the community all of the time, not just after disasters
- have strong local knowledge and networks
- will still be working to support the community after other recovery services are concluded.

Supporting communities through recovery can be challenging and resource intensive for councils.

Recovery is more effective when councils take a proactive role and are engaged with their communities through all phases of recovery.

Councils working in partnership with local agencies across all sectors leads to better recovery.

Working with community sector organisations to enhance recovery arrangements

Local people and community sector organisations have a critical role to play, not just during the immediate aftermath but in the longer-term recovery phase. They live and work within their communities, are known and trusted and will still be there after the large service providers and government representatives have moved on.

Community organisations have a strong track record in activating and mobilising through their local relationships in disaster response and recovery.⁶

Learnings from past disasters have often highlighted a lack of connection between formal emergency management and recovery structures and community organisations, networks and recovery efforts.

Community organisations provide a vital conduit between communities and emergency management structures. They know the impacts of disasters on the people most at risk, as these are the people they support every day. They have important knowledge and resources to contribute in recovery and must be included/linked with formal recovery plans, structures and arrangements.

Not every organisation and group can be on the Recovery Committee, but it is important that the Committee establishes links with those who have a valuable contribution to make.

Community organisations that represent Indigenous peoples, people with disability, domestic and family violence, mental health, children and youth and CALD communities are just some of the types of organisations that need to be linked into emergency management planning and recovery.

Local community consultation groups are a good way to make sure that the community voice is represented on the recovery committee. The *Community Recovery Handbook* (2018 p.43) provides some guidance about local community consultation groups.

⁶ Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal, *Supporting community led approaches to disaster preparedness: Summary Research Report* (2020)

It's important to remember that disasters can also impact the capacity of community groups, and Recovery Committees should consider what extra funding and resources can be provided.

Recovery over time

Recovery is long term – it takes years.

Communities' and individual's needs and priorities will evolve and change over time.

Strategic approaches to recovery and the composition of Recovery Committees also need to change over time as community needs evolve.

A centralised government-driven approach to recovery is often necessary in the initial period following a disaster where decisions must be made quickly by those with authority, to mobilise strategies such as clean up and debris removal, waste management, repair of critical infrastructure and temporary housing. However, these actions need to be undertaken in close consultation with affected communities and informed by emerging needs and priorities. Ultimately the community needs to be empowered to develop their own goals and strategies and regain a sense of control.

Representation on recovery committees will change over time as the needs of the community change. It's a good idea for Recovery Committees to include a review of membership after the first 6 months in their Terms of Reference.

When a disaster has had a significant impact on a community, a formal recovery committee can run for up to 2 years and in some cases longer.

Community Recovery Committees (membership of community members) may run for a number of years.

Video: Three perspectives from recovery practitioners on community recovery

In this video 3 disaster recovery practitioners share their perspectives from local and state government and community and talk about the most important things they have learnt from working in recovery.

Leanne has been a leader working in local government and state government for more than 40 years. She was General Manager at Bega Valley Shire Council over the period of the Tathra and Yankees Gap fires in 2018 and the South Coast fires in 2019-20.

Anne Leadbeater lives in Kinglake, Victoria, and was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her work in the aftermath of the 2009 'Black Saturday' bushfires. Anne has 30 years of experience working in the community sector and with state and local government, specialising in disaster recovery and community resilience.

Wendy Graham is a former NSW Government senior executive responsible for community recovery, disaster welfare and community resilience programs. Wendy has provided strategic leadership and recovery coordination in disasters for over 15 years.

[Three perspectives from recovery practitioners on community recovery](#)

Video Length: 6 minutes

Applying the National Principles for Disaster Recovery: Group Discussion Activity

The National Principles set the standard and provide a roadmap to help navigate recovery and keep recovery stakeholders on track. There are 6 national principles.

Ideally the Principles should inform recovery planning before a disaster occurs and also be applied to shape recovery from the time of impact.

The Principles are not a rigid prescription for how to do recovery, but they help us to negotiate a complex environment and keep the focus on the community and what the community needs.

Guiding questions for Break-out Group Discussion:

1. Which principles for disaster recovery are most important to you in your role in recovery?
2. How can this influence and inform your practice?

Have each group report back on their key learnings and discuss as a large group plenary.

Good practice tips for recovery committees

- Be as inclusive as possible in identifying and assessing the 'affected' community.
 - Recognise that significant impacts can be experienced by those not considered 'directly affected'.
 - Remember that not everyone who is affected will live in the same area.
 - Understand that people will not all respond or react in the same way.
 - Plan collaboratively with the community.
 - Tailor and adapt plans to meet changing community needs.
 - Identify and work through community leaders.
 - Reinforce shared responsibility between all sectors of the community.⁷
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Take away messages

- Recovery is complex and always takes a long time.
 - People will recover at their own pace, and everyone's recovery journey is different.
 - Communities will recover more quickly if they are influencing and shaping their own recovery.
 - Local people and community sector organisations have an important role to play in recovery.
 - Recovery Committees must stay connected with and be representative of the community.
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⁷ *Community Recovery Handbook p.6*

Suggested next steps

Review your emergency and recovery plans – how are local community organisations and the assets they bring referenced?

