

Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery: A guide for local organisations

A resource from the
Community resilience,
wellbeing and
recovery project



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Introduction





What is this guide about?

Disasters such as floods, bushfires, drought and COVID-19 are occurring with increasing frequency in many Australian communities. Increasingly, local organisations are using the skills they have built as part of their day-to-day activities to support the wellbeing of their community during and after disaster.

Local organisations, like yours, support the wellbeing of their communities in a thousand ways every day – providing services, reaching out to vulnerable members of the community, bringing people together socially, volunteering, and sharing information, to name just a few.

When disaster strikes, your skills continue to be critical to supporting and rebuilding wellbeing over time.

There is growing recognition that disaster recovery and resilience-building processes are more successful when they are ‘community-led’.

While often having critical skills that can make a big difference in supporting the wellbeing of their community during disaster recovery, local organisations often have little training and preparation for taking on a role in disaster recovery and limited capacity to manage increased demand.

This guide helps local organisations:

- 1 identify the roles they contribute to disaster recovery and resilience in their community
- 2 plan and prepare for these roles.

How to use this guide

There's a lot of information in this guide. You may be reading it when your organisation and community is under a lot of pressure post-disaster.

- 1 Rather than trying to do lots of the things recommended in this guide, we recommend you 'dip into' the guide and identify one or two realistic actions to work on that can help your organisation.
 - 2 Focus on taking a few steps at a time to implement each action you decide to take on.
 - 3 If you feel like it's too much, remember every step is likely to make a difference in helping your organisation support your community.
 - 4 Wait until you feel comfortable with the initial actions you've taken before considering further action.
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How was the guide developed?

The guide draws on interviews and workshops conducted with people working in disaster recovery and resilience building across NSW, across a wide range of organisations, as well as on findings of other studies.

This guide is one of three resources produced in the **Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery** series. The series was developed as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery project*, a partnership between the Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), and University of Canberra.

Who is this guide for?

This guide assists local organisations plan and prepare for disaster recovery and building resilience to disaster. Doing this contributes to maintaining and building your community's long-term wellbeing and resilience.

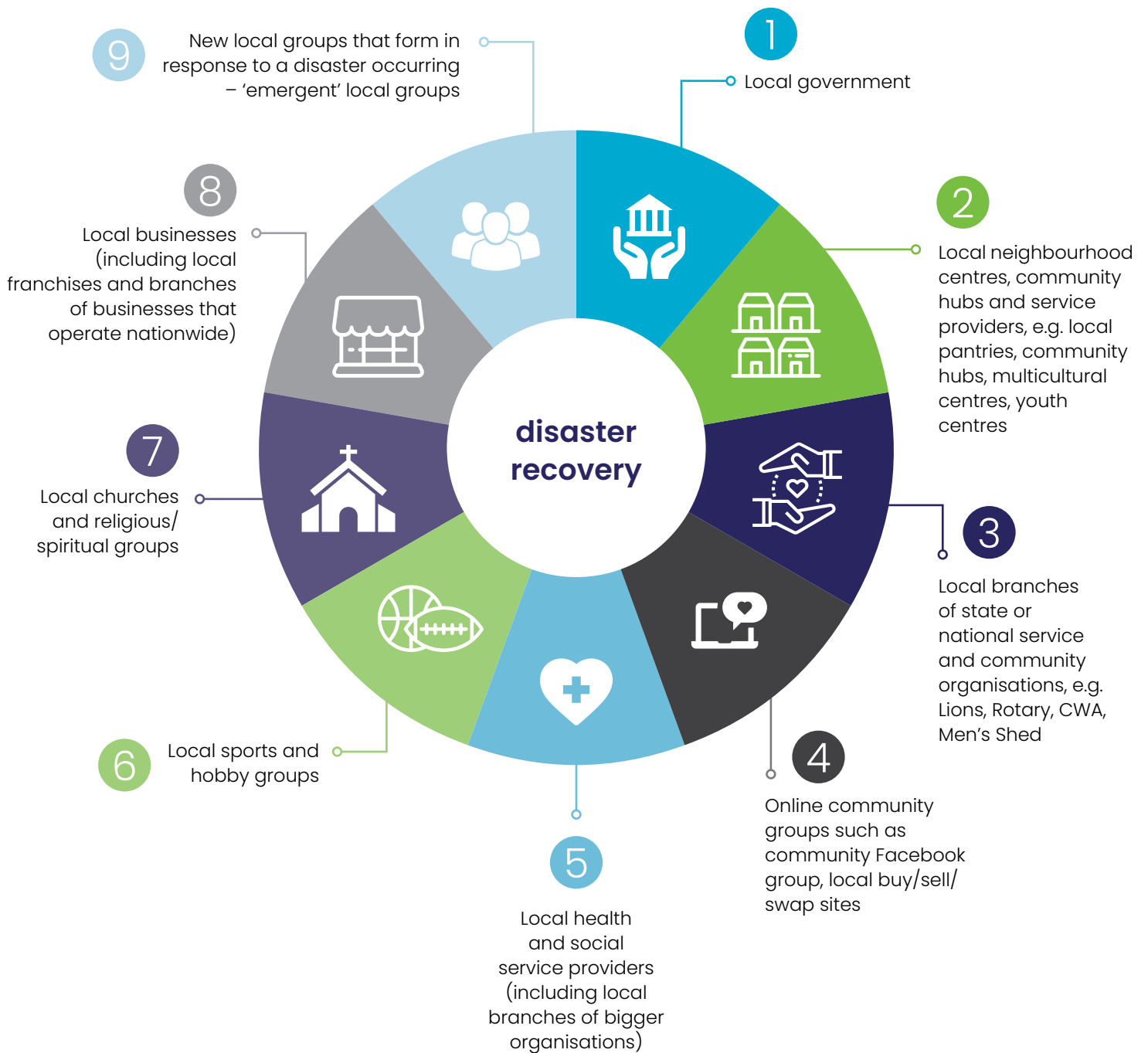
A 'local organisation' is any organisation that has a long-term local presence in a community or that emerges in a local area to help support the community. Examples include local service providers including government and non-government organisations (NGOs), health services, community centres, local community Facebook groups, local branches of state or national organisations (for example, the local Country Women's Association, Rotary, Lions), local government, Neighbourhood Centres, sports groups, Men's Sheds, local businesses and community groups, churches, sports groups, and social groups – to name a few.

This guide is one of a set of three resources:

- 1 A guide for community-based organisations (this guide).**
This guide focuses on helping locally-based organisations understand and prepare for supporting their community through disaster recovery.
- 2 Practical worksheets.**
This resource provides practical worksheets you can use to plan for your organisation's role in disaster recovery processes.
- 3 A guide for funders, large organisations and others seeking to enable and support local organisations in disaster recovery.**
This guide examines how funders and non-local organisations can enable and support local organisations as part of their work in disaster recovery.

Four reports were also produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project – these are listed at the end of this report.

Common examples of local organisations involved in disaster recovery and resilience efforts



Is this guide relevant to my organisation?



We do community development, not disaster work"



My organisation provides services for vulnerable people – not disaster recovery services"



We're just a group that helps people get together and find out what's happening locally, we have nothing to do with helping people affected by disaster"

The reactions above are common when local organisations are asked what their role is in helping their community navigate disasters such as drought, bushfire, flood and pandemics. However, past experience shows that when disaster happens, local organisations often find themselves at the centre of disaster recovery efforts.

This guide is for all local organisations – especially those who don't think they

have a role in disaster recovery. Whether your organisation provides health or social services, faith-based services, a gathering place, supports the local community or sports groups, organises local events, shares local news, advocates for local needs, or organises volunteers to do environmental rehabilitation – this guide IS for you.



You may not be a 'disaster recovery' organisation – but you probably do a lot to help your community when disaster happens. This guide helps you identify how the things you do support your community before, during and after disaster; and to plan for when disaster affects your community.

