

National Strategy for Disaster Resilience: Community Engagement Framework



Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE
HANDBOOK COLLECTION

National Strategy for
Disaster Resilience:
Community Engagement
Framework

Handbook 6



Australian Government
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History of the Australian National Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection

The first publications in the original Australian Emergency Manual Series were primarily skills reference manuals produced from 1989 onwards. In August 1996, on advice from the National Emergency Management Principles and Practice Advisory Group, the Series was expanded to include a more comprehensive range of emergency management principles and practice reference publications.

In 2011, Handbooks were introduced to better align the Series with the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*. Compiled by practitioners with management and service-delivery experience in a range of disaster events, the handbooks comprised principles, strategies and actions to help the management and delivery of support services in a disaster context.

In 2015, the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) was appointed custodian of the handbooks and manuals in the series. Now known as the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, AIDR continues to provide guidance on the national principles and practices in disaster resilience in Australia through management and publication of the Collection.

The Handbook Collection is developed and reviewed by national consultative committees representing a range of state and territory agencies, governments, organisations and individuals involved in disaster resilience. The Collection is sponsored by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

Access to the Collection and further details are available at www.knowledge.aidr.org.au.

Australian National Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection (2011 –)

Handbook 1 Disaster health

Handbook 2 Community recovery

Handbook 3 Managing exercises

Handbook 4 Evacuation planning

Handbook 5 Communicating with people with a disability – National Guidelines for Emergency Managers

Handbook 6 National Strategy for Disaster Resilience – community engagement framework

Handbook 7 Managing the floodplain: a guide to best practice in flood risk management in Australia

Guideline 7-1 Guideline for using the national generic brief for flood investigations to develop project specific specifications

Guideline 7-2 Technical Flood Risk Management Guideline: flood emergency response classification of the floodplain

Guideline 7-3 Technical flood risk management guideline: flood hazard

Template 7-4 Technical project brief template

Guideline 7-5 Technical Flood Risk Management Guideline - flood information to support land-use planning

Guideline 7-6 Technical flood risk management guideline: assessing options and service levels for treating existing risk

Practice Note 7-7 Considering flooding in land-use planning activities

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- Handbook 8** Lessons management
- Handbook 9** Australian Emergency Management Arrangements
- Handbook 10** National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines (*plus supporting guideline*)
- Guideline 10-1** National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines: practice guide
- Handbook 11** *renamed Guideline 10-1 National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines: practice guide*
- Handbook 12** *Spontaneous volunteer management*

Australian Emergency Management Manual Series

The most recent list of publications in the Manuals series includes 46 titles.

The manuals have not been reviewed since 2011 or earlier and the Manual Series is undergoing a review which will see relevant Manuals move into the Handbook Collection. Current and past editions of the Manuals will remain available on the AIDR Knowledge Hub at www.knowledge.aidr.org.au.

Manual Series Catalogue: 2004 - 2011

- Manual 1** Emergency management concepts and principles (2004)
- Manual 2** *Australian Emergency Management Arrangements (superseded by Handbook 9)*
- Manual 3** Australian Emergency Management Glossary (1998)
- Manual 4** Australian Emergency Management Terms Thesaurus (1998)
- Manual 5** *Emergency risk management – applications guide (superseded by Handbook 10)*
- Manual 6** *Implementing emergency risk management – a facilitator’s guide to working with committees and communities (superseded by Handbook 10)*
- Manual 7** Planning safer communities – land use planning for natural hazards (2002, currently under review)
- Manual 8** *Emergency catering (2003, archived)*
- Manual 12** Safe and healthy mass gatherings (1999)
- Manual 13** Health aspects of chemical, biological and radiological hazards (2000)
- Manual 14** Post disaster survey and assessment (2001)
- Manual 15** Community emergency planning (1992)
- Manual 16** Urban search and rescue – capability guidelines for structural collapse (2002)
- Manual 17** Multi-agency incident management (replaced by AIIMS)
- Manual 18** Community and personal support services (1998)
- Manual 19** *Managing the floodplain (superseded by Handbook 7)*
- Manual 20** Flood preparedness (2009)
- Manual 21** Flood warning (2009)
- Manual 22** Flood response (2009)
- Manual 23** Emergency management planning for floods affected by dams (2009)
- Manual 24** Reducing the community impact of landslides (2001)
- Manual 25** Guidelines for psychological services: emergency managers guide (2003)