- What are the areas for improvement?
- What existing structures/processes (such as interagency or community reference groups) can link to the recovery committee so that it can be better connected with community organisations?
- Which community organisations can you reach out to for support?
- What else do you need to do?

Module evaluation questions

This question is included in the Recovery Exercise Participant Feedback form.

The recovery exercise has increased my understanding of community recovery.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Module development

The Recovery Exercising Toolkit and accompanying Modules have been developed by the National Emergency Management Agency. Modules are developed with the input and support of subject matter experts. The Fundamentals of Community Recovery was developed by Anne Leadbeater and Wendy Graham.

Anne Leadbeater

An independent national consultant specialising in disaster recovery and community resilience, Anne has 30 years of experience working in the community sector and with state and local government. She has supported communities recovering from drought, fire, flood, cyclone and earthquake in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and New Zealand. Anne designs and delivers national training for recovery practitioners and in 2018, she completed a review of the Community Recovery Handbook for the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. Anne lives in Kinglake, Victoria, and was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for her work in the aftermath of the 2009 'Black Saturday' bushfires.

Wendy Graham

Wendy is a former NSW Government senior executive responsible for community recovery, disaster welfare and resilience programs. Wendy has provided strategic leadership and recovery coordination in disasters for more than 15 years. In the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires, she led community recovery teams who worked alongside recovery committees and councils in 33 local government areas. Wendy established the NSW Community Recovery Officer Program and the Bushfire Recovery Support Services Program with services in 25 locations across NSW. Wendy has also had a lead recovery role in many other major disasters including; Tathra Bushfires 2018, Daly River Floods Northern Territory 2016, Lindt Cafe Siege 2014 and Hunter/Newcastle

“Pasha Bulka” Storms 2007. Wendy is a Winston Churchill Fellow, researching international disaster recovery and resilience programs. This experience continues to inform her practice and passion for working with disaster affected communities.

Readings and Resources

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Community Recovery (2018)

This handbook aims to provide a comprehensive guide to community recovery in Australia. It is intended to assist those involved in working with communities to design and deliver recovery processes, services, programs and activities.

knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-recovery

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience (2020)

The Handbook presents nationally agreed principles and provides high-level guidance to support those who engage with communities at all phases of disaster. The guidance reflects strengths-based, inclusive approaches that improve the quality and effectiveness of community engagement practices and maximise inclusion and participation to achieve effective disaster resilience outcomes.

knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-engagement

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Recovery Matters webinar series

Through a series of informative webinars, expert speakers to share what they know and help us to move forward with disaster recovery.

knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/recovery-matters-webinar-series

Australian Red Cross, Red Cross Recovery Basics

Recovery Basics is a series of three booklets for people or organisations living through or working in disaster recovery.

- The impact of disasters on communities and individuals
- Working in recovery
- Looking after yourself during and after disasters

www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/#recover

Australian Red Cross, Communicating in recovery

This guide is for people or organisations working and managing information in a post emergency/disaster environment.

www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-migration/documents/emergency-services/communicating-in-recovery-resource.pdf

ABC Documentary Series, People's Republic of Mallacoota

This documentary provides insight into the aftermath of the December 2019 Black Summer bushfires in Mallacoota, Victoria.

knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/peoples-republic-of-mallacoota

Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal, Supporting community led approaches to disaster preparedness Summary Research Report (2020)

Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M., Sampson, D. & Katrak, M. (2020) Supporting community led approaches to disaster preparedness: learnings from three pilot locations. Evaluation of the Get Ready Disaster Resilient: Future Ready pilots for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and Resilience NSW; University of Sydney and University of Newcastle

This project was designed to work with 3 pilot communities to investigate, understand and measure activities, processes and structures that enable or hinder individuals and communities in disaster resilience building.

frrr.org.au/funding/disaster-resilience-and-climate-solutions/disaster-resilient-future-ready

Recovery Capitals (RECAP)

Quinn P, Gibbs L, Blake D, Campbell E, Johnston D, Ireton G. *Guide to Post-Disaster Recovery Capitals (ReCap) (2021)*

The Recovery Capitals (ReCap) Guide contains resources for people, organisations and governments managing emergency recovery. It aims to support wellbeing after disasters by providing evidence-based guidance to aid decision making, encouraging strengths-based, holistic and inclusive approaches to recovery.

www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub/resources/recovery-capitals

Victorian Council of Social Services, Stakeholder Guide for Community Organisations (2022)

vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Whos-who-and-what-do-they-do-recovering-from-emergencies-and-disasters.pdf

Victorian Council of Social Services, Building resilient communities (2017)

vcoss.org.au/policylibrary/2017/05/building-resilient-communities

Other Modules that link to this topic can be found on the ADR

[Recovery Exercising Toolkit page](#)



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