How to read this guide:

This guide talks openly about common practical challenges local and non-local organisations experience as part of disaster recovery. This includes difficulties in collaborating with other organisations and in accessing resources. The intention is to help organisations understand these challenges and develop solutions, not to criticise the many organisations that work in disaster recovery and resilience, and whose staff and volunteers often go ‘above and beyond’ to support communities impacted by disasters. We recognise and thank every organisation – local and non-local, government and non-government – for their work in disaster recovery, and hope this guide can support them in this vital role.

Community organisations contribute to disaster recovery and resilience building in many ways – here are four common ones:

1 Your everyday work.

Local organisations provide the scaffolding that supports a community in good times and bad. Whether you provide a meeting place, deliver social or health services, organise festivals and community activities, deliver food, host support groups, or bring people together socially, you are building and maintaining relationships your community relies on in disaster. Your day-to-day activities build disaster resilience and wellbeing in your community.

2 Providing support to vulnerable/at-risk people.

Your organisation may have trusted relationships with at-risk people, who are more likely to seek and accept support from you after disaster than from an unfamiliar specialist disaster response organisation. This might include those with long-term health and disability-related challenges, elderly people receiving in-home support, or those experiencing poverty or other forms of social vulnerability. It can also include people such as local farmers or business owners, who may be reluctant to reach out for help after a disaster – you may be the first organisation that becomes aware of their needs.

3 Providing information, referral, and practical support. Local organisations are the first place many residents go for support after disaster. Whether it's to look for people they want to make contact with, to find a place to charge a mobile phone, to access food, water, shelter, or support, it's common for them to go first to local community groups. Many local organisations are unprepared for the high volume of people who seek them out after disaster – this guide helps you prepare.

4 Being present in the community before, during and after disaster. The words 'disaster recovery' often conjure pictures of the specialist organisations who often send personnel to help communities after a disaster, such as the Red Cross or government agencies. However, this type of help isn't available after every disaster. Even when it is, these specialist organisations will usually stay in your community for a limited amount of time – several months or a year, occasionally longer than this – before moving to the next community that needs their help. Local organisations, in contrast, are there before, during and after disaster and uniquely placed to provide ongoing support through every stage of disaster recovery.

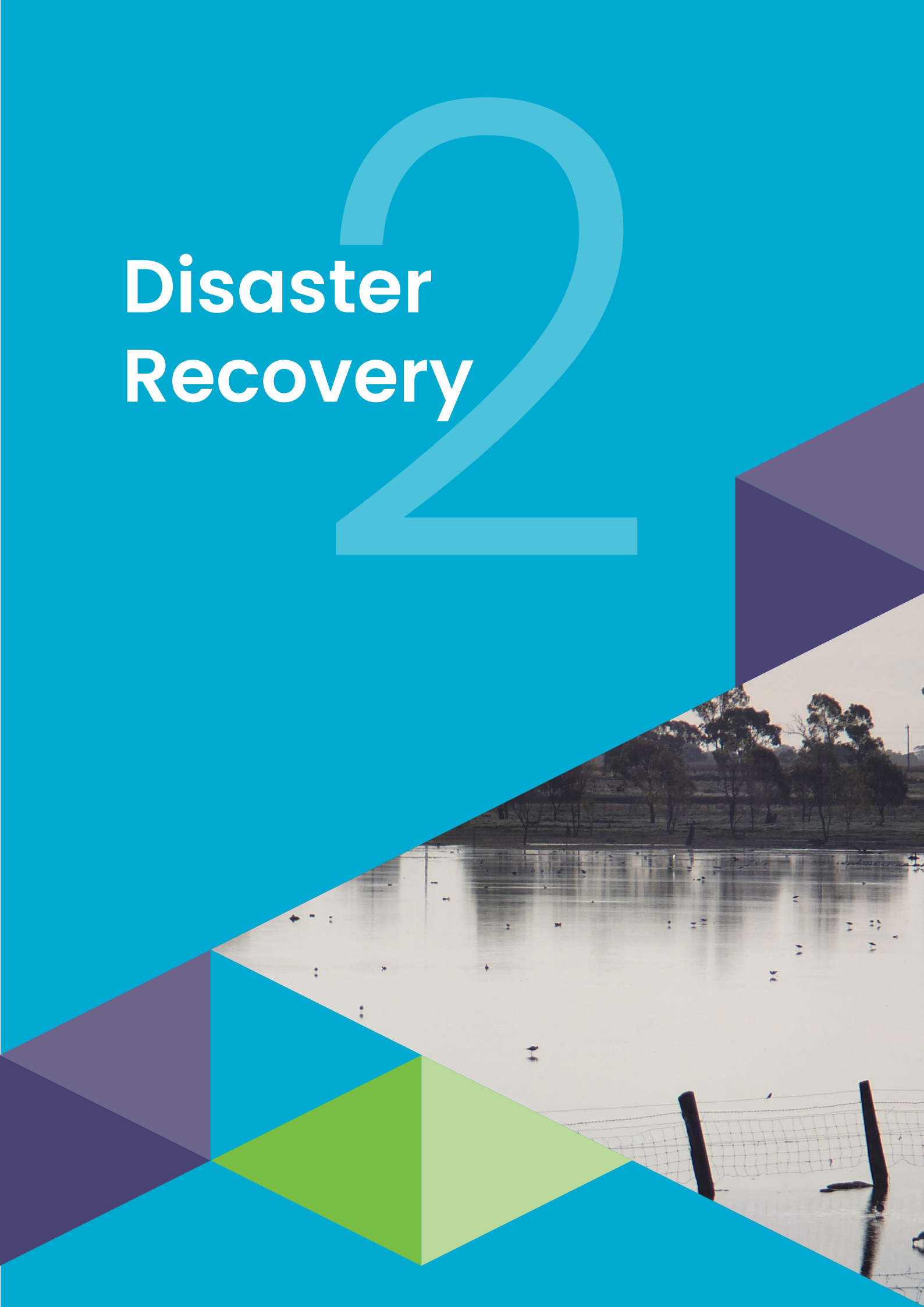
Local organisations are uniquely placed to provide the type of long-term support communities need after disaster because they have:

- Established, long-term relationships with community members
- In-depth knowledge of the unique needs and strengths of their community
- Ability to provide support before, during, and after disaster into the long-term.

After a disaster, it is common for specialist organisations such as government

agencies that support disaster recovery, or non-government organisations such as the Red Cross or Blaze Aid, to enter communities and provide disaster recovery support for a period of time – typically months, sometimes one or two years, and occasionally longer. This support is critical but typically short-term: these specialist organisations will eventually leave. This shorter-term presence means that often these 'external' organisations rely on local organisations to help them identify, contact and build relationships with local residents, to identify recovery needs, and to take over when they leave the community.

Disaster Recovery



What is community-led disaster recovery?

Community-led disaster recovery is widely supported but not well defined. The National Principles for Disaster Recovery¹ describe it as being “community-centred, responsive and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.” We define community-led recovery and resilience as:



...enabling local people and organisations to shape and lead their community's disaster recovery and resilience building processes, with support from non-local people and organisations.

Local organisations regularly spend time engaging the community and building strong relationships and networks in their local community as part of their day-to-day work. These skills form an important part of community-led disaster recovery and resilience.

Community-led disaster recovery processes usually involve working out how best to draw on and work with resources available from outside the local community – such as expert disaster recovery specialists, donations of goods, funding, and new staff or volunteers who come into your community to help out.

In successful community-led recovery, everyone works together to ensure that the actions taken after disaster:

- Are tailored to the unique needs of different communities – both those existing before disaster, and those that emerge during and after disaster
- Draw on the unique strengths of the community, such as local leaders and organisations
- Make it easy for local residents to be a meaningful part of disaster recovery and resilience building activities
- Build local skills and capacity that are then drawn on in future disasters.