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- Manual 26** Guidelines for psychological services: mental health practitioners guide (2003)
 - Manual 27** Disaster loss assessment guidelines (2002)
 - Manual 28** Economic and financial aspects of disaster recovery (2002)
 - Manual 29** Community development in recovery from disaster (2003)
 - Manual 30** Storm and water damage operations (2007) (information may not be appropriate to all situations)
 - Manual 31** Operations centre management (2001)
 - Manual 32** Leadership (1997)
 - Manual 33** National Land search operations (2014) (refer to the Land Search Operations Manual website)
 - Manual 34** Road rescue (2009)
 - Manual 35** General and disaster rescue (2006)
 - Manual 36** Map reading and navigation (2001)
 - Manual 37** Four-wheel-drive vehicle operation (1997)
 - Manual 38** Communications (1998)
 - Manual 39** Flood rescue boat operation (2009)
 - Manual 40** Vertical Rescue (2001)
 - Manual 41** *Small group training management (1999, archived)*
 - Manual 42** *Managing Exercises (superseded by Handbook 3)*
 - Manual 43** Emergency planning (2004)
 - Manual 44** Guidelines for emergency management in culturally and linguistically diverse communities (2007)
 - Manual 45** Guidelines for the development of community education, awareness and education programs (2010)
 - Manual 46** Tsunami (2010)

Executive Summary

This Community Engagement Framework is a key component in the implementation of the Council of Australian Governments' National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. The Framework directly supports the Strategy's direction for a national emergency management approach based on achieving community and organisational resilience.

The purpose of this Framework is to provide guidance for those working in emergency management to effectively engage with the community. It supports the Strategy by outlining a shared understanding of community engagement values, principles and practice in Australia. It is intended that the Framework will be used by state, territory and local government agencies with a role in emergency management, as well as non-government emergency management practitioners.

This Framework has been developed by the Community Engagement Sub-committee of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee and has been informed by a national workshop of senior emergency management and community engagement professionals held at the Australian Emergency Management Institute, Mount Macedon, in September 2012, as part of a formal consultation process. It incorporates a community engagement model for emergency management, which was developed at the national workshop and draws on the internationally recognised Public Participation Spectrum of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

This Framework builds on research and analysis in the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs* to reflect an 'evolving conversation' in education, engagement and building disaster resilience.

It was nationally approved by Ministers at the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management meeting on 4–5 July 2013.



Introduction

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (the Strategy) recognises that emergency management is a shared responsibility for all of society. It is important for those working in emergency management to understand the key role the community plays in contributing to its own safety, and to develop and strengthen the partnership between emergency management agencies and the community.

What is community engagement?

There are many different kinds of communities, including communities of place, interest, belief and circumstance. Communities are dynamic—they change over time and interact in different ways.

Community engagement, for the purpose of this Framework, is the process of stakeholders working together to build resilience through collaborative action, shared capacity building and the development of strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect.

This nationally agreed Framework provides guidance for effective community engagement across the emergency management sector, while acknowledging there is no one-size-fits-all approach—each community is different as is the context for engaging the community.

Many emergency services organisations, not-for-profit or non-government organisations, the private sector and other stakeholders already have their own methods for engaging with the community. These methods are tailored to their experience, priorities and objectives. This Framework should be considered alongside such existing community engagement arrangements. It encourages those working in emergency management or with related responsibilities to consider best practice when engaging with the community, including the importance of evaluating effectiveness of their engagement and a commitment to its continuous improvement.



A changing approach to emergency management

We need to develop and embed new ways of doing things that enhance existing arrangements across and within governments, as well as among businesses, the not-for-profit sector, and the community more broadly, to improve disaster resilience.

National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, p 1.

A 'community safety approach' to building disaster resilience recognises active engagement with and empowerment of the community as central to achieving resilience over the long term. This approach does not reduce government or agency responsibility in emergency management, but strengthens community participation and influence. It recognises that resilience is enhanced when communities play a key role in their own safety.

Whilst an approach that seeks to empower communities is relatively new in the emergency management sector, it has been the basis of community development work over many decades, particularly in the social sciences. Connecting with the knowledge and expertise in this field will build capacity within the sector and demonstrate sound community engagement practice.

Working with communities

Disaster resilience is based upon existing strengths and relationships. Individuals and communities are the starting point to build disaster resilience and the way to work with communities is to connect with what is already there. At a practical level this means working in partnership with the community, building on existing networks, resources and strengths, identifying and supporting the development of community leaders and empowering the community to exercise choice and take responsibility. It means adopting flexible approaches in the way we communicate with, and within, communities. This concept requires decision makers to recognise the fundamental role of social capital and social resources in building disaster resilient communities.

Engagement as core business

In the emergency management sector, community engagement has often been seen as peripheral to the core business of emergency management organisations. This means that embedding engagement within the culture and practice of emergency management organisations is a key challenge for the future. Such a change requires sustained resourcing, commitment and cross-sectoral partnerships, as well as new ways of measuring and evaluating success.

An important aspect of this shift is for organisations to build their capacity and capability to undertake community engagement activities. Resourcing and supporting community engagement is a front-end investment that ultimately builds the capacity of organisations and communities to work more effectively together. Sustainable engagement requires substantial resources. This does not necessarily mean more money and people, but requires time to identify and develop different skills, bring existing know-how to the process and build partnerships and networks. Every community has capabilities, experience and local knowledge that it can contribute. Engaging a community in how it can prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies is more likely to result in decisions and outcomes the community is confident about and will act upon, and this in turn will support the work of emergency management organisations.

Where resources are to be invested in community engagement activities it is important to know whether or not such activities are making a difference. An early part of the engagement process should be to understand and agree what is expected of the process and to establish measures that are meaningful for communities and agencies, against which the engagement process can be assessed.

Effective engagement across the emergency management spectrum

Effective community engagement should be part of day-to-day business in the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency management. Communities need to be engaged before, during and after major emergency events. As the different phases of emergency management overlap and intersect, different types of engagement will be necessary.

Provision of information has a useful role but is rarely effective in isolation from more interactive strategies. Different types of engagement and levels of community involvement are required for different phases of an emergency. For example, when preparing a town fire plan, a collaborative approach incorporating community experience, priorities and knowledge is appropriate. However, when a fire threatens a town, the legislated obligations of response agencies to manage emergencies will mean a command-and-control approach, that provides clear direction and information for the community, is likely to be necessary. Experience shows that relief and recovery are most effective when led by an empowered community working in partnership with government and emergency management organisations.

Effective engagement is complex and requires a long-term commitment to build and maintain relationships with the community. Organisations must be clear about the purpose of the engagement in any particular phase of an emergency, what the engagement aims to achieve, and the degree of influence a community is able to have. Being upfront and clear about the engagement process is essential for establishing and maintaining trust.

Community engagement model

To assist practitioners in their work with communities, this Framework incorporates a model that details principles and approaches of community engagement in the emergency management context (Figure 1). The model draws on the internationally recognised International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum*—a tool designed to assist community engagement practitioners select the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any community engagement program.

It builds on the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs* which emphasise the importance of localised programs and activities, establishing an evidence base to inform future activity, and striking an appropriate balance between agency operational requirements and specialist expertise on the one hand and community expertise and participation in planning, decision-making, preparation, response and recovery activities on the other.

Weblinks

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum*

www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum

Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs, Manual 45, Australian Emergency Management Handbook and Manual Series

www.em.gov.au/Documents/Bookmarked%20PDF.PDF

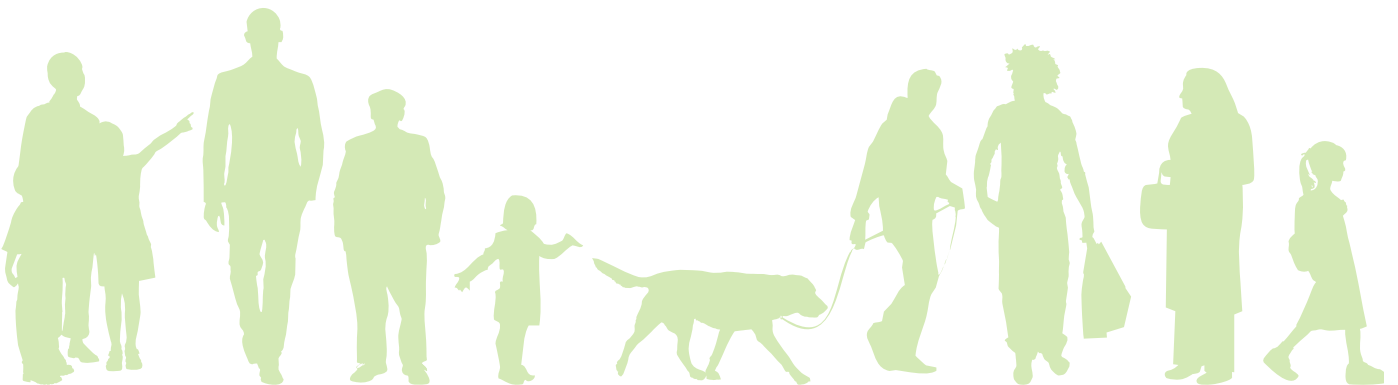


Fig 1 Community Engagement Model for Emergency Management



The Community Engagement Model for Emergency Management is circular to show that one engagement approach is not necessarily better than any other, and that different approaches are legitimate depending on the purpose and context of a particular situation.

The model makes clear that for all types of engagement it is essential to be guided by community engagement principles, to understand the broader context of the engagement, and have a clear purpose for engaging the community in the first place.

Good engagement practice relies on choosing the right approach or combination of approaches for engagement in different situations.

Principles of effective community engagement

There are three fundamental principles for effective community engagement in the emergency management context. Each of these principles is supported by some key actions.

1. Understand the community: its capacity, strengths and priorities

The knowledge, experience and shared history of communities are invaluable resources that emergency management practitioners should draw upon. Communities know how they functioned pre-disaster and what they aspire to post-disaster. They can be trusted to identify solutions to mitigate against the risks they face.

Understanding communities is the first step in harnessing this knowledge and effective community engagement practitioners recognise this and take the time to appreciate the environment they will operate in. This involves identifying and understanding networks and relationships, and working in partnership with existing and emerging community groups and leaders. Developing understanding involves putting time and effort into creating trust and building relationships across all phases of emergency management: before, during and after an event. It recognises that community engagement in the emergency management context is a long-term process and, to be most effective, must take place well before an event occurs and continue long after it is over. It is a two-way communication process where each participant can learn and benefit from the knowledge and experience of the other. People will get involved and stay engaged if their input is respected and valued.

Understanding the community involves:

- respecting and using local knowledge and experience
- tapping into existing networks
- identifying and acknowledging community capability and sharing resources
- appreciating the risks faced by communities
- assessing risk and levels of community awareness and preparedness.



2. Recognise complexity

Effective community engagement recognises the inherent complexity in engaging with the community. It embraces community diversity, including groups or individuals with specific vulnerabilities, and formulates strategies to engage in meaningful, inclusive and culturally appropriate ways. To be effective, practitioners will seek to understand the needs of the community, taking into account gender, age, culture, ability, and challenges such as geographic isolation, inadequate services or infrastructure, transient populations, accessibility issues and entrenched disadvantage. Practitioners must also recognise that in any community there will be differences of opinion, experience, knowledge, resources and capacity.

Community engagement that recognises complexity involves:

- embracing and respecting difference and diversity, including different perceptions of risk
- using genuinely respectful and flexible approaches
- identifying and addressing barriers to engagement and making participation accessible to all
- recognising that communities evolve and change over time.

3. Partner with the community to support existing networks and resources

Every community has networks, structures and ways of working that are familiar and meaningful to its members. The formation of partnerships that connect with and reflect these characteristics is crucial to effective community engagement. Partnerships should be based on mutual interests, values and goals for increased disaster resilience, creating a sense of shared responsibility, and a commitment to coordinated planning and response. Partnerships are about community members being 'at the table', being listened to, and being able to influence and make decisions on issues that affect themselves and their community. Often the most complex and pressing problems are resolved through engagement with local knowledge, experience and capabilities.

Partnering with the community to support existing networks and resources involves:

- building and maintaining partnerships
- fostering relationships with community leaders
- respecting community choices
- aligning emergency management activities to build on existing social capital
- identifying and employing strategies that empower local action.

Context and purpose of community engagement in emergency management

Sound community engagement requires an understanding of the context, and a clearly defined purpose, for the engagement. These are described below.

Community engagement context

All engagement activities occur in a wider context and it is essential to identify and understand this context, including:

- ✓ existing strengths, capacity and capabilities within the community
- ✓ key risks that the community face
- ✓ the community profile—including the diverse needs, values, perspectives, priorities and expectations of the community
- ✓ the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of organisations
- ✓ the phases of emergency management and long-term nature of community engagement including before, during and after events
- ✓ the scale of the engagement to be undertaken, for example, at a household or wider level
- ✓ time, resources and skills needed for the engagement activity.

Community engagement purpose

All engagement activities should have a clearly defined purpose. This means having a clear understanding of:

- ✓ what the engagement aims to achieve
- ✓ who the key decision makers and key stakeholders are
- ✓ what issues or questions are negotiable with the community
- ✓ what is within scope and what is out of scope
- ✓ both stakeholder and agency interpretation of the issue/concern/question being addressed, and whether either need more information
- ✓ the preparedness of people to engage
- ✓ the resources required to undertake the engagement and whether they are available.

Community engagement elements

The model outlines five elements of engagement—information, participation, consultation, collaboration and empowerment—with each having a particular goal. Any given engagement activity may incorporate one, several, or all elements, depending on the required outcome of the activity.

The goal of each of these five elements and some key considerations are described below.

1. Information

Goal: Sharing information with and between communities and agencies to come to a mutual understanding. Everyone is informed and able to take responsibility for decisions and actions.

- ✓ Communication is relevant, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent
- ✓ Communication is two-way
- ✓ Information is accessible to audiences in diverse situations, addresses a variety of communication needs and is provided through a range of channels
- ✓ Mechanisms are established to ensure coordinated communication with organisations and individuals
- ✓ Key messages are repeated.

2. Participation

Goal: Building connected networks and relationships, ownership and trust through active involvement.

- ✓ The community has an opportunity to be actively involved in decisions or actions that potentially affect or interest them
- ✓ There are multiple entry points or pathways to participate
- ✓ The community has the opportunity to input into how they want to participate
- ✓ Participation is possible for all members of the community.

3. Consultation

Goal: Sharing information, questions or positions to obtain ideas, feedback, knowledge or an understanding of objectives and expectations.

- ✓ Sufficient time is allowed for the community to consider an issue or question and provide input, and for agencies to consider this feedback
- ✓ The consultation process is as broad as possible while appropriate to the scope of the issue
- ✓ Opportunities are created so that many voices can be heard
- ✓ Information received from the community is recorded, stored and used appropriately
- ✓ The community is informed as to how their input is considered and influences outcomes.

4. Collaboration

Goal: Partnering with communities to support action, including developing alternatives and identifying a preferred solution..

- ✓ Opportunities are created for the community to take action in areas that could affect their lives
- ✓ Relationships are developed where agencies and organisations work collectively with the community—each contributing their share
- ✓ There is recognition and communication of the needs and interests of all participants, including decisions makers/agencies
- ✓ Seeking out and facilitating involvement of all who are potentially affected by or interested in a particular issue.

5. Empowerment

Goal: Individuals and communities have capacity to understand risk and accept responsibility and implement initiatives.

- ✓ Knowledge is shared between agencies and the community
- ✓ The community leads and owns the process
- ✓ Joint action and inclusion leads to empowered individuals and communities
- ✓ Opportunities for deliberation are an integral part of the process.

Conclusion

Every year, Australian communities face devastating losses caused by disasters. Floods, bushfires, storms, other hazards and their associated consequences have significant impacts on communities, the economy, infrastructure and the environment. Given the increasing regularity and severity of natural disasters, developing Australia's capacity to withstand and recover from them is critical.

This Framework provides guiding principles for engaging with Australian communities as vital partners in building disaster resilience. It focuses on strengthening existing social networks and assets fundamental to community resilience. Community engagement approaches should build upon and connect the knowledge, experience and strengths of the community, with the expertise, resources and capabilities of emergency management agencies and organisations. Establishing these partnerships requires long-term commitment, cooperation and goodwill. It is a challenging and complex process that is critical to ensure more resilient communities and better outcomes for all Australians.

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Further Resources

Further resources for community engagement in emergency management, including case studies and practitioner forums, can be found on the Australian Emergency Management Knowledge Hub www.emknowledge.gov.au.





Australian Emergency Management Website

www.em.gov.au