07

DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

EMV EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VICTORIA

Engaging the community in disaster recovery

07

DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

This resource is one in a set of eight booklets designed as a toolkit for local councils to understand, prepare for and actively support the recovery of their communities following a disaster.

The toolkit includes an introduction to the context and complexity of experiencing a disaster; what this means for individuals and the community; and the implications for local councils. The toolkit includes practical tips and tools designed to assist local councils to undertake effective recovery activity.

Each of the booklets in the toolkit is described to the right.

Cover Image: The Strathewen wish box, before it was buried beneath the Blacksmith's Tree, Strathewen. Photographer Silvi Glattauer.

Above Image: Rahima Toukhsati at the Whittlesea Community Garden and Bushfire Memorial. Photographer Silvi Glattauer.

BOOKLET		CONTENT	AUDIENCE
01	Understanding disaster recovery	Provides a broad context and understanding of recovery from disaster and has been designed as a companion document to be read before the specialist information detailed in each of the other booklets.	Councillors, senior managers, emergency management personnel and all staff across council
02	Recovery readiness: preparation for recovery before a disaster	Designed to supplement municipal emergency management planning and support councils to improve recovery readiness by addressing the factors contributing to recovery success.	Councillors, senior managers and emergency management personnel
03	When disaster strikes: the first days and weeks	Assumes that recovery readiness will have occurred and builds on this preparatory work by addressing the factors contributing to recovery success as they relate to the first days and weeks following a disaster.	Councillors, senior managers and emergency management personnel
04	Beyond disaster: the months and years ahead	Builds on the immediate recovery experience to move towards medium and long-term recovery. In this stage the factors contributing to recovery success are embedded in the process of recovery planning.	Councillors, senior managers and emergency management personnel
05	Council business matters: meeting the organisational challenges of disaster recovery	Focuses on council business matters in recovery, including workforce planning and resource management from preparation and post-disaster perspectives.	Councillors, senior managers and emergency management personnel
06	Regional recovery networks	Showcases the role of regional recovery networks in finding solutions to shared challenges.	Senior managers and emergency management personnel
07	Engaging the community in disaster recovery	Examines how councils can support community-led recovery and engage with the community more effectively to support recovery.	Councillors, senior managers and emergency management personnel
08	Recovery tools and other resources	Brings together the tools that support decision making and planning described in the other booklets. It also includes additional reading and other useful resources.	Emergency management personnel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Community engagement is not an end in itself but is fundamental to overall recovery. After a disaster, getting involved assists communities to make decisions about their recovery.

In the first weeks and months it is concerned with sharing information and short term recovery activities. As time passes, involvement and collaboration ensures that communities can develop a vision for the future and make decisions about the longer term recovery activities that will get them there.

Community engagement can restore the sense of being 'back in control' for communities that can often feel powerless after experiencing major losses and trauma. This is important to the healing process for individuals and the community as a whole. In the process, community engagement can provide the knowledge, experience and skills that make for a more resourceful and resilient community in the future.

While most councils are not new to community engagement, the impacts on a community following a disaster mean that community engagement must adapt to the new and challenging circumstances.

*'There is a growing movement, in Australia and in other countries such as the United States and New Zealand that sees disaster-affected communities encouraged to rebuild sustainably and to **build back better** than before disaster struck, to improve their resilience to disaster in both built and social terms.*

Most importantly, governments have begun to heed the call of citizens who desperately want to be a part of rebuilding their communities, who don't want to see inappropriate decisions made over their heads, and are on track to improving 'community engagement' in disaster recovery.' [1]

This booklet is intended to support councils to prepare for and run processes that involve, collaborate with and engage communities in community recovery.

Others engaging communities recovering from disasters, such as community organisations and government agencies, might also find the material useful in informing their approach.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is concerned with involving individuals, families, businesses, interest groups and other stakeholders directly in decisions that affect them. This will include decisions across the social, built, economic, natural and agricultural environments.

Community engagement is defined by Cavaya (2001) as:

'... mutual communication and deliberation that occurs between government and citizens. It allows citizens and government to participate mutually in the formulation of policy and the provision of government services.

Ideally it links government action with community action to progress community and government goals. Community engagement necessarily means participation with a community of people, rather than an individual citizen. This means that engagement arrangements need to incorporate the diversity and dynamics of communities, issues of community representation and power, and the potentially conflicting goals of sub-communities. ...'[2]

A key feature of effective community engagement is that it is a two way exchange of information, views and aspirations. Community members are active participants in informing or making decisions – not the unwilling recipients of well-intentioned decision makers.

In practice the degree of influence of community engagement can vary from token efforts to genuine joint or delegated decision making. Most councils recognise the risks of non-involvement and will strive for meaningful participation in pursuit of various engagement goals.

This range of community engagement goals is described by the International Association for Public Participation Australasia (IAP2) in its *Spectrum of Community Engagement*[3]. This framework uses five levels to illustrate the public participation goals and the promise to the community this implies. See Table 1 below.

Engagement varies from simple one-way provision of information through to fully empowering and supporting people to plan for and manage their own objectives and address their own needs.

TABLE 1: IAP2 MODEL

	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOAL	PROMISE TO THE COMMUNITY
INFORM	To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.
CONSULT	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.
INVOLVE	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.
COLLABORATE	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible.
EMPOWER	To place final decision making in the hands of the community.	We will implement what you decide.

Adapted from *Spectrum of Community Engagement*, IAP2 2004.[4]

In the course of 'business as usual' councils will determine the nature of community engagement depending on the topic, time frames, resources, statutory responsibilities and level of community concern. The effort dedicated to the community engagement task will usually be matched to the project and be time-limited. For example, community engagement for a new plan or strategy will normally be contained to a period of weeks or a few months and associated with key project elements, such as 'plan development' or 'consultation'. The more contentious the issue usually the longer the time dedicated to it.

Council's primary concern in these cases is providing the community with the opportunity to participate. If the community chooses not to, while council might be disappointed, ultimately it is the community's decision to be involved, or not.

Many councils have documented community engagement policies or strategies that guide them – many based on the IAP2 Community Engagement Spectrum.

A sample of such a Plan is illustrated below.

EXTRACT – LATROBE CITY COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Council's Community Engagement Objectives

Latrobe City Council's objectives when engaging the community are informed by the community consultation program and guided by the IAP2 Spectrum of Community Engagement.

They are:

1. To maintain an effective and ongoing dialogue with the community by both informing and listening.

2. To consult the community in policy development, planning and project delivery.

3. To involve the community in matters that directly affects them in a specific location or in the delivery of a Council service.

4. To collaborate with and empower the community to deliver selected services on behalf of Council.

5. Ensure the community understands how their input has influenced Council.

6. To continue to develop and improve Latrobe City Council's community engagement capacity

Supporting the IAP2 spectrum of community engagement are nine guiding principles which confirm stakeholder's commitment to implement systems and processes which enhance community participation as well as develop increased opportunities to involve those members of the community not currently engaged. They support the commitment to continue to develop and implement community engagement activities.

1. Participation and Inclusiveness

Encourage community involvement in a diverse range of Council activities including policy development, planning, service delivery and decision making.

Embrace inclusive processes and practices to maximise results from engagement activities.

2. Active Engagement

Use new and effective ways to engage, moving beyond established networks and tapping into the significant knowledge and expertise residing within our community.

3. Respect

Actively listen to and better understand the views, concerns and experiences of our community. Where agreements or consensus cannot be reached, the choice to respectfully disagree is a valid and honourable position.

4. Integrity

Utilise engagement practices and processes that genuinely inform decision making and increase community trust and confidence in Council. Do what we say we will do, when we say we will do it.

5. Valuing diversity

Seek out diverse opinions and perspectives on Council activities and decision making processes.

6. Trust

Develop community engagement activities that are genuine, relevant, timely and respectful of the community's desire to be involved. Inform the community as to the purpose of engagement and provide timely and appropriate feedback on how their input was considered by Council.

7. Timely

Schedule community engagement activities to provide maximum opportunities for involvement by all stakeholders. Ensure that community members and groups have adequate time to consider and prepare responses.

8. Transparent and Accountable

Provide community members with a clear understanding of how their inputs will be used and provide feedback on how their input contributed to Council's decision making process.

9. Informed

Ensure Council decisions are well informed by documenting the results of community engagement activities in all officer reports to Council. Council will consider submissions of all participants and community members when making decisions. If a difference occurs between community input and Council's final decision, the reasons for the Council decision will be clearly and unambiguously detailed.

The above extract illustrates this council's commitment to engaging its communities in a 'business as usual' context.

Following a disaster, the kinds of principles asserted by such a plan do not change. However, the engagement context does – reflecting the needs and capacity of the community in the immediate aftermath and over time.

The next section explores some of the factors to be considered when engaging communities recovering from a disaster.

WHY IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIFFERENT FOLLOWING A DISASTER?

Community engagement is different following a disaster for several reasons.

Foremost are the direct impacts of the disaster, which will affect people's capacity to participate, for example:

- community members who have suffered loss and trauma might struggle with what they regard as bureaucratic processes

- many will be using their energy in the functions of daily living, which have become more complex and time consuming

- many will be under financial stress

- some might be physically dislocated from the community, living in alternative accommodation or absent from the area for long periods

- some might be isolated as a result of disability, age or culture, which might be exacerbated following the disaster

- timeframes are often different with needs and priorities changing rapidly – in the early stages these might change daily.

Nonetheless, involving the community is a vital part of minimising disaster related trauma.

'Because trauma emanates from profound powerlessness, interventions should emphasise empowerment, meaning they need to emphasise strengths, mobilise the community's capabilities, and help the community to become self-sufficient'. (Harvey, 1996)

This highlights a further difference. In a non-disaster environment, people can make choices about participating in consultation with little consequence to themselves. However, in a disaster recovery situation, including people affected by the event in decision making processes can actually help to minimise isolation and restore individual and community wellbeing.

For council this means that simply providing a 'business as usual' opportunity to participate is insufficient – community engagement following a disaster must:

- recognise the different state of mind of people affected by the disaster

- add tailored engagement techniques and approaches that might be different to those used in a 'business as usual' setting

- use proactive participation strategies that reach out to affected individuals and communities

- apply transparent consultation processes that maximise information exchange and clarify the basis for decision making

- provide objective, fair and accessible processes that are not seen to show favour to certain individuals or groups over others

- validate the views and input of interest groups with the broader community

- continue to apply engagement principles throughout the planning, consultation and implementation of recovery

- be based on the capacity and needs of the affected communities – rather than on the process and timeframe needs of council and other agencies.

Importantly, a key difference to community engagement following a disaster will be the need to enable communities to take the lead in managing their own recovery.

The national disaster recovery principles highlight the importance of recovery being led by the community.

Community-led recovery acknowledges and supports the resources, capacity, resilience and leadership already present within individuals and communities.

This is clearly articulated in *Community Recovery, Handbook 2, Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series: Building a disaster resilient Australia* AEMI, 2011[5]:

COMMUNITY- LED RECOVERY

Successful recovery is responsive and flexible, engaging communities and empowering them to move forward. Recovery should:

- centre on the community, to enable those affected by a disaster to actively participate in their own recovery;

- seek to address the needs of all affected communities;

- allow individuals, families and communities to manage their own recovery;

- consider the values, culture and priorities of all affected communities;

- use and develop community knowledge, leadership and resilience;

- recognise that communities might choose different paths to recovery;

- ensure that the specific and changing needs of affected communities are met with flexible and adaptable policies, plans, and services; and

- build strong partnerships between communities and those involved in the recovery process.

When applying the IAP2 framework, the more community engagement **involves, collaborates with** and **empowers** the community – the more the recovery is being led by and focusing on the community. This can be quite a different and challenging role for council but it will be well appreciated by a recovering community.

STRATHEWEN EXPERIENCE

'Council's willingness to accept the uncertainties of a community-led recovery, their flexibility in proceeding at the community's pace and respect for the Strathewen Community Renewal Association agenda has been fundamental in creating a very positive working relationship.'

(Handbook 2 – Community Recovery – Australian Emergency management handbook Series).

A review conducted by community recovery committees following the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria, provides critical insight into the key themes of successful community engagement from a community perspective.[6]

The review identifies these themes as: communication; community leadership; community planning and identifying priorities; community health and wellbeing; working with government; and building effective relationships and networks.

Challenges for community engagement that can emerge following a disaster include:

- individuals who do not necessarily represent the views of the community might seek disproportionate influence on decisions about recovery, putting themselves forward as community spokesperson with the media or political leaders

- new groups can emerge claiming ownership of some aspects of the recovery with or without broader community support

- different views that are largely dormant before a disaster can be brought to a head as groups blame each other for the disaster

- new divisions can emerge as people make judgments about what they think is fair for them and not fair for others

- councils might feel less willing to tackle contentious issues in a highly emotive post-disaster environment.

Community engagement that is well managed and takes account of post-disaster conditions can:

- reduce the powerlessness and isolation some people will feel

- create goodwill and trust between the community and council – which can be hard to restore if it is damaged

- realise opportunities to fully grasp community challenges and discover potential solutions

- discourage the formation of disaffected groups, that can splinter whole of community efforts and stretch meagre council resources

- minimise divisions in the community and support the spread of reliable information.

The following principles can be used to guide effective community engagement during disaster recovery:

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

2 *Recognise complexity*

3 *Partner with the community to support existing networks and resources*[7]

The stakes are very high when engaging the community during disaster recovery and considerable planning, monitoring and refinement of approach is required.

The following practical steps are designed to achieve effective community engagement:

- Support community-led decision making structures

- Build on community networks

- Foster trust

- Consider the whole community

- Use effective engagement methods.

Each of these is discussed more fully in the following sections, including what can be done to prepare for a disaster and how community engagement can be tailored once the impact and issues have emerged.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY-LED DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES

One of the keys to effective community-led recovery is the central role of formal decision making and coordination structures. These usually take the form of community recovery committees which might:

- use or build on existing structures or organisations – for example a progress or ratepayer association shifting its focus to recovery or a community development or community resilience committee taking on the role; or

- be purpose-built – establishing a dedicated committee formed from affected community members and relevant community organisations and agencies.

The structure and membership of community recovery committees will, in part, depend on the nature and impact of the disaster.

The key aim of a community recovery committee is to provide a mechanism where decisions about recovery activities can be made in a timely and informed manner. Its role should include:

- representing the needs of the community

- providing legitimate and recognised leadership

- acting as a community advocate

- communicating and listening to the community

- informing and engaging the community on recovery

- coordinating and monitoring activities and events in the community

- acknowledging and documenting the recovery journey of the community

- providing a strong communication channel between the community and council, along with other organisations and government agencies.

PRE-DISASTER

A STRUCTURE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A pre-disaster option is to consider establishing or using an existing community committee with a focus that includes recovery. This can often provide a fast-track to a community recovery committee when one is required.

The challenges with this approach are that the committee might not match well with the affected community or area and the membership might be resistant to change. It is also possible that community representatives might only become motivated to get involved following a disaster.

TIP

Consider a scan of existing committees (not necessarily council links or advisory committees) that might be interested in broadening their scope to include recovery, for example, community hall committees or progress associations.

ALPINE SHIRE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

In Alpine Shire, a Community Recovery Committee that met quarterly or as needed was transformed into a Community Resilience Committee that met bi-monthly.

The new committee broadened its scope and took on challenges such as articulating and developing a Community Resilience Plan. This Plan focuses on preparing and informing the broader community about emergency and disaster preparedness, for example conducting an annual Resilience Week.

The new committee also found it was easier to maintain interest and commitment by meeting bimonthly and focusing on needs that were not dependant on a disaster which happened fairly infrequently.
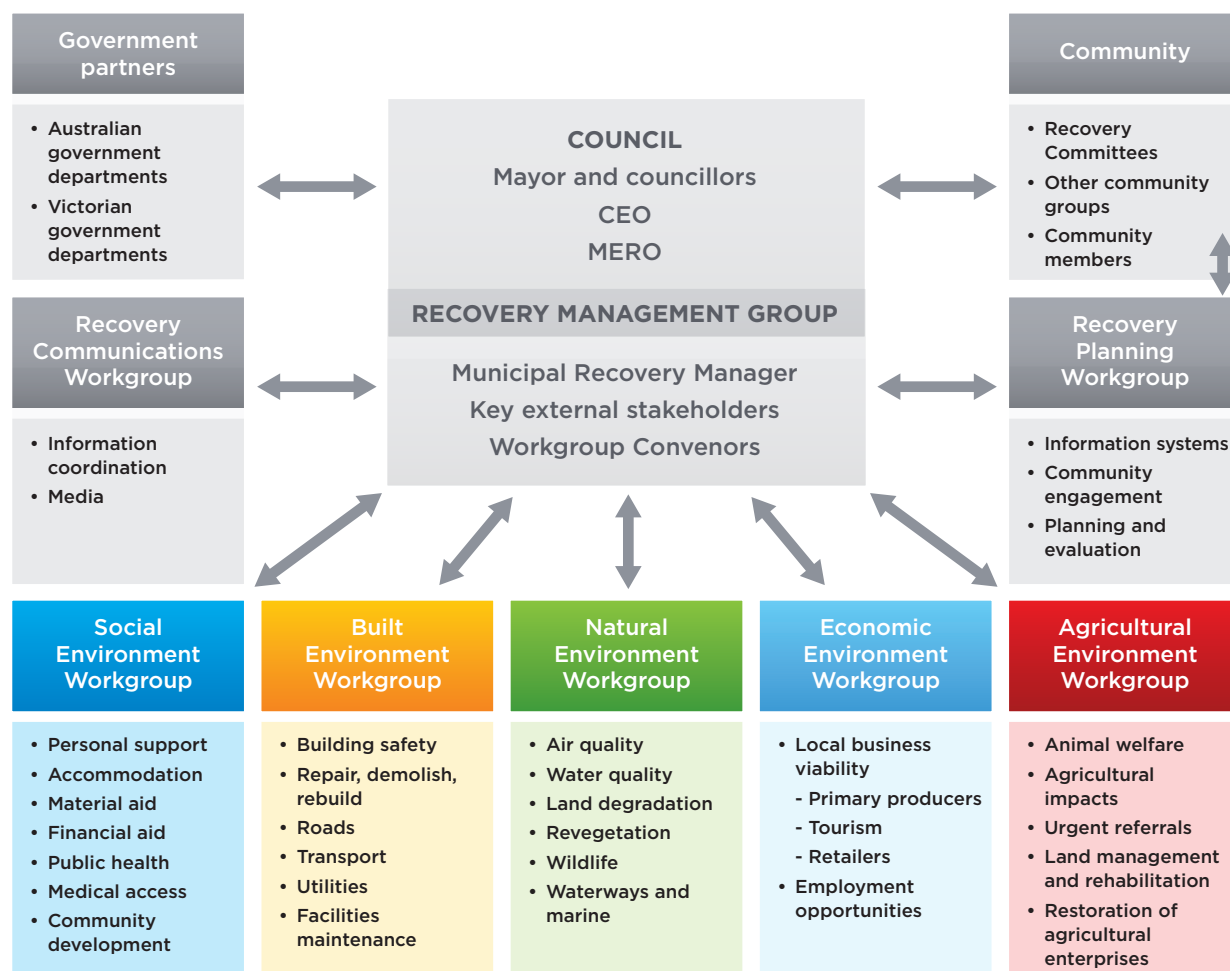
Alpine Shire Council has a strong role in the Community Resilience Committee – in other areas Community Recovery Committees might be more independent of the council.

It will also be useful to consider how a community recovery committee will interact with council decision making structures, in particular the Recovery Management structure.

FIGURE 1: RECOVERY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Government partners	COUNCIL	Community
• Australian government departments • Victorian government departments	**Mayor and councillors** **CEO** **MERO**	• Recovery Committees • Other community groups • Community members
Recovery Communications Workgroup	**RECOVERY MANAGEMENT GROUP** **Municipal Recovery Manager** **Key external stakeholders** **Workgroup Convenors**	**Recovery Planning Workgroup**
• Information coordination • Media		• Information systems • Community engagement • Planning and evaluation

Social Environment Workgroup	Built Environment Workgroup	Natural Environment Workgroup	Economic Environment Workgroup	Agricultural Environment Workgroup

• Personal support
• Accommodation
• Material aid
• Financial aid
• Public health
• Medical access
• Community development
	• Building safety
	• Repair, demolish, rebuild
	• Roads
	• Transport
	• Utilities
	• Facilities maintenance
		• Air quality
		• Water quality
		• Land degradation
		• Revegetation
		• Wildlife
		• Waterways and marine
			• Local business viability
			  - Primary producers
			  - Tourism
			  - Retailers
			• Employment opportunities
				• Animal welfare
				• Agricultural impacts
				• Urgent referrals
				• Land management and rehabilitation
				• Restoration of agricultural enterprises

POST-DISASTER

EMBRACE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Normally people do not wait to be told what to do – they take the initiative and just get on with what they see needs to be done. This is the reason the community already has so many community groups and networks operating.

Post-disaster the community will become highly motivated, driven to act by immediate needs and have access to very high, adrenalin fuelled energy. They don't consider giving up and they can regard lack of action from council as insensitive, bureaucratic or incompetent – 'typical'.

The emergence of new community groups focused on recovery is a common response to disaster and demonstrates the community's desire to restore their own wellbeing. Multiple groups can pull in different directions leading some affected communities to become confused, disoriented, divided and conflicted and lose confidence.

Council's role as a facilitator and mediator is particularly critical in galvanising, supporting and coordinating groups across the municipality.

If emerging groups are not included in recovery structures, council's recovery effort might be spread too thinly or drawn into less productive activities.

TIP

Make the offer to support or establish a community recovery committee quickly after the event.

Do not apply pressure to communities to do so but do not wait for the community to 'be ready' before the offer is made. Providing communities with the clear option straight away will help to reinforce council's role in recovery and start to point the way towards recovery.

Not making the offer early can be interpreted, particularly by those who want to 'get on with it' as disinterest or incompetence on the part of council and they might well form splinter action groups, which will be more difficult to coordinate with as time goes by.

SUPPORT EFFECTIVE COMMITTEES

Unsurprisingly, the aftermath of a disaster can lead to hugely increased interest from the community in decisions that affect them. This brings with it the risk that vocal individuals with their own specific agendas will push themselves forward to join or run community recovery committees or other key groups in the recovery.

In the interests of long-term recovery, it is preferable that community recovery committees represent the broad views and aspirations of the entire community. It is critical therefore that people who are involved in community recovery committees are chosen carefully and that the community decides on the process of appointment to the committee. Some communities will be comfortable with a committee that simply evolves from interested people or known community leaders; others will need a more formal process, for example, the support of the Electoral Commission has been used to assist in the establishment of some community recovery committees.

Councils can assist communities to establish a balanced and effective community recovery committee by encouraging and aiding inaugural groups to use processes more likely to lead to representative committees. This might include:

- convening an initial interest meeting; inviting all relevant community organisations and interest groups; and supporting them to determine the pathway they wish to take

- suggesting models that include representatives from different geographical locations, different population groups (such as young people or culturally diverse groups) and different interest groups (such as local traders, farmers or heritage groups)

- suggesting an independent chair for example, an ex-mayor, former local state member of parliament or similar

- providing assistance with drafting a constitution or terms of reference and advising on committee election processes.

Community recovery committee members will need to be locally credible, with communication skills, commitment and the time to give to the task. The likely duration of recovery will influence who might be able to be involved.

Likely candidates might be found among existing leaders such as sporting club, service club or community organisation office bearers; religious leaders; business leaders or other positions of responsibility such as a school principal.

They might also be found among those who do not have pre-existing community roles but who are experienced and capable retired managers or administrators, who emerge following the event.

Often such people ask useful questions or contribute positive ideas at community meetings and other events. They might be happy to be approached to take an active formal role in the recovery.

TIPS

Encourage people with the credibility, skills and commitment to join their community recovery committee. Pay attention to including representatives of particular interest or population groups.

Match the skills and interests of people with community recovery committee roles – some people will thrive on 'big picture' topics like developing a new community vision and goals setting, while others will be more task oriented.

Provide support to get the committee working smoothly so that they can focus on the main tasks – not administration. For example, provide a facilitator, a minute or note taker and provide assistance, such as chairing initial meetings, providing meeting venues, photocopying and printing, coordinating invitations and mail outs.

COMMUNITY-LED RECOVERY RESOURCE

See Community-led recovery: Workbook for Community Recovery Committees after a disaster, DH, 2011 which provides guidance to establishment of a CRC post-disaster.

BUILD ON THE COMMUNITY'S NETWORKS

The community will already have a wide variety of networks that connect people to others in the community.

These formal and informal networks include shared activities, such as sports or hobbies; business connections and charity work.

Many of the organisations and people from these networks already have goodwill with other members and are also likely to have the skills, motivation and relationships to aid the community engagement process. If they are elected or executive members of existing organisations they might already be recognised as having authority to represent sections of the community.

Such networks provide existing avenues to the community that are more targeted and interest based, for example, canvassing the views of young rural people about a memorial might get more buy in through the Young Farmers Club or Youth Drop-in centre rather than a general public notice or survey. Similarly the Craft Guild or the Art Society might be more targeted avenues to consult on recovery arts projects.

In addition to these community based networks there are a range of federal, state and non-government agencies that provide services or infrastructure within the community. Many will be active in the recovery process such as the Department of Human Services, Australian Red Cross, the Council of Churches and some will have roles prescribed by legislation or associated plans.

As such, they too form part of the existing networks that council can work with in disaster recovery engagement.

PRE-DISASTER

EXISTING NETWORKS AND AGENCIES

Community engagement can draw widely on the formal and informal networks and agencies that operate in communities. These will have been identified in the process of considering potential partners in recovery. (See **Book 2: Recover readiness – preparation for recovery before a disaster**).

Understanding and developing this potential before a disaster event will fast-track effective engagement.

> ### TIP
>
> Review the stakeholder mapping resource to check that options for community engagement roles have been considered.
>
> Consider including specific reference to community engagement in formal partnership protocols.

RECOVERY STAKEHOLDER MAPPING RESOURCE

This resource provides a template to identify and document recovery stakeholders along with their likely recovery roles and functions – including community engagement.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL – WORKING WITH COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Community Emergency Planning Project:

Wellington Shire has several high risk communities where fire or flood occur at regular intervals. Funding enabled council to work with the communities of Loch Sport and Golden Beach/Paradise Beach on a pilot project to develop an all hazards *Community Emergency Planning Guide and Workbook*. The development process involved the participation of many community members and local agencies.

These communities have subsequently produced their own emergency plan with the Golden Beach/Paradise Beach Community Emergency Plan successfully applied in March 2014 following a marine pollution incident.

Emergency Planning for Caravan Parks:

Caravan Parks are usually located in beautiful locations, often at risk of natural disasters. Park residents are largely unfamiliar with the local environment or the risks associated with bushfire, floods or other emergency events. To support owners/managers of caravan parks with their legislative requirements Wellington Shire Council in conjunction with emergency services agencies, conducted a two day Emergency Management Workshop. The workshop included risk management, business continuity and the opportunity to network and share information.

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL – CONDUCTING **ARE YOU READY?** WORKSHOPS

The 2011 floods were widespread throughout the Mount Alexander Shire municipality. During the recovery phase, residents expressed concern that they were not sure what to do if there was another emergency in the area. Council and the Community Recovery Committee decided to host several workshops to help clarify the roles of agencies and the support that is available in emergency events.

Three community workshops were held at the Castlemaine Farmers Markets to promote 'emergency readiness'. Several key agencies including, council, Castlemaine District Community Health, State Emergency Service, Country Fire Authority and Australian Red Cross were involved in these workshops. An emergency-ready kit was handed out to participants during the workshops.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Supporting the establishment and development of community networks has been shown to create structures and relationships that assist communities to come together and make decisions collectively about the future of their communities following a disaster.

Councils have reported that they found the process of establishing community recovery committees in communities that had pre-existing progress associations easier than in those that had no previous formal networks.

TIP

Invest in community development and the establishment of local groups particularly where there are none and in risk prone areas.

Consider the economic environment and business sector when developing networks and working with communities.

FOSTER TRUST

POST-DISASTER

Once disaster strikes, emergency plans will be
activated, the impact of the disaster will be assessed,
and the recovery commenced. This is the trigger
to activate existing networks in community
engagement roles.

TIPS

Assess post-disaster capabilities: *What groups
are still active and equipped to undertake
community engagement tasks?*

Activate protocols keeping partners informed
and updated.

Actively engage and support existing networks
that are functioning in an affected community.

Be aware that some organisations might have
the desire to take on the community recovery
committee functions discussed in the previous
section. However, they might not have the
necessary resources and capacity to do so
without assistance or partners.

Work with other agencies to ensure that
community engagement activities are
coordinated as much as possible and that
findings are shared. For example, put involving
the community on the agenda of multi–agency
meetings; seek input from the community and
other agencies into the design of community
engagement tools, such as surveys; and
encourage communities to invite key agencies
to attend community meetings or engagement
activities.

Trust in council will be critical to genuine community
involvement. This will be influenced by how council is
viewed before the event, immediately after the event
and in every step toward recovery from that point on.

Because council controls much of the public and
regulatory space and oversees rules of access, many
can regard council as a barrier to 'getting on with
it' – planning processes can appear bureaucratic and
unnecessarily restrictive.

This can be exacerbated if there is a pattern of
negative interaction that results in distrust or
perceived unnecessary 'red tape' and bureaucracy.
A negative general attitude toward all government
agencies might ensue as some people do not
differentiate between local, state and federal
government and see the combined three levels
simply as 'the government'.

**Proactively fostering trust can
ensure that available energy and
resources are directed towards
recovery rather than repairing
damaged relationships with the
community.**

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL –
BUILDING COMMUNITY TRUST

It is important to remember when liaising
with community members after a disaster,
information must be kept factual, timely and
consistent. Whether this is via social media,
newsletters, public forums or face to face
communication.

PRE-DISASTER

A sound track record of honest and transparent community engagement that forges strong relationships and facilitates participation, will encourage the community at large to trust council.

Council plays an important facilitation role before a disaster nurturing connections between community organisations and with government agencies. Some of these might be through formal channels such as meetings and projects. Other connections might be less formal, such as by arranging introductions of key people or inviting small numbers of influential people to a local café to exchange information and establish relationships. Councils have a high credibility with communities and the business sector and the value of council actively introducing key people to each other cannot be underestimated.

POST-DISASTER

DEPLOY AN IMMEDIATE STAFF PRESENCE IN AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Without a strong and immediate local council presence, people can feel they went through the disaster on their own – 'without council'. Consequently, people can feel that they can no longer take the supportive role of council for granted and any trust between council and the community can become strained and need to be re-established.

If council uses 'business as usual' planning and decision making processes; busies itself with procedural matters, regulatory restrictions and jurisdictional issues; is not seen out and about in the community; and does not inform the community about what is (and what is not) happening – people will quickly feel abandoned. This uncertainty can become anxiety and then anger – damaging previous trust and presenting a barrier to ongoing recovery.

The value in being seen as 'one of the community' in building trust cannot be overstated and early contact is important in making the right start. This early contact can be very challenging for both the community and the council officers. It is important to consider what officers might expect to encounter and need to do in such circumstances; who would play these roles, what attributes they will need and ensure they are properly trained and prepared.

BE SEEN TO SOLVE PROBLEMS – NOT CREATE THEM

The old saying, *'you only get one chance to make a first impression'* is certainly true in the aftermath of a disaster.

Trust is created where councils find solutions and unblock barriers – for example, managing to open a road in a restricted access area so that fruit pickers can harvest a crop means the farmer might prevent a total loss of a crop and as importantly the message is clear that council is concerned for the community – not just the rules.

Another example of this is a council that had issued rates notices that were delivered immediately following a disaster. The council appreciated the untimeliness of this on people who had suffered extensive losses and immediately issued deferment notices and advice that those who had lost their homes would be rated on land values only.

Acts of this kind quickly develops a picture of council 'knowing what they are doing' and 'doing the right things' and immediately builds confidence and trust.

PROVIDE RELIABLE INFORMATION

Reliable information is important for three reasons:

- The more often the information provided is accurate the more the source (in this case council) becomes trustworthy

- When the information is sensitive to the needs of the audience, people start to believe council understands their needs

- Providing full and frank information on the options people can choose delivers better decision making.

In considering their views on the future of the community, people will largely draw on their personal circumstances. Experience tells us that some things that might not normally evoke a personal reaction can be taken very personally or that overreaction is common. The quality of communication in general will therefore impact on their trust or acceptance in what they are being asked to consider.

All messages to the community need to meet the same high standards so that by the time it comes to making big decisions, enough trust exists between council and the community to make well-informed and well-balanced decisions for the future.

In *Communicating in Recovery, ARC, 2010*[8], the Australian Red Cross outlines suitable standards including practical advice on providing information that is relevant, timely, clear, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent.

It is important to recognise that conflicting information or no information quickly leads to speculation, rumour and distrust. In the aftermath of a disaster community communication sharing and interaction is at its peak with people readily discussing all manner of observations from the disaster and what is occurring thereafter.

Listen to the community and match information to needs.

TIPS

Make sure information and messages are coordinated with key partners to ensure consistency

Be alert to misinformation and negative rumours and move quickly to ensure correct information is made available.

A useful guide is to use messages that say:

1. This is what we know.

2. This is what we don't know.

3. This is what we are going to do.

4. This is what we want you to do.

Be prepared to repeat key information.

MANAGE COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS OF COUNCIL

Inviting suggestions from the community about what they want to happen in the future can raise their expectations of action. Council does not want to limit the hopes and desires of the community but it is important to ensure that community expectations of council are realistic.

In the normal course of community consultation it is common for ideas to be canvassed to gauge community reaction with little impact on expectations. However, people who have just experienced a disaster are more likely be in a state of mind where options will be interpreted as intentions. This can lead to disappointment, frustration and anger – with trust in council becoming seriously damaged.

Being open about council's limitations can reduce tensions but must be managed sensitively, so that communities can be supported to think broadly and creatively about their future.

TIPS

Be conscious that engagement can raise expectations and ensure any limitations on council's options being presented are clear.

Where possible provide written materials to reinforce and document the information being presented so that people can take it away to read, consider or share with others. Make sure such materials are written in plain English and easy to understand.

On occasions when council cannot pursue a community endorsed suggestion, explain council's rationale for not proceeding.

ACT ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REPORT RESULTS

At times it can seem to a community that their concerns, ideas and suggestions are not being heard or acted upon. This is sometimes because resources have not been secured or simply that the time between consultation and implementation can be considerable.

It is particularly important at a time where communities are stretched and their time is precious, that councils keep communities up to date about what has been pursued as result of earlier community input.

For example, if a community is consulted to make a choice between say a memorial or a community arts initiative, the outcome or preference determined by the consultation needs to be reported and acted upon.

This also includes reporting on progress as time goes by, for example, 'X program is now operating and y people have used it' or 'the contract for X infrastructure project has been advertised'.

It is important to recognise that councils cannot take every idea on board. Nonetheless as the level of government closest to a community, councils are in a good position to gather community intelligence and feed it through to others, such as state or federal government agencies. Sometimes this might mean advocating directly with other councils or recovery agencies or through peak bodies, such as the Municipal Association of Victoria.

TIPS

When advocating an issue ensure it reflects the views of the majority – not a vocal few.

Use formal and informal avenues to keep people with influence in the loop, for example brief local state or federal members of parliament.

Use community recovery communications to update status on key initiatives and projects.

Reinforce recovery plan reporting processes by including engagement ideas and progress.

LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE

Undertaking an open and transparent review of council's disaster recovery performance and involving the community in this process not only demonstrates accountability, it also creates the foundation for further capacity building and resilience in the community.

Disaster recovery reviews or evaluations conducted or commissioned by council provide an opportunity to capture the experiences of community members, distil the lessons and use them to improve disaster recovery in the future.

Giving people affected by disasters the opportunity to tell their stories is a useful means of gaining insight into the recovery experience from their perspective and provides them with the opportunity to deal with their experience in a positive and meaningful way.

TIP

Find creative and engaging ways to involve the community in disaster recovery review or evaluation processes.

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL – CAPTURING STORIES IN *TOO MUCH WATER!*

Much of the 2011 flooding across Mount Alexander Shire occurred in places distant from each other, such as Baringhup, Castlemaine and Campbell's Creek, and Walmer, Newstead and Sutton Grange. Though stories and experiences of flood affected people are shared with those around them, the personal disclosures and feelings are rarely expressed more widely.

A community engagement project was initiated by Mount Alexander Shire Council to record the stories of several flood-affected residents from across the municipality. An external organisation was contracted to manage the project from inception to post-production. The contractor worked with council staff and community groups to identify and work with local residents, volunteers and businesses who had been impacted by or involved in the floods and flood recovery.

The end product is a professionally printed book that showcases the stories of local people. The book, entitled *Too Much Water!,* was launched at the Castlemaine Market Building in February 2013 and displayed for six weeks. Five-hundred copies were produced and distributed to flood-affected residents, volunteers, organisations, businesses, schools and associated individuals and agencies. It was also displayed at the Newstead Writers' Festival and was submitted for consideration in the 2013 Victoria Community History Awards.

This project has enabled people to share their stories across the municipality and beyond. It has provided an opportunity for those not directly impacted by the flooding to absorb the stories and photos and better understand the experiences of those who were.

THE CITY OF WHITTLESEA – SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY WRITING GROUP

Word Weavers is a community group that developed organically following the 2009 fires. It emerged two years after the event receiving recovery funding and facilitation support from a recovery community development worker in response to community requests.

Up to fifteen members get together each month to share personal writing pieces, listen to guest speakers talking on writing skills and to provide emotional support to each other about all sorts of life experiences, including their fire experiences.

The group has been established as a program of the Whittlesea Community House so it has a long-term 'place' to exist, insurance for members and volunteers and a potential auspice for future grants.

Word Weavers now exists as an inclusive community group open to any interested community members. Current members are a mix of ages and genders. Some are directly fire affected, some indirectly and some are completely new to the area.

Members have taken on group responsibilities (with support of the recovery community development worker) and are currently planning an anthology and a writers' retreat. At times the sessions have been very intense, focusing on shared support relating to their 2009 experience. At other times the sessions have been full of laughter and camaraderie.

Experience shows that council staff involved in a group such as this and other similar community engagement initiatives need strong support as it is far beyond the scope of 'normal' community development work. Regular professional debriefing and a team approach is essential.

ENGAGE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Communities are not homogenous groups and effective community engagement following a disaster will need to understand and manage this complexity.

Similarly, not all people will be interested in being engaged. It is important however, to ensure there are transparent and open opportunities for as many people as possible who want to be involved.

The experience of the disaster will have affected people in quite different ways and how each deals with their loss will vary. People are therefore likely to be at various stages of recovery and might or might not grasp where others are at.

In addition to this, there are likely to be other factors that influence their expectations of community engagement or their capacity to contribute to it. For example, people affected by mobility limitations such as older people or people with a disability might not be able to attend community meetings; others might have difficulty hearing; for others such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, reading English might be difficult. Children also have a stake in the future of the community and many who are now adults who did not get the opportunity to participate in decisions about recovery from disasters they experienced, talk of the disappointment of being left out.

There will also be quite diverging views within a community, for example business interests and heritage interests might clash over streetscape renewal or conservationist and animal welfare groups might clash with those wishing to clear roadsides over remnant forest and habitat protection. Other divisions might be less predictable. For example, community division might arise where 'the insured' resent assistance to 'the uninsured' or where perceptions arise that the system has supported some families more than others – particularly if this appears disproportionate to need. During the early period this will be largely about immediate support such as assistance, appeals, repairs, and donated goods. Longer term disparity will emerge as the apparent pace of re-establishment and rebuilding is seen to vary across a community.

Effective community engagement has to ensure that there are opportunities for the many voices and opinions in the community to be heard and to do this in a way that brings the community together.

PRE-DISASTER

The greater council's understanding of its community before a disaster, the easier it will be to mobilise an effective community engagement strategy. Much of this will be done already through a range of planning processes and business units.

Stakeholder analysis will also have identified most of the formal networks council is connected with.

TIP

Review council community engagement policies and practice to assess how vulnerable or isolated groups might be contacted and involved in the wake of a disaster.

POST-DISASTER

GIVE PEOPLE TIME

Time is one of the most important resources for quality of life. Time is necessary to think at one's own pace, to make decisions and to reflect on experiences – and for some, it might take considerable time, even years, to fully recover. Affected people will be dominated by their losses and overwhelmed by the effort of recovery. The pressure to respond to deadlines can create additional anxiety and stress that will exacerbate personal issues and inhibit recovery – if people 'are not ready'.

Council will be increasingly driven to manage its post-disaster services as efficiently as possible for example, gathering registrations and applications and to meet the many requirements of other parties for example funding deadlines.

People's personal priorities are likely to eclipse what they might regard as the administrative or 'petty' requirements of council or government. Some will simply be unable to respond to deadlines on time despite their best intentions.

Missing out on opportunities to have input into decisions affecting the community can cause some people to resent whatever decisions are made. This can have consequences down the track as some decisions are protested or need to be revisited. The experience for these people can add to a loss of faith in council and create a barrier to their recovery.

Council can easily be placed in a conflicted situation – where the community are saying 'you are going too fast' and State and Australian governments are wanting quick decisions about the funding, support and rebuilding assistance they are wanting to offer.

Council need good communication processes to manage the expectations of both the community and other levels of governments, particularly in fully grasping the needs of its communities and advocating these needs.

A key aspect of community recovery that needs to occur at a pace determined by the community, is making decisions about commemorations and memorials. Community involvement into all aspects of the planning and conduct of such events is critical.

TIPS

Provide as much forward advice of community engagement deadlines and avoid being rushed to make decisions.

Try to stage community engagement with options that mean if people miss an initial deadline they are not excluded from the whole process.

Lobby government agencies and advocate for the community for realistic timeframes that match the ability of the community to make decisions and meet deadlines.

Work with neighbouring councils affected by the disaster to lobby and put a collective position on timeframes, resource requirements and so on to other levels of government.

Listen to and work with affected communities on downscaling or removing services and facilities.

Be open and honest with the community about what is possible, what is not possible and what is being done.

MURRINDINDI SHIRE COUNCIL – REFLECTING THE COMMUNITY IN COMMEMORATIONS AND MEMORIALS

Murrindindi Shire Council established the Commemorations and Memorials Working Group to advise council on bushfire commemorations and memorials following the 2009 fires. The working group developed guiding principles.

Council engaged an external agency (Professional Public Relations) to assist with consultation activities with the aim of capturing the desires, ideas and stories of as many people within the community as possible.

Two phases of community consultation have occurred to date with the community asked to prioritise the various options and ideas presented. Council subsequently worked with Community Recovery Committees, the Commemorations and Memorials Working Group and event managers to coordinate seven events for the first anniversary commemorations.

CONSIDER THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

Most community members are unused to government processes or accessing welfare support services and systems and will quietly do their best until they can no longer manage. They feel disinclined to make demands or create a fuss. Some people, such as isolated older people, people with disabilities or children, might be particularly vulnerable and despite being in immediate need of services and support might be difficult to engage.

A small minority will react loudly and critically. They might use the system – ringing government ministers, talking to media and seemingly gaining undue influence. They might promulgate unhelpful myths frightening and demoralising the community, for example, stories about service breakdowns or council incompetence.

As disasters can affect a large number of community members, councils need to ensure they retain a balanced view of community recovery needs and endeavour to consider the whole community in post-disaster activity.

TIP

Pay attention to the needs of the whole community when planning for recovery.

Acknowledge the voices of noisy minorities – but ensure this is not at the expense of or a diversion from the needs of the whole community and less vocal minorities. Thoughtful community leaders will provide the best advice and information.

ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL – RESPECTING GENDER

'Women communicate face-to-face, men communicate shoulder-to-shoulder'

(Men's Shed saying –"Through Women's Eyes" Project).

It is important to understand diversity and after a disaster to provide gender appropriate opportunities for women to get together and to provide activities for men to get involved.

LATROBE CITY COUNCIL – WORKING WITH THE BEREAVED COMMUNITY

Latrobe City Council identified those who had lost immediate family members in the 2009 Black Saturday fires as a distinct group in the community.

Council staff facilitated people getting together as a group and undertook one-to-one conversations to build relationships and connect people. It was important for those who had lost immediate family members to feel that those who had died had been acknowledged and recognised.

The initial meeting of the bereaved community group was not easy to plan for – 'what do you put on an agenda like that?' It started with a minute's silence, and followed a path that the group was comfortable with. From time-to-time breaks were needed when the tears flowed – and that was okay too.

There were legal barriers to inserting death notices in newspapers immediately following the fires, and many people in the community did not know who had died. Council worked with the family members to publish material in a way that communicated their losses – in a way that met the requirements of the law.

Some months after the fires, council arranged a four page lift out in the Latrobe Valley newspaper which included personalised tributes and photos of each of the people who had died in the fires. The photos were chosen by their family members. Council asked families to select a photo of their loved one which council then had framed and it was then presented to the family.

Council has subsequently conducted a number of activities to support these families. For example, just before the first anniversary of Black Saturday council, at the suggestion of the families, invited all the bereaved families on a bus tour that visited all the sites where people had died and family members acknowledged and told the stories of their loved ones. The bus tour also provided commentary on the chronology of the fire. A lot of the families had not been to many of the sites visited and were not aware of the fire's progression. The bus tour was followed by a lunch where family members reflected on their day and were joined by Christine Nixon (Chairperson, Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction Authority) and the Victorian Premier. Counsellors were in attendance and the day concluded with a singing workshop (light-hearted in part) which ended the day on a high.

The group met regularly initially and still meets each year. Special bonds have been created between the participants in part due to the emotions they have shared, the respect that has been developed and the confidences that have been maintained.

OVERCOME ENGAGEMENT BARRIERS

Sometimes it will beneficial to engage the community as a whole; at other times better results might be achieved by segmenting the community and tailoring the engagement process to their circumstances.

For example, using different approaches for groups like young people, farmers and other people who live in rural or isolated areas, small businesses, tourism and other businesses, seniors, holiday home owners, and so on.

Sometimes these groups can be engaged as part of whole community engagement activities with some adjustment to ensure their specific views are heard, for example using small group work kiosks as part of a larger forum.

In other circumstances, there might be specific consultation activities for some of these groups, and the engagement process might be customised to match their lifestyle preferred communication styles. For example, engagement of young people might include text message surveys or an art or music event in a public space, while consultation of seniors might be combined with a meal at a senior citizens centre.

Similarly, some of the targeted consultation might be geographically based. For example, there are several examples throughout Victoria where residents affected by floods have been engaged on a street by street basis to avoid tensions and focus on localised needs and concerns.

Getting in touch with some people to invite them to join engagement activities or simply to gather their views can be difficult. It can sometimes mean mobilising existing service networks, such as issuing personal invitations or deploying simple surveys through Meals on Wheels or other Home and Community Care service staff.

Sometimes it can involve creating purpose-built pathways, for example, in order to engage an ageing Vietnamese community affected by flooding in South Australia it was necessary to make contact through their children living outside the area. This was a very indirect method but enabled many people to be engaged who would have otherwise remained isolated from recovery benefits.

TIPS

Identify who in the community is at risk of missing out on the community engagement process and consider how they can be successfully engaged. Use existing networks to build engagement pathways and design methods suited to the characteristics of each group.

Consider how community engagement can be managed to avoid exacerbating contentious issues in the community.

Sometimes this will mean segmented processes that take the heat out of the debate and at other times it might mean highly structured and facilitated meetings or forums that attempt to find common ground.

Make sure misinformation or lack of information on divergent views is countered with facts and expert opinion and provided to all participants.

Find ways to keep in contact with people not living in the district – either residents who have moved out of the district (temporarily or permanently) or those with holiday homes in the affected area. Options for maintaining contact could include:

- collecting contact details, email addresses/ phone numbers and setting up a data base to maintain both routine and targeted communication with different groups of people

- ensuring that invitations to community events and engagement activities are also sent to people out of the district, and that records of events are freely available for those unable to attend.

BAW BAW SHIRE COUNCIL – MANAGING COMMUNICATIONS

Following the 2009 Black Saturday fires Baw Baw Shire Council developed and implemented an Emergency Management Communications Plan that outlines key processes for council to follow to better inform staff and the broader community about issues arising from the emergency. The Facebook activity statistics demonstrate improved communications in an emergency.

During the 2014 Aberfeldy and Neerim South district fires (a reasonably small event for Baw Baw) council had 35,000 hits on its Facebook page with people accessing information on what to do, where to go etc in response to the fires.

BE PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED

The emotional state of people in the community will fluctuate during disaster recovery and it is not uncommon for setbacks to occur from time to time; even though on face value things might seem to be progressing well. Some triggers are reasonably predictable. For example, anxiety levels in a community affected by flood increase when a storm warning is issued or during wet weather; or in a community affected by fire when a hot windy day is forecast or arrives.

Similarly, the recovery progress of a community might be tested when:

• major milestones occur, such as anniversaries of the disaster

• an action of council or another recovery agency is perceived as insensitive

• other unrelated community traumas occur – for example, a road crash

• individuals in the community experience major health issues.

These setbacks will impact not only on people's willingness to be involved in community engagement but might also reignite the stresses that make well-reasoned and thoughtful decisions difficult to make.

TIP

Be alert to events likely to set back recovery and reschedule or amend community engagement activities as necessary.

USE EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT METHODS

There are a multitude of ways to engage the community. The most obvious of which is public meetings.

However, many other methods can be used to ensure that as many members of the community are informed and as many voices and opinions are heard as possible.

PRE-DISASTER

Council will already use community engagement methods. The more familiar council is in using these in a 'business as usual' context the more readily they can be adapted to the recovery context. There might be other methods that are rarely or never used and from a pre-disaster perspective becoming familiar with these through professional development and practice might prove useful.

As with all engagement methods the ones that are used will depend on the aim of community engagement. For example, some methods are more suited to providing information, generating ideas or agreeing priorities. On the IAP2 spectrum of **Inform – Consult – Involve – Collaborate – Empower**, the expectation would be that community engagement would occur right along this spectrum, but with a leaning towards the **Collaborate – Empower** end. This is particular the case if community–led recovery is going to be realised. Certainly the role of a community recovery committee is an empowered one. The following table sets out the benefits and limitation of some key engagement methods:

TABLE 2: BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODS

METHOD	BENEFITS OR LIMITATIONS
Public meetings	• Allows the views of individuals and community groups to be expressed • Good platform for simple, consistent information and key messages to large numbers from a community • Not a strong forum for dialogue • Meeting facilitation skills needed to channel energy productively • Might be scope to break up into smaller discussion groups or provide information-feedback booths
Focus groups	• Useful with relatively homogeneous groups • Suited to smaller interest and population groups • Good for generating and canvassing ideas rather than decisions • Allows for creative thinking if well facilitated
Workshops	• Can produce structured exploration of issues, options and ideas and future vision, direction and actions • Larger groups and broader agenda possible • Format can include smaller group work fed back to the whole group • Needs skilled facilitation

METHOD	BENEFITS OR LIMITATIONS
Roundtables and forums	• A joint planning/decision making forum between council and key stakeholders with expertise about a specific issue
	• Helps to establish a collaborative process from the outset
	• Suited to dealing with topics with technical content
	• Can prepare informed recommendations for broader community consideration
	• Challenges in achieving representation
Hard copy surveys For example, postal survey, street survey, open survey – such as whiteboard at shopping centre or 'opinion tent' at a local fair or recovery event	• Can provide opportunities to reach mixed audiences where they live and in opportunistic locations
	• Can be combined with face to face support, for example interviewers or 'opinion tent' facilitators
	• If face to face interpretation is not possible what is requested must be very clear and brief – preferably pre-tested
	• Good for gathering ideas and canvassing options
	• Requires intensive support and interpretation
Electronic surveys For example, website, email or social media consultation	• Can provide opportunities to reach specific audiences where they live
	• Suited to smaller interest and population groups with existing networks
	• Face to face interpretation is not possible so what is requested must be very clear and brief – pre-tested
	• Good for gathering ideas and canvassing options
	• Excludes non-online communities if only avenue
Vision surveys For example, photo and drawing submissions of how the community sees the future	• Can provide opportunities for input from people who are more visually orientated
	• Suited to broad invitation, particularly engaging children
	• Suited to dealing with a specific built or natural environment matter with cultural or heritage implications
	• Good for gathering ideas
	• Useful to feedback visual depictions of options
Onsite engagement For example, walking a roadside with the community and horticulture/arborist expertise to consider roadside vegetation management/clearing options	• A joint planning/decision making event between council and interest groups conducted on site
	• Expertise is on hand to explain and discuss technical aspects
	• Suited to dealing with a specific built or natural environment matter with cultural or heritage implications
	• Can prepare informed recommendations for broader community consideration or make decision depending on mandate

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE

See *Effective Engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders, Book 3 the engagement toolkit, DSE, 2013* which provides guidance to a wide spectrum of specific engagement methods and tools.[9]

EQUIP FRONTLINE STAFF FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Because community members will come into contact with a wide range of council officers following a disaster, it will also be important to ensure these staff are equipped to guide people towards community engagement processes.

These frontline staff include not just emergency management or recovery personnel but people in service delivery, such as home and community care, customer services, and the outdoor workforce.

Some might routinely find themselves talking with community members about how they have been affected by the disaster and on occasion this might be the only contact these members of the community will have with council. It can be therefore of great value to equip all staff in these roles to be able to provide information to affected people they come into contact with.

POST-DISASTER

Some methods of community engagement might prove more effective than others in the post-disaster environment, particularly in the immediate aftermath or in engaging specific population or interest groups.

The method, the delivery, the setting and all aspects of the engagement process and the outcomes sought need to be consciously planned. Consideration also needs to be given to how the community can be involved in determining and implementing the engagement methods.

MAKE THE MOST OF COMMUNITY MEETINGS

It might appear difficult to make the time for community engagement when council is stretched and under pressure. It is also a time where criticism might be directed toward council and there might be a temptation to avoid this by not holding community meetings and other community engagement activities.

At this time however, the community will generally have a very strong need for information, wanting to be heard, and looking for leadership, accountability and stability from council. Community meetings provide an immediate opportunity for a local presence by council and a chance to demonstrate council's interest and commitment. It demonstrates that council is there for the community and is willing to do what needs to be done. Conducting community meetings is an important statement to the community and done well, will contribute to the community's recovery.

Such meetings require skilled and sensitive facilitation that allows 'people to be and feel heard' – to share experiences, identify needs and add to the information required for recovery planning and decision making. Any sense of tokenism or simply defending council decisions or actions is likely to be inflammatory and be detrimental to the recovery process.

The content of community meetings might change over time. In early meetings, the focus will include – gaining understanding of the extent and nature of the damage, loss and impact of the event, and providing information on the event and services and support available. This means everyone getting a common picture of what has happened and using individual perspectives and experiences to help colour this in.

At the same time, initial community meetings will assist people to reconnect and check on what has happened to others in the district. Such meetings will provide the community with basic information on needs, such as where to stay and how to access immediately available government financial assistance. Details will need to be kept basic as many people will often be in an agitated state of mind and not capable of or interested in complex discussions.

Within weeks, people are likely to have returned to their homes or the district and be dealing with the challenges of re-establishment. Community meetings will now start to include more complex information – identifying needs and issues and working on immediate solutions. Such meetings will be able to report on progress to restore functioning and can benefit from having a panel of specialists who will be able to advise directly on practical things like repairs, banking, power, gas and water supply, telephone services, road closures and detours and so on. In addition, participants in community meetings might be able to share their local knowledge with council to help fill in information gaps and assist in solving problems.

At times participants in community meetings might become angry and look for someone to blame. It is important to allow anger to be vented in a controlled way so that people feel heard and that 'the system' and council appreciate their concerns. Generally, being defensive and responding to issues detailed by participants in this state of mind is unhelpful and does not aid the recovery process. Once people have vented their anger and emotion, they are more able to think rationally and start to look for solutions.

USE A VARIETY OF ENGAGEMENT METHODS

In the weeks and months that follow the disaster it will be preferable to engage the community using a variety of methods in addition to community meetings.

This will ensure the participation of a wide cross-section of people and specific segments of the community.

Some of these methods will be quite formal for example, surveying business sector views regarding infrastructure redevelopment of the town or less formal for example, gathering drawings from school children on their vision for the school. They will also involve and mobilise communication channels to get in touch with and engage specific interest or population groups.

Engagement methods will have been considered in pre-disaster, however, following the disaster they will be tailored to the specific impacts of the disaster.

TIPS

Review council community engagement methods to assess the range of methods used.

Use methods that match the community engagement objective.

Clarify the aim of the engagement first – Is it to generate ideas, canvas options or make recommendations or decisions? How will the results be used?

Identify how feedback to the community will be provided.

Is engagement contentious? Who in and outside council needs to be involved at this stage?

LATROBE CITY COUNCIL – MARQUEES IN THE PADDOCK

Some rural communities do not have the necessary community infrastructure to support a recovery site or presence in the district.

Following the 2009 fires Latrobe City Council erected marquees in a paddock near these rural communities for events, social gatherings and sharing of vital information, that became recognised as the place where recovery activities occurred. This included catering by the Country Women's Association and service clubs and formal community discussions. Locals played a key role in reconnecting with their neighbours and family members.

Council sometimes organised high profile speakers who created interest and good attendance, and conducted discussions on critical issues that enabled needs to be identified and acted upon quickly. For example, one small community expressed their anxiety about a number of dangerous trees which led to council and the community successfully applying for $100,000 of funding with support from the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority to address the issue.

Other gatherings were more focused on conversations, music, games and documenting people's experiences through collecting stories and photographs.

MOBILISE FRONTLINE STAFF FOR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Frontline staff will be in contact with community members very quickly following the disaster. Activating the protocols developed in the pre-disaster period as quickly as possible will ensure that they know exactly what to say to the people they come in contact with.

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL – SUPPORTING FRONTLINE STAFF

When you think of frontline disaster recovery workers, it is easy to think about the people who stand face-to-face with people wanting to get back to their homes; the people who clear the roads; the people who remove or bury deceased livestock; the people who drive the buses that carry people back into affected areas to see their homes; and the people clearing debris in affected areas.

After the 2009 Black Saturday fires Mitchell Shire Council identified that the frontline can extend to some less obvious places. The reflections of a staff member at the transfer station highlighted the need to support such staff and the opportunity to engage with community members in less conventional settings.

Some observations from the council staff member include:

'I said to someone, "what happened to your leg" – noticing a cut. Ten minutes later, they were still telling me their Black Saturday experience.

I could see the devastation on their faces the products of their lives' hard work being loaded into a scrap bin.

I knew it was only a wind change away from being me and not them but I still had to continue doing what had to be done, as well as dealing with my own pain and loss.

A small leading question would bring forth stories of pain, destruction and ute   loads of nails and broken glass that would take years to pick up.'

After the Ashes had cooled people split into two groups those that had lost everything and those that hadn't.'

Similar experiences occurred to other outdoor workers and customer services officers.

USE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO RECOVERY SUPPORT

Community engagement activities will involve people in the community affected by disaster. Some of these people will be actively supported by the full range of recovery services and activities, however others might not.

Indeed, community engagement activities might be the only contact some people are having with council or other agencies.

Some of these people might not access support because they are not aware of the opportunities; are reluctant to do so because they have never used such assistance previously; or feel that using them is an admission that they need help and cannot cope by themselves. However, these same people might be willing to attend a community meeting, festival, or informal community gathering, or might talk with outdoor staff or Home and Community Care workers.

It is important therefore that while the primary objective of community engagement is not to provide support services, community engagement activities provide an important opportunity to connect such people to information and support options.

Key messages used in community engagement can reinforce the role of support as there for everyone and a right, for example, depicting financial assistance as 'getting some of your tax back' rather than 'getting a hand-out' or 'being on welfare'.

Informal support can be achieved simply by sharing a meal or chat breaks as part of community engagement events. More formal support might involve inviting service representatives to attend such events to connect with people as they can. Some people will be more likely to connect to a service or support where they can talk to them informally, with privacy and away from the general public view at a community event or gathering.

In addition, support information might be distributed through community engagement channels, for example, a youth chat line site circulated via social media to young people.

TIPS

Build in meals or unstructured chat time at community engagement events.

Invite service representatives to attend community meetings and engagement activities. Discuss with them beforehand how best to connect with people. This might be a booth with brochures or staff in attendance, or it might be less formal with staff interacting with community members over a cup of tea after the meeting or during the engagement activity.

Make sure invitations to the community are strictly focused on the community engagement objectives. Some might not get involved if they think they will be 'harassed' by support services – after all 'they are fine'.

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL – COMBINING CONNECTION AND SUPPORT WITH ENGAGEMENT

Following the 2009 fires Nillumbik Shire Council supported regular small morning tea gatherings in St Andrews providing free morning coffee and cakes at a local café.

These gatherings enabled local people to reconnect with each other and helped council to understand community needs and connect with people in a way that led to supportive relationships. At the same time it supported local businesses.

BAW BAW SHIRE COUNCIL – EFFECTIVENESS OF NEWSLETTERS

The community of Drouin West did not have an established community group before the 2009 Black Saturday fires but it quickly formed one afterwards. The new group ran many community events and functions and developed a Community Newsletter.

Although the group has now disbanded the newsletter continues on a quarterly basis. It is an inspiring and informative publication including a '*Meet your neighbour*' segment in each publication, plus news of the area, recipes and recovery success stories.

This newsletter now provides an ongoing communication mechanism for future disaster preparation and recovery.

KEY COUNCIL ROLES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MAYOR AND COUNCILLOR ROLE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The roles of the mayor and councillors can be particularly important in linking the council with the community. Attendance at community meetings or other engagement events can provide a strong, authoritative presence for the community. They can also assist in encouraging the community to participate, particularly in those areas or sectors that have had little to do with council services.

> **TIP**
>
> Align any roles in community engagement with council's communication guidelines.
>
> There is a strong overlap here with the role of the mayor and councillors in communication with the community.
>
> See also:
>
> *A Guide to the Role of the Council CEO in Emergency Management* (MAV, 2012(a)).[10]
>
> *A Guide to the Role of Mayors and Councillors in Emergency Management,* (MAV, 2012 (b)).[11]

As a council figurehead, the Mayor is a key member of the recovery process and their behaviour can communicate leadership and confidence to the community. This needs to be executed carefully to maintain clear understanding of the roles of the elected members and not confuse them with management of the disaster recovery operations.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL – MAKING COMMUNITY MESSAGES ACCESSIBLE

When the Mayor of Wellington Shire Council decided to use social media to ensure important information was communicated to the community following the 2013 Seaton (Aberfeldy) fires, he went one step further.

Posting fire relief and recovery information on his Facebook page in the form of a video, he was accompanied by a local Auslan interpreter who signed his presentation – making the messages directly accessible to people with hearing impairments.

The approach received very positive feedback from around Australia, for example:

Wonderful to see such important information available to our hearing impaired citizens.

Well done Wellington Shire for thinking of the Deaf people in our community.

The video can be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=10152431388140291

Use the following checklist to consider councillor's roles in community recovery:

Role in community engagement is understood ☐

Satisfied that their council is as prepared as possible for community engagement following a disaster ☐

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER ROLE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The task for the council Chief Executive Officer is to ensure that community engagement achieves it goals, particularly, striving to involve, collaborate and empower the community. The Chief Executive Officer's primary role in community engagement therefore involves providing the clear management oversight of strategy and process to ensure there is a clear governance and decision making framework understood by council, partners and the community.

The decision to take specific roles in community engagement, such as chairing community meetings or speaking at other community engagement events, might vary depending on personal style and skills.

Using an independent chair for meetings and using experts to deal with the detail of community questions can free up Chief Executive Officers to concentrate on keeping strategic partnerships working and the overall community engagement strategy on track.

Use the following checklist to consider the CEO's role in community recovery:

CEO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

Community engagement integration with recovery management structure is clearly described and understood across council and by partners ☐

Community engagement methods are clearly described and understood across council and by partners ☐

Adequate resources (physical, financial and human resources) are allocated to community engagement ☐

CROSS–COUNCIL ROLE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement might be managed by the person responsible for planning recovery or might be delegated to a dedicated community engagement person or team. Any refinement to community engagement practice ahead of a disaster will be useful however, following a disaster, the community engagement task can be expected to arrive suddenly and shift and change over time.

Use the following checklist to consider cross-council roles in community recovery:

CROSS-COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

Pre-disaster

Governance mechanisms are clearly described and understood across council and by partners	☐
Agreements and protocols with partners are prepared and up-to-date	☐
Relationships with community recovery committee(s) are clear	☐
Adequately skilled people are identified, inducted and trained and available to implement community engagement	☐
Facilities and resources are available for community engagement	☐

Post-disaster

Governance mechanisms and agreements and protocols with partners are reviewed	☐
The community engagement function is included in the Recovery Management structure	☐
Community engagement strategies are developed with clear objectives	☐
Local communities are adequately informed of community engagement events and activities	☐
Geographic and demographic characteristics of local communities are taken into account, including tailored response to vulnerable populations	☐
Community engagement activities are resourced, monitored and refined	☐

Take action to address any gaps or deficiencies in community engagement by using the resources referred to in this booklet.

They can be found in **Book 8: Recovery tools and other resources** which also includes additional reading such as existing recovery resources; materials and web links.

> **TIP**
>
> Remember to review community engagement documentation routinely (at least annually) and ahead of any known periods of local danger such as fire or flood
>
> Re-check if conditions are forecast that make the risk of disaster high.

ENDNOTES

1   Millen D, 2011, *Deliberative Democracy in Disaster recovery: Reframing community engagement for sustainable outcomes*, Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy University of Western Sydney

2   Cavaye, Dr. J (2001) 'Community engagement framework project: scoping and review paper', Cavaye Community Development/CEO Committee on Land Resources, Queensland citing OECD (2001) 'Engaging Citizens in policy-making: information, consultation and public participation', *PUMA policy brief No 10*, July 2001, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

3   International Association for Public Participation 2004, *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum,* International Association for Public Participation Australasia, http://www.iap2.org.au/sitebuilder/resources/knowledge/asset/files/36/iap2spectrum.pdf

4   IAP2, 2004

5   Australian Emergency Management Institute, 2011, Community Recovery, Handbook 2, Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series: Building a disaster resilient Australia, AEMI, Canberra http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%202%20Community%20Recovery.PDF

6   *Lessons learned by Community Recovery Committees of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Advice we offer to communities impacted by disaster, Victoria* 2011 http://www.strathewen.vic.au/index.php/download_file/view/21/112/

7   Australian Emergency Management Institute, 2013, *Community Engagement Framework, Handbook 6, Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series: Building a disaster resilient Australia*, AEMI, Canberra

    http://www.em.gov.au/Publications/Australianemergencymanualseries/Documents/National%20Strategy%20for%20Disaster%20Resilience%20Community%20Engagement%20Framework.PDF

8   Australian Red Cross, 2010, *Communicating in Recovery*, ARC, Carlton http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Communicating_in_recovery_resource.pdf

9   http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/105825/Book_3_-_The_Engagement_Toolkit.pdf

10 MAV, 2102(a) is available in hardcopy from Municipal Association of Victoria, (03) 9667 5555

11 MAV, 2102(b) is available in hardcopy from Municipal Association of Victoria, (03) 9667 5555