Trying to achieve these ideal outcomes, however, is accompanied by potential perils, aptly described by Stephen Petris:

¹ Source: Social Recovery Reference Group. 2018. National Principles for Disaster Recovery. URL: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-disaster-recovery/>



“...commitment to community-led recovery recognises that the more that people and communities take control of their recovery experience, the more likely they are to achieve better outcomes. ... But these initiatives can be difficult to get right. There is a sweet spot between enabling and overwhelming affected individuals and communities, and organisations keen to support can stray easily into ways of operating that disempower.”
– Petris (2020²)

Common challenges local organisations experience, whether working on their own

or with specialist organisations who have come into the community to help support recovery, include:

- Limited financial and practical resources
- Staff and volunteers are themselves often directly impacted by the disaster
- Limited skills and experience in the specialist field of disaster recovery and resilience building
- Difficulty delivering disaster-related activities in addition to the activities the organisation normally delivers.

² Source: Petris, S. 2020. Community-led recovery from extreme events sounds great – but what does it really mean? Nous Group. URL: <https://www.nousgroup.com/insights/community-led-recovery/>

What are the ingredients of successful community-led recovery that builds resilience and supports community wellbeing?

Ingredients needed for success	What does it look like when it works?	What can it look like when it goes wrong?
Inclusion of all parts of the community	The diverse needs and strengths of all groups in a community are recognised and included in recovery processes. Actions taken support the recovery, resilience and wellbeing of all people in the community.	Some groups are not represented, and their voices and needs not heard or recognised. This can add to the negative impacts of disaster on their wellbeing.
Skills and knowledge	Local people and organisations are able to contribute their skills to disaster recovery and resilience and to build further skills through access to support from specialists in disaster resilience and recovery. The skills and knowledge they gain grow resilience to future disasters.	Local organisations and leaders implement actions based on limited knowledge of disaster recovery and have little access to advice from specialists. As a result, more mistakes are made, recovery is slower, and community wellbeing may suffer as a result, as this steep learning curve occurs.
Support tailored to the community's needs	The community is enabled to articulate its needs, and disaster recovery supports and services are sufficiently flexible to be tailored to varying needs within and across communities. As a result, available resources are used where they can be most effective in supporting wellbeing.	Disaster recovery supports and services are inflexible and generic. Some provide assistance not needed by a local community that goes unused, while other needs are not able to be responded to. This results in waste of some resources, community frustration, and slower recovery of wellbeing after disaster.

Financial and physical resources

Local organisations can access short- and long-term funding that enables them to deliver both immediate supports in the early days after disaster and to support longer-term evolving recovery needs. They have access to the physical resources needed to facilitate delivering this support. This enables faster recovery and minimises stresses on wellbeing during recovery.

Local organisations provide a lot of support and services but have little or no additional funding to cover these, or lack the specific infrastructure or physical resources that could make delivering them easier.

Staff and volunteers experience fatigue and burnout, and there is high turnover of personnel. Delivery of support is less effective due to the lack of financial resources. This compounds what are already high levels of stress on the wellbeing of the community.

Support from non-local organisations (funding, staff, volunteers, practical resources)

Local organisations have access to resources contributed by people and organisations outside their community – such as expertise, funding, personnel and goods. Requests to assist in disaster recovery are accompanied by the resources they need to deliver supports and services.

Non-local organisations are actively engaged and work collaboratively with local organisations. This reduces the burden and demand on local organisations, particularly during the periods of greatest need.

In the absence of support from non-local organisations, local organisations can become overburdened, and recovery may slow.

However, if non-local organisations descend on a community but don't work with local organisations, the supports and services provided may not match community needs, resulting in wasted funding and resources.

If non-local organisations are present for too short a time or leave without appropriate handover to local organisations, recovery can also suffer.

Processes that deliver timely action

When there is a rapid need for action, local and non-local organisations can respond efficiently, without long delays in identifying and responding to needs. The right balance is struck between consultation, engagement, and action.

Lengthy and multiple community engagement processes cause fatigue amongst local residents, delay on-ground action, and at their worst, compound impacts of disaster. Needs assessments and disaster recovery plans are not revisited and adjusted as recovery needs change.

Planning your part in community-led disaster recovery: Key steps

This guide focuses on disaster recovery, and more broadly, on actions that not only help support recovery but build long-term capacity that in turn supports longer-term resilience to disasters.

It's easy to think of disasters as occurring as a series of distinct steps, like those shown to the right. This can lead you to believe that you should only invest in planning and preparing for disaster in the 'before disaster' stage, leaving you free to focus on enacting disaster response and recovery actions when disaster happens.

In reality, though, disasters often don't occur in neat cycles like this. This means you may need to identify how you can plan and prepare for the next disaster while still supporting your community to recover from the previous one.

Communities often experience multiple disasters in a relatively short period of time – for example, drought followed by bushfires and then flood. When this happens, multiple cycles of overlapping disaster response, recovery, and planning/preparation can happen at any given

time. As a result, local and non-local organisations are often delivering supports and services into a community in which different residents are in varying stages of disaster recovery and have a diversity of support needs.

Action can be taken to prepare and support disaster recovery at all stages of a disaster cycle. There is no 'good time' to prepare for disaster recovery. Instead, organisations can invest in a range of actions that enhance their ability to support disaster recovery. Some of these will also help you deliver immediate disaster response and most help build longer-term disaster resilience.

While disaster cycles aren't simple, there's still some things you may want to focus on at different points. The next pages help you do this.

An idealised version of what the disaster cycle looks like



Before disaster

Prevention, planning, preparation



Disaster

Focus on immediate disaster response (reducing impacts on life and property)



Early recovery

Supporting the immediate needs of residents post-disaster, such as accessing safe housing, telecommunications



Mid-term recovery

Focus on longer term psychological, environmental, and economic recovery, while continuing to rebuild infrastructure such as houses



Long term recovery

Long term changes are made, to further assist recovery and reduce risks of negative impacts from future disasters, such as changing regulations, implementing requirements for planning and preparation, or changing infrastructure



		Actions you can take				
What's likely to be happening?		Disaster planning, response and recovery – roles (see Section 3)	Networks and collaborations (see Section 4)	Contact directories (see Section 5)	Supporting staff and volunteers (see Section 6)	Financial and practical resources (see Section 7)
 Before disaster 	Everyone's getting on with their day to day lives and aren't thinking much about disasters. It's often hard to get people together to do disaster planning and preparation work.	Plan – what is your emergency response plan? What could you do to support disaster recovery? What resources would you need? Make disaster planning part of the 'normal'.	Maintain a local network that can activate rapidly when disaster occurs. To keep it going through these quieter times, hold joint planning, training, and social events.	Update your contacts directories regularly. Ensure they are easily accessible to all staff and volunteers if disaster occurs.	Run disaster planning/preparation/training sessions annually (ideally collaboratively with other organisations to help maintain networks). Plan the resources you need in place to support staff and volunteers during disaster.	Develop and maintain budget plans that accurately estimate the cost of expanding activities if a disaster occurs – ready to use in funding applications. If feasible, identify budget that can be redirected to disaster response if needed. What can be repurposed – and what can't?
	 Disaster response 	Everyone is working to minimise damage to life, property and assets, and to keep people and animals safe. The community may be cut off and have limited telecommunications, power, information, or supplies. People are also forming their intentions to help. New local groups may emerge that seek to get support to those impacted, and people inside and outside your community are often fundraising and planning what they can do to help.	Enact disaster response roles (if appropriate). Prepare for likely disaster recovery roles.	If appropriate, partner and collaborate with others in your network from response stage onwards.	Make sure everyone has access to up to date contacts. Update contacts with new organisations and people involved in disaster response.	Check-in regularly; where possible, support staff and volunteers as they experience disaster impacts. Minimise anything not immediately necessary to reduce pressure. Identify any funding in your existing budget you can use for disaster response and recovery, and organise to access it.

	What's likely to be happening?	Actions you can take				
		Disaster planning, response and recovery – roles (see Section 3)	Networks and collaborations (see Section 4)	Contact directories (see Section 5)	Supporting staff and volunteers (see Section 6)	Financial and practical resources (see Section 7)
 Early recovery 	If you have experienced a high profile disaster that is widely reported in the media, it's likely that a lot of people want to help your community. There's a lot of donated goods, people providing supports and services, and some disaster support funding – but not all are well targeted to what your community actually needs. If your disaster is not 'high profile', you may lack support in the form of funding and resources given from those outside your community. In either case, it's often hard to know who's who, what's available, and how to access resources. Residents are in the early stages of assessing their options for recovery and often don't know which types of support will be most useful for them yet (for example, it may depend on whether they decide to rebuild their house versus shift to a new community).	Deliver the roles you can do, work with others to avoid duplication, and say no to the things you can't do. Plan how your role may evolve as you shift to mid-and long-term recovery.	Communicate with other organisations (local and non-local) providing recovery supports and services in your community. Advocate for coordination of activities, regular communication, and collaboration. Rapidly contact new organisations that seek to enter your community so they know who you are, and you can coordinate activities where needed.	Update or check in regularly with your contacts; staff often rapidly change roles during this time, as do the types of services and supports available and how they can be accessed.	There's a lot of pressure to work long hours, and it's hard to create any space for staff and volunteers to have a break. There's a big risk of burnout. Check whether staff and volunteers are using supports such as debriefings, peer support networks, check-ins and clinical supervision. Work with staff/ volunteers to plan breaks – even if they're in the future and not able to happen now.	Assess funding opportunities and apply for those that are relevant and worthwhile for your organisation and its activities. Include funding for the supports your staff and volunteers will need (such as counselling or clinical supervision) as well as the on-ground costs of services.

Actions you can take during mid- to long-term recovery						
	What's likely to be happening?	Disaster planning, response and recovery – roles (see Section 3)	Networks and collaborations (see Section 4)	Contact directories (see Section 5)	Supporting staff and volunteers (see Section 6)	Financial and practical resources (see Section 7)
 Mid-term recovery 	The initial shock has worn off. Many people have received basic supports to help them through the early stages of recovery, but it's still a long road to getting their home, work and lives to the place they'd like them to be. They are now starting to make sense of what has happened and face hard decisions about what to do next. The initial intense attention given to the community by others has died down, and communities may feel forgotten. While some disaster recovery staff are often still available on the ground, as this stage progresses, other services and supports will be withdrawn.	Keep regularly assessing and planning for the changing roles you may take on, for any increase in demand you may experience, as external organisations leave the community, as well as for decrease in some types of demand. Work on smooth handovers as roles change. Plan how your role may evolve as you move through mid and long-term recovery.	The network will gradually downsize as some external organisations that supported initial recovery leave and some local organisations downsize the workforce they took on to help deliver support during earlier stages of recovery. Work to keep the network alive in its smaller form and to maintain connection and collaboration between the local organisations who will be there long-term.	Update your contacts directories regularly. Ensure they are easily accessible to all staff and volunteers if disaster occurs. Work on opportunities to share contact directories and to make easily accessible public directories of available services available to the public. Invest in back-end systems that enable easy updating of these directories.	There's often a lot of turnover of personnel, and changing of roles, in this period. Work to ensure lessons learned are documented for the next disaster, and handovers happen – it's easy for some services and supports to lose effectiveness when vital information is lost in handover processes.	Continue applying for long term funding for the activities you are likely to be doing through the medium and longer-term.
	 Long-term recovery The external supports provided in earlier stages, such as financial payments, have stopped. While many aspects of people's lives are back to 'normal', many are still affected by long-term financial, social and psychological impacts. Local organisations continue to provide support and work to build resilience to future events.					

Planning your roles



Disaster recovery roles: What ways and where you can contribute

What ways can your organisation contribute to disaster recovery and resilience building?

What ways will your existing activities, skills and knowledge be able to help support your community's wellbeing when disaster happens?

What does your organisation already do that will support recovery and rebuilding, what existing activities could be expanded, and what (if any) new or different roles could it take on? Some local organisations may play major ongoing roles; others may play a minor, short term but still important role. Put together, the contributions of different organisations all doing what they can will be more than the sum of the parts.

Clearly identifying the roles your organisation is well placed and willing to provide, and the resources you would need to provide those roles is critical to successfully contributing to disaster recovery.

Having a clear understanding of this enables you to advocate for your organisation to deliver these roles, to actively seek the resources that can help

you, and to ensure that the resources you need don't end up allocated elsewhere due to a lack of awareness of your organisation's skills and capabilities.

Thinking about your roles also helps you avoid the common pitfall of attempting to take on roles your organisation lacks the resources or skills to deliver well. It can help you push back if you find yourself pressured to take on roles you are not well suited to do.

Taking on the wrong roles can lead to poorly delivered services and rapid burnout of staff and volunteers. Being able to clearly define your organisation's areas of competence helps ensure you engage in the disaster recovery activities that best fit your organisation's skills, capacity and resources.

This section helps you understand common roles of local organisations in disaster recovery, including those that often go unrecognised (even by the people in your organisation). It then asks you to consider which roles you are well-

placed to take on, which you are not, and what resources you would need.

The next pages list common roles local organisations provide during and after disasters. Many of these are done as ‘unfunded extras’ rather than as formal disaster recovery services. For example, many small organisations spend many hours helping refer local residents to support services after disaster but don’t receive funding to cover their time, or call this a disaster recovery activity.

For each of the roles listed, think about whether and under what circumstances your organisation would provide this role. Some won’t be roles you can provide. Others may be roles you do every day and are already well resourced to provide. Finally, there may be roles you can do, but with significant limits on the scope and scale you can deliver without additional resources.



Think about:

- 1 Is this role currently ‘core business’ for your organisation?
- 2 Do your staff and volunteers have the training and skills needed to do this well?
- 3 Do you have the practical resources needed to do this – such as meeting rooms, office space, storage, facilities, funding?
- 4 How long would you be able to do this in addition to your day-to-day activities without additional resourcing?
- 5 What additional resources would you need to be able to take on this role during or after a disaster such as drought, bushfire, or flood for an extended period (in some cases, several years)?
- 6 Are there other organisations in your local area that provide this service/role? Can you partner with them?
- 7 Would you take this on if asked to by your clients or members? By local residents you don’t normally work with? By a government agency or disaster response organisation?



Want a worksheet to help you assess the roles you can take on and resources you would need? Use **Worksheet 1** in the *Workbook for community-based organisations*.

Common roles of local organisations during and after disaster

Referring

Referring people who approach you to appropriate services and supports. This means when you are approached by people needing assistance, you help guide them to where they may find it.

Connecting

Helping disaster relief and recovery organisations connect to local people who may benefit from their assistance. In particular, helping connect them to those who are at-risk or vulnerable, and more generally, people your organisation has an existing relationship with.

Communicating with specific groups

You may be asked to help reach out and communicate with people you work with, particularly those who are at-risk, vulnerable, or who are unlikely to engage with 'mainstream' disaster communication.

Gathering information, assessing needs and impacts

Local organisations are often asked to report on 'what's happening on the ground' and provide assessment of the impacts of the disaster on their community and emerging needs.

Advocating

Advocating for the needs of specific groups of people your organisation works with and for, or for the needs of animals or environmental health.

Networking

Networking, e.g. helping different organisations providing disaster recovery support to connect, communicate, and collaborate with each other.

Coordinating

Coordinating disaster recovery activities, e.g. organising which organisations will provide different supports, how to direct funding and supports to those who need it.

Helping people apply for support

Helping people impacted by disaster to apply for support. e.g. you might help them complete forms, go to a service with them, provide language translation assistance.

Distributing information

Providing information, e.g. about types of support available, meeting places, evacuation centres, road closures, locations people can go to seek support.

Meeting/ gathering place

Providing a meeting or gathering place for community members

Psychosocial support

Helping people manage daily tasks, make social connections, complete forms, undertake work or study, or more generally participate in the community.

Case management

Supporting people to access a range of supports from different agencies and organisations and advocating for them as a case manager.

Mental health support

Providing formal mental health support, e.g. counselling, crisis support, clinical supervision and referrals to mental health services

Education

Providing education, training, skills building.

Food preparation

Preparing meals (you may distribute these, or they may be distributed by another organisation).

Food and water distribution

Distributing food and water (e.g. a pantry service, Foodbank, distributing pre-prepared meals).

Accommodation

Providing or helping people find accommodation.

Distributing goods or financial assistance

Sourcing and distributing goods and financial support, e.g. clothing, household goods, vouchers, disaster assistance grants. This often involves identifying needs and helping source goods.

Providing volunteers

Providing volunteers to help with rebuilding activities such as fencing, cleaning.

Wildlife care or animal welfare

Supporting wildlife and animals in your local area.

Natural resource management

Engaging in action to help restore environmental health in your area, including health of land, vegetation, waterways, and other areas.



Is this 'core business' for your organisation?



Do staff and volunteers have the training and skills needed?



Do you need additional resources like meeting rooms, storage, cooking facilities? Where can you access these?



How long would you be able to do this in addition to your day-to-day activities without additional resourcing?



What additional resources would you need to be able to do this for anything from several months to several years after a disaster occurs?



Do other organisations in your local area do this? Are they better placed than you? Can you partner with them?

Planning to work together



Local and non-local organisations: planning to work together

When disasters occur, it is common for many organisations to provide support services.

This can include a range of local and non-local organisations, such as NGOs and government agencies.

Many organisations entering disaster-affected communities will be unfamiliar with the local community. Local organisations often find themselves asked to help non-local organisations by providing advice, connections and local insight – while also doing their own work.

For local organisations, an influx of non-local organisations during and after disaster can be a double-edged sword. It can provide additional resources – in the form of funding, specialist knowledge, and people – critical to disaster recovery. However, if not managed well, it can reduce ability of local organisations to access funding and practical resources for their role in disaster recovery while also often adding to their workload.

Page 36 lists common benefits achieved when organisations work well together – and challenges that can happen when there is limited collaboration.

In an ideal world, local organisations will be ready to partner with non-local

organisations that have specialised knowledge of disaster recovery. Non-local organisations, meanwhile, will be prepared to enable and support local organisations.

How can local organisations plan and prepare for working with the non-local organisations likely to enter their community after a disaster? While there are limits to what you can prepare before disaster, some things are possible.

Start planning to work with non-local organisations by learning about the organisations likely to enter your community as part of disaster response and recovery efforts. These typically include state government agencies e.g. Resilience NSW, Service NSW, Rural Fire Services (RFS), State Emergency Service (SES); NGOs specialising in disaster recovery, (e.g. Red Cross and Blaze Aid) or community services and disasters (Salvation Army, Anglicare); NGOs that facilitate donations and linkages, such as GIVIT; commercial businesses that deliver key types of disaster assistance, such as banks and insurance companies; and philanthropic organisations that provide funding and support to assist disaster relief.



For each of these, consider:



1 Do they provide services/supports that align with those your organisation provides?



2 Could they be a source of funding or support for your organisation?



3 Is it worthwhile making contact via an email or phone call or asking them to help by giving a talk to your staff and volunteers?



Worksheet 2 in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* helps identify the organisations you can develop relationships with and how you might work with them during and after disaster.

Benefits of collaboration between locals and outsiders



When organisations work well together...

...specialist skills and knowledge are brought into local communities that speed up disaster recovery, and people with local knowledge identify how to apply that knowledge to best help the local community

Local organisations build skills in disaster recovery through partnering with larger organisations that specialise in these areas

...local organisations receive explicit support for their role in disaster recovery and rebuilding from external organisations

...people affected by disasters are rapidly and compassionately referred to an organisation that can assist with their specific support needs

...targeted support is available for a wide range of needs of those affected by disaster, and residents can easily find out where to get the support they need

...support is delivered efficiently and effectively

...increased human resources on the ground, and ability to share work across organisations, reduce burnout amongst staff/volunteers

...local residents feel confident to seek assistance; when 'external' organisations leave a community, there is no gap in service provision, as local organisations have the skills and resources needed to continue providing support

...local organisations are able to build their long-term capability and capacity through working with non-local organisations



When organisations don't work well together...

...external organisations deliver services that don't meet specific local circumstances, while local organisations deliver support that isn't informed by understanding of what works best in disaster recovery and rebuilding

This results in poorly targeted support that doesn't meet local needs, e.g. funding, programs and donated goods that don't meet the needs of residents

...local organisations are 'bypassed' by new organisations and lack resources, despite often providing many disaster recovery supports and services

... there is little or slow referral between organisations; disaster-affected residents often have to tell their story multiple times to multiple organisations, sometimes adding to trauma

...disaster-affected residents have to apply to multiple organisations for different forms of support, often involving time-consuming processes; it is difficult to identify which organisation provides what support

...duplication of roles by different organisations means some funds are not used efficiently

...some organisations have a lot of staff and little to do, while others are doing a lot and risk staff and volunteer burnout

...lack of relationships between some organisations and local residents means residents are reluctant to seek support, or support does not transition to a local organisation when an 'external' organisation exits the community during recovery and rebuilding

...local organisations feel pressured to provide assistance to non-local organisations, even when this means they may not be able to deliver well on both this and their own work

Challenges when collaboration does not work well



Case study: Tathra bushfires, NSW

In 2018, bushfires destroyed close to 100 homes and caravans in the small coastal town of Tathra, NSW, and caused significant damage to other homes and property. Collaboration between local and non-local organisations helped both types of organisation deliver effective supports and services. For example, local leaders talked about the benefits of having access to expertise from disaster specialists to guide their work supporting local residents:



... the [disaster recovery specialist] came in at the end of the first week. And her full-time job is she goes wherever there's disasters and kicks off the initial response. She said to us, "Watch out for the people who say 'I'm all right, yeah, I'm OK.' They're the ones who may be really struggling a few months in. And she said 'Mark them in your diary, and at month six go and chase them up.'" And that's exactly what the case workers did.'

This advice helped case workers make sure they were actively following up people who were likely to be at risk some months after disaster and who had not initially reached out for support. This, in turn, helped local organisations identify and deliver the supports this group of people needed.

5 Networks and coordination



Cross-organisation networks: building and maintaining them before, during and after disasters

When we spoke to organisations who have worked in communities during and after events such as bushfire, drought, and flood, almost all talked about the importance of effective cross-organisational networks.

Disaster recovery efforts involve multiple organisations (local, non-local, government, NGOs, and others). Achieving good outcomes often hinges on whether these organisations are able to coordinate their activities. Coordination may involve having regular meetings or contact as disaster recovery progresses, whether through a formal committee or less formal catch-ups.

Having a **network of local organisations established before disaster** can help a lot during and after disaster. An existing network can activate rapidly when disaster occurs, helping local organisations mobilise quickly and effectively. It also provides non-local organisations coming into the local community with a central contact point. These networks help local organisations coordinate better both with each other and with the new organisations that come into their community during and after disaster.

Those involved in disaster recovery commonly identified four aspects of networks that, when present, helped them deliver more efficient and effective disaster recovery supports and services:



1 Having an existing network of organisations. Having a 'skeleton network' ready to activate helped get resources on the ground and delivering services more effectively. It reduced duplication of activities and wastage of resources and enabled more rapid action. However, while having existing networks was ideal, often networks only formed after disaster and took some time to achieve effective coordination. This often resulted in delays in delivering effective supports and services, which in turn increased frustration and stress in communities as they worked to recover from disaster.

It was also common for networks to disband a year or two after disaster, only to have to reform in another year or two when the next disaster occurred. Where networks were maintained, on-ground action was faster, more efficient, and more effective.



2 Having central points of contact. More effective delivery of support and services occurred where multiple organisations could be reached through a central point of contact. Examples included a central phone number and email that was used to refer people to the specific organisations best suited to supporting their needs. This was sometimes managed by one organisation, particularly local government.



3 Inclusive networks that included both local and non-local government and non-government organisations. It was common for networks formed during disaster recovery to include larger organisations providing formal support but to exclude some local organisations that also provided important services and supports. Making sure all organisations are included can increase effectiveness of networks. In particular, it is important to ensure the inclusion of smaller local organisations who are providing support to those impacted by disaster as part of their everyday work and have good visibility to the changing needs of the community.



4 Effective communication by the network. Not all organisations can attend regular network meetings; networks that sent emails and other updates to all members, including those unable to meet face to face, were more effective in building good communication, collaboration and coordination.

An important part of planning for disaster is to identify and build relationships with the other organisations you are likely to need to coordinate, communicate, and collaborate with throughout disaster response and recovery processes. This network will change as disaster recovery progresses – but having some existing relationships gives you an important head start when disaster occurs.

To kickstart your organisational networks:

- 1 Identify existing cross-organisational networks in your local area (and, if they exist, make contact with them). Try contacting your local government, local emergency response providers, local branches of NGOs, and State government agencies such as Resilience NSW and Service NSW.
- 2 Identify the local organisations you might need to interact with during disaster response, recovery and rebuilding and develop your own network with them

Once you've identified who you want to network with, the next challenge is forming and maintaining a network that is ready to activate during and after disaster. The best outcomes result when a network is 'ready and waiting' – but it is hard to keep networks going when there isn't an immediate disaster response or recovery need.



Worksheet 3 in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* helps you identify the organisations you may want to contact.





Communicating with a single voice

A common challenge during and after disaster is a lack of consistent communication about what's happening. Often different organisations give differing information; some may be out of date or inaccurate, or provide only part of the picture and leave out important details.

Having a shared 'single point of truth' and ensuring all organisations in your network use the agreed 'point of truth' can help immensely.

Having a network enables organisations to rapidly share and update information, agree on what specific sources of information are most accurate, and ensure all organisations have access

to these 'single points of truth' as the disaster and subsequent recovery unfold.

Developing a 'Disaster Dashboard' that integrates information from different reliable sources and makes it available in a single place is increasingly used to address the challenge of conflicting information. Having a Disaster Dashboard gives a place all organisations can point people to.

A shared approach to communication can also help you reduce time spent responding to what can be time consuming – but important – requests from the media.

Key tips and tricks from people who have done it before include:



- 1 Set a small, manageable amount of time aside to actively invest in maintaining a network of contacts – maybe an afternoon once every 3–4 months



- 2 Don't overdo it – trying to establish a formal committee with a website, staffed roles etc. may not work in many communities



- 3 An informal (or formal) meeting where you bring the organisations that may need to network together to share ideas is often a great starting point



- 4 If you find a network emerges during a disaster, try to keep it going during the 'quieter times' between disasters, so it can be easily re-activated when the next one happens.



- 5 Identify shared disaster preparation activities the organisations in your network can collaborate on to help build and maintain relationships, such as:
 - Training and seminars, e.g. Accidental Counsellor training attended by people from multiple organisations in your network, organising joint seminars.
 - Jointly produce an annual information booklet sent to local residents, providing information about local organisations and what they do in 'normal' times and when disaster occurs. The 'Resources' section at the end of the guide has an example.
 - Develop a shared directory of organisations and people and update it once a year, with organisations rotating responsibility for updating the resource or resourcing one organisation to take on this responsibility
 - Identify specific preparation or community activities you can collaborate on – a fete or field day jointly held by your network, for example.



- 6 Piggyback on existing meetings – sometimes it's hard to get interest in talking about disasters when one isn't happening. Are there other reasons to have a meeting with your network? Could you hold a social get together so staff can develop personal relationships?

Consider developing a cross-organisational disaster response plan. This can be a living document, updated annually. It can provide a reason to bring your network together once or twice a year to review and test the plan, for example, through conducting scenario-based disaster exercises that involve the different organisations in your network.

Contacts, directories and mapping 'who's who' in disaster recovery

Having a **directory of 'who's who' that is updated at least every six months (more often during initial stages of disaster recovery)** enables people working in disaster response and recovery to connect to each other. It's important to know not just the organisations but the individual people performing different roles. With many staff often being seconded or appointed to specific disaster recovery roles for short periods, regular updates are critical.

When disaster happens, it's often hard to keep up with the changing organisations and people who are working to help your community. It's common for local organisations to have new volunteers and staff who come on board to help, as well as for new organisations to come into the community.

A common challenge is maintaining a directory of contacts that is relatively up-to-date. This is particularly difficult for small organisations, which often rely on each staff member or volunteer to maintain their own contacts, rather than having a shared directory of contacts.

Developing and regularly updating a formal directory of contacts can give you an easy reference to find out who to call when you need to refer a resident to a support service, or when you have identified an area of need that your organisations can't address but another may be able to. Being able to pick up the phone and call the right person makes a big difference, instead of having to phone

multiple people before identifying the right one. It can also help you onboard new staff and volunteers faster by ensuring you can easily share a list of contacts they are likely to need.



Whether it's a simple contact file you can share with personnel in your organisation, or a formal shared database everyone can contribute to updating, work to put in place a system where you:



1 Have a directory of key contacts that can be distributed to everyone in your organisation, and updated regularly.



2 A system that allows the directory to be easily accessed and updated by all your staff and volunteers and shared with others. Consider whether you can rely on a directory stored as a shared online file, or whether you need locally saved copies – or printed copies – that can be used when there is limited or no internet available.



3 Update your directory as organisations, and people change. Ideally, do a ring-around of your key contacts every now and then to check whether any need updating. This is particularly important for those organisations that you might not regularly have contact with but who you may need current contacts for when disaster occurs.



You can use **Worksheet 4** in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* to help you identify the organisations you may need to include contacts for in your directory.

It's also critical to ensure people know how to reach you. In many communities, difficulty identifying who to contact for support after disaster is a common issue. Some communities create public directories to help address this problem. It's easy for these to become out of date if not updated regularly.

In addition to developing your own directory:

- Ensure your organisation's details are included in existing publicly available directories
- Talk with other organisations, particularly local government, about investing in a regularly updated, publicly available directory. This can provide an easy to find contact list for new organisations that may seek to support your community after a disaster occurs. However, it requires appropriate and ongoing resourcing.

Referrals and sharing personal information

When multiple organisations are working simultaneously in a community to support disaster recovery and rebuilding, being able to refer clients between organisations is important.

In the absence of good referral processes, community members may have to contact several organisations before they find the one that can provide the support they need. They may have to provide the same documentation repeatedly to different organisations and to fill the same details in on different forms. Having to repeatedly provide information to establish their identity, or repeatedly describe the losses or damage they have experienced in a disaster to multiple organisations, has the potential to re-traumatise those impacted by disasters.

Community members and those involved in disaster relief and recovery told us that they commonly came across people who gave up trying to get assistance after being repeatedly told ‘we’re not the right place – try X’. When already experiencing difficulty functioning after disaster, with many people experiencing difficulty processing information as they experience the shock and trauma that often follows disaster, it can be very hard to summon the energy to contact yet another organisation you don’t know and try to ask for help.

“ When people are in brain fog after experiencing a traumatic event, handing them a card or a piece of paper with someone’s name and phone number on it, they’re just as likely to get home and go, “What’s that for again?” A warm referral is ‘So Jackie, you’re telling me you need assistance with homelessness, mental health, filling out the form’, whatever it is. ‘I think I know a local person, organisation who can help you with that. Do you want me to ring them now and see if we can organise a time for you to see them at your convenience?’ So, I ring up Myrtle, and I say, ‘Myrtle, I’ve got Jackie here on the phone. She’s just been through X. We’re looking to arrange an appointment. Can I put Jackie on the phone to you now and arrange time that suits her?’ So, it’s that wraparound support that isn’t just going, “Here’s the phone number, bye.” – Local organisation leader with experience of multiple local disasters

This process can be made considerably easier for those impacted by disaster if the first organisation they try to contact takes the time to help them get in contact with the right people, and if they are able to give consent for relevant information about them to be shared across organisations.

Taking the time to provide 'warm referrals' can support the wellbeing of residents who are attempting to navigate the often complex and confusing process of trying to figure out how to access services and support after disaster. This involves not just telling a person what organisation to try next, but actively contacting that organisation, arranging an appointment with them for the person, and, if appropriate, sharing relevant information with that organisation, so the client doesn't have to repeat their story and details. Doing this can substantially reduce the trauma and challenge involved in seeking help after disaster and support more rapid recovery of wellbeing.

However, often organisations are under pressure to maximise the number of clients they see – and their staff and volunteers aren't rewarded for spending time to help a person connect to another organisation. Enabling warm referrals requires an organisation to:

- Encourage and enable staff and volunteers to spend the time needed to refer people to other organisations. This requires actively building this into organisational culture and staff performance indicators.

- Have a regularly updated directory of organisations and people, with information about their roles, available for all staff and volunteers (see previous section).
- Have policies and procedures in place that enable referral of clients to other organisations and, where appropriate and consent is given, sharing of information.

Privacy and confidentiality considerations can prevent organisations from sharing information with each other. This can be frustrating for those impacted by disaster, who have to provide the same information multiple times to different organisations. It is also frustrating for organisations that can't access information from another organisation about people that they may be able to help, and as a result, can't reach out to them to offer support.

While frustrating, restrictions on sharing information often exist for good reasons.

Sharing information comes with significant risks to the privacy and confidentiality of the people whose information is being shared. If appropriate protections are not in place, there is a real risk that information could be shared with the wrong people or organisations. This is particularly the case when information is shared between local organisations in a small community: with many residents knowing each other, there is a risk of confidential information being communicated to colleagues and friends of a person who is seeking support. This can, in turn, lead to people being unwilling

to seek help due to fear their private challenges will become more widely known in their community.

This risk means it is critical for organisations to have sound processes in place that ensure consent is obtained before any sharing of information occurs. Many local organisations do not have formal processes in place in which they ask clients whether they would give permission for some information to be shared with other organisations. Having these in place and ready to use can improve disaster recovery processes.



Worksheet 5 in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* helps you identify the specific types of consent you may need to consider.

When developing your consent process, consider how you can best do the following:

- Ensure clients can easily understand what they are agreeing to
- Enable clients to choose which of the following types of information can and cannot be shared
 - Name, address, phone number, email
 - Names and contacts of family members/friends

- Information about
 - Types of loss experienced in disaster
 - Income, or financial value of losses
 - Support needs
 - Other personal information.
- Enable clients to choose what period of time information can be shared for
- Enable clients to identify which organisations information can – and can't – be shared with
- Clearly inform clients how they can change their consent, and ensure it is easy for them to do so
- Provide appropriate options for signing that consider varying levels of literacy and access to online forms
- Provide copies of completed forms to clients
- Securely store information on consent
- Keep a record of the dates and times when information stored by your organisation about a client was shared with another organisation

Many online resources are available to help you put in place robust consent and privacy processes. Justice Connect provides a range of resources to help you understand legal requirements for ensuring privacy and appropriate consent and templates you can draw on (see the 'useful resources' section for more information).

Supporting staff and volunteers





Supporting staff and volunteers

The staff and volunteers who are part of your organisation are central to the success of your contribution to disaster recovery and rebuilding. It is well recognised that volunteering or working for organisations that are part of disaster response and recovery efforts is often stressful and can have a high risk of burnout if not managed well. This risk of stress is often compounded amongst those working for local organisations, as many have been personally impacted by a disaster, as well as working to help others affected by it.

With many communities experiencing not one single disaster, but multiple challenging events within short spaces of time (for example, a drought, followed by bushfire, followed by flood, over a period of three to four years), it can be difficult to maintain the health and wellbeing of staff and volunteers (including yourself). You may feel you have no 'downtime' between disasters and go from being in the middle of recovering from one disaster to managing the next. This means you may need to implement new ways of managing staff and volunteers that assume regular occurrence of disasters will be a way of life going forward, rather than treating disasters as a 'one-off' occasional event that you rarely have to manage.

Page 55 describes common challenges experienced by staff and volunteers when engaged in typically long-term

processes of disaster recovery and resilience building. These include having limited experience and resources to draw on, managing impacts of disaster on their own households while helping others, risk of burnout, fatigue, and vicarious trauma, and high staff and volunteer turnover.

Increasingly, many workplaces are putting in place access to a range of supports for staff and volunteers who may be at high risk of burnout, fatigue or vicarious trauma. Different types of support will be appropriate depending on the types of services and supports your organisation provides. The table on pages 56 to 59 provides a brief guide to the different types of support commonly put in place, why they are used, and when they may – and may not – be the most appropriate option for your organisation.



In addition to identifying these supports, things you can do to plan and prepare to successfully support staff and volunteers through often lengthy disaster recovery and resilience building work include:

- Investing in regular training and skills building, including refresher training similar to that used to ensure first aid skills are up to date
- Reviewing whether the types of resources you are providing to support personnel are working and if you need to consider others. These include providing access to counselling, peer support networks, debriefings, and clinical supervision, amongst others.
- Identifying the cost of providing these resources, so you can include this in funding applications
- Identifying regular acts of recognition you can invest in, from emails thanking staff and volunteers to events, certificates and others.



Worksheet 6 in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* helps you identify the things you can do to plan and prepare to successfully support staff and volunteers through disaster recovery and resilience building work. It also gives ideas for actions you can take to recognise the efforts of staff and volunteers.

Challenge	Tips and ideas to address this challenge
Existing staff and volunteers have little or no experience in disaster response, recovery or rebuilding. This is a common issue for small community organisations: despite often finding themselves having a key role in recovery and rebuilding, staff often have little or no experience or specialist knowledge about how best to help their community through this experience.	• Develop relationships with larger organisations that specialise in disaster recovery and rebuilding. • Get them to give a talk to your staff or hold a workshop. • Find local community members who have disaster experience and ask them to give talks or advice to help your organisation prepare. • Invest in having staff/volunteers attend training courses such as Accidental Counsellor training. • Examples of courses are given in the resources section.
Staff and volunteers are impacted by the disaster, while also working to help others who have been affected.	• Recognise the impacts being experienced. • Encourage staff and volunteers to seek support themselves as well as supporting others.
Inexperienced new staff or volunteers who join your organisation to help with its disaster recovery and rebuilding efforts.	• Document standard operating procedures, contacts, organisational values so new staff and volunteers have a readily accessible resource. • Plan for your limits – how many volunteers can you realistically train? What skills do volunteers need to have before you will allow them to volunteer for your organisation? • What skills are essential for staff? Prepare staff recruitment and training plans.
Staff and volunteers are at high risk of vicarious trauma, burnout and/or fatigue through their work supporting others or as a result of ongoing exposure to a continuous media cycle, criticism of past or current work, or dealing with conflict in the community,	• Put in place processes such as debriefings, check-ins, peer support networks, access to counselling, or clinical supervision, to support staff and volunteers (see pages 56–59). • Invest in training to help staff and volunteers recognise and manage signs of trauma, burnout and fatigue. • Plan to enable staff and volunteers to have time off, even during the busiest of times. This is often very difficult to achieve – but critical.
High staff and volunteer turnover	• Invest in processes of documentation that ensure smooth handover. • Where possible, have handover processes in which old and new staff/volunteers work together before a person leaves the organisation (this is not always possible). • Make sure your staff and volunteers know their efforts are noticed and recognised. This may be via an email of thanks; a thank you BBQ or organisational awards.

Type of support	What is this & when is it typically used?	Strengths	Limitations
Informal social events	While many people think about formal supports such as counselling, ensuring people have opportunities to get together for social events is an important way to support wellbeing.	Easier to organise than many other types of support.	Social events need to be inclusive of all people with the venues, timing and types of activities accessible to people from different cultures, with differing abilities, and with different caring responsibilities.
Training to recognise and respond to signs of burnout, trauma	Training can help staff and volunteers recognise warning signs and symptoms of burnout, fatigue and trauma in themselves and others they work with. You may find local mental health providers who can provide annual training or online courses.	Builds knowledge and understanding to ensure staff and volunteers are better aware of issues and can identify them.	Sometimes, emphasising self-recognition can suggest that staff are wholly responsible for their own wellbeing and ignore systemic workplace issues that are contributing to higher risk of burnout. Ensure your people know that they don't have to 'go it alone' when trying to address these issues.
Regular check-ins	Supervisors regularly check in to see how staff and volunteers are doing.	Builds on relationships and enables supervisors to take action.	Not all people are willing to discuss issues they are experiencing with supervisors (especially if they may be caused in part by the supervisor): some may prefer to have the option of anonymity or privacy in raising and discussing challenges related to trauma and burnout.

Type of support	What is this & when is it typically used?	Strengths	Limitations
Debriefing sessions	Teams get together and debrief on what has been happening, working through challenging situations and giving advice and support to each other.	Can build stronger team relationships, shared skills and knowledge.	Similar to above, not all people may be comfortable discussing issues with colleagues; and may find it difficult to raise issues that are a result of difficulties with colleagues or supervisors.
Peer support network	Personnel who work in similar roles across different regions or organisations organise a peer support network. This may be a regular meeting of those engaged in similar types of work in which experiences are shared. In some cases, it can take the form of having the ability to seek advice from a person delivering similar work, but in a different organisation or region – giving the staff member some ability to seek independent advice from those with expertise located outside their own organisation.	Provides access to advice, expertise and support from others engaged in similar roles. Can provide the ability to seek confidential advice outside the direct supervisory relationship.	Sometimes there are few people working in similar roles who can be identified, or it's difficult to make contact. Organising online or phone catch-ups can be useful, or networks in which people are 'buddied up' with one other person who they are able to maintain contact with easily.

Type of support	What is this & when is it typically used?	Strengths	Limitations
Employee assistance program	Employees (and sometimes volunteers) are given access to free psychological support up to a specified limit. Usually, this is available anonymously so that supervisors are not notified when an employee chooses to access the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).	Personnel are able to seek anonymous support.	Many EAP programs do not have counsellors trained to identify and respond to the needs of those working in disaster recovery roles. There is typically a limit to the number of counselling sessions a person can access via an EAP, and this may not be sufficient to address longer-term need for support amongst staff and volunteers who are working with traumatised communities. There is sometimes reluctance to access counselling.
Ongoing counselling access	As above, however, differs from an EAP in that some counselling programs are mandated – for example, those working in roles in which they have high risk of vicarious trauma may be required to attend counselling sessions.	Personnel are able to seek anonymous support.	In some cases, formal psychological counselling may be less useful than being able to connect to peers who have similar experiences and can provide role-specific advice. There is sometimes reluctance to access counselling (including amongst those who recommend counselling to others).

Type of support	What is this & when is it typically used?	Strengths	Limitations
Clinical supervision	Clinical supervision can take more than one form. It generally involves health practitioners working with approved supervisors who evaluate their work and help them continue to build their skills, as well as ensuring they provide ongoing support for the mental health and wellbeing of the staff member.	Provides direct supervision by a person with relevant qualifications and expertise in the type of service or support being delivered.	Often not costed into funding grants. Sometimes there is a lack of available experts. Some fields of work lack a culture of engaging with clinical supervision, which is more common in health-related work, and less so in other types of work-related to disaster recovery.



Resources



Financial resources

After a disaster occurs, local organisations often find themselves competing with many other organisations for limited disaster recovery funding.

This funding is often made available by governments, NGOs and philanthropic organisations through grant rounds in which organisations have to apply for funding via a competitive process. Local organisations often experience difficulty successfully applying for funding. It is also common for much of the limited funding made available to focus almost entirely on the immediate disaster recovery stage, with little being made available to support longer-term recovery needs.

Common challenges small organisations experience, and strategies funders can use to minimise these, are described on the next page. In addition to being aware of these challenges, local organisations can prepare for disaster recovery funding processes by:



1 Prepare (and every 6 to 12 months, update) a resource kit your organisation can use to help rapidly prepare funding applications. This should include information commonly required as part of funding applications, such as

- information on charity registration status, ABN, public liability insurance, etc
- staff and volunteer CVs
- case studies of past projects and their outcomes
- evaluation templates you can use to report on outcomes of your activities, which can be included in applications to demonstrate how you will monitor and evaluate outcomes and report back to the funder.



2 Identifying a **professional grant writer** who can help prepare grant applications. If you don't have resources to pay a professional, create a volunteer role for grant writing and actively seek out volunteers with great writing skills and the ability to take on this role. Consider supporting them to take part in training courses or workshops on grant writing – many low and no-cost options for building grant writing skills are available.



3 Develop a checklist you can use to decide **whether it is worthwhile applying** for the different funding opportunities that come up. Consider the following:

- What can the funding be used for? Does the stated purpose align with your organisation's activities, or would you have to change what you do to 'fit in' with the funding requirements?
- How long will you have to spend the funding? At what point will you be required to return unspent funding? Can you realistically deliver your activities in this timeframe?
- What are the reporting requirements? Can you provide the types of monitoring and evaluation of outcomes required by the funder?

For small, locally-based organisations, being aware of the signs that funding is likely to be 'more hassle than its worth' versus enabling you to support your community's needs can help you decide what funding to apply for – and what not to. It's important to learn not

to apply for funding that doesn't fit your organisation well. If the funding is too short-term, focused on activities that aren't your core business, or has reporting requirements that you are unlikely to be able to manage – don't apply!



Issue	Small organisations...	Funders should...
Complex application processes	...often lack resources to develop and submit lengthy applications	...simplify application requirements where possible, and ensure small organisations are not disadvantaged by the complexity of application requirements
Rapid application requirements – after disaster, many funding applications are open for only a short time	...can easily miss tight deadlines or find it difficult to apply rapidly	...ensure that if there is a short timeframe, the application process is widely advertised and made as simple and easy as possible to engage with
Short-term funding	...can take time to build relationships, recruit staff & access resources needed to deliver on-ground ...often find new people emerging who need support many months (or years) after disaster occurs ...sometimes have to return funding when they are unable to spend it within a relatively short time frame	...ensure funding is available for a suitable length of time, rather than having to be spent in unrealistically short timeframes ...provide options for extension of timeframes if funding recipients can show evidence of ongoing need
Inflexible funding	...often find that funding available is for highly specific purposes, and these don't always match the needs they are observing in their community ...have to 'turn themselves inside out' to change what they do so it meets the requirements for funding	...allow applicants to identify needs and how they can best use funding to meet those needs, rather than being overly prescriptive regarding the specific uses of funding ...still require funding recipients to clearly document and cost how funding will be used

Issue	Small organisations...	Funders should...
Unclear reporting requirements	...find it difficult to know what they need to monitor and report to demonstrate outcomes of the activities they have done using funding	...provide reporting templates, or work with funding recipients to develop appropriate reporting templates that match the capacity of the organisations that have received funding
Large organisations are better placed to succeed in funding applications than small organisations	...find it hard to prepare and submit applications that can compete with those of larger organisations ...often miss out on funding as a result – only to be asked to help the larger organisations who did receive the funding when they enter their community	...design grant programs that encourage collaboration (for example requiring larger organisations to have at least one local community partner who will work with them) ...design programs specifically for smaller organisations
Funding processes encourage competition rather than collaboration between organisations	...find themselves competing against each other for funding ...find funding guidelines do not enable cross-organisation collaboration ...cannot use funding to work with other organisations	...explicitly design grant programs to encourage and enable organisations to work together on the ground

Practical resources

Many small organisations rapidly expand their operations during and after a disaster. For example, organisations may expand through:

- seeing more clients (requiring more meeting rooms or use of transport than usual)
- doing more online applications (requiring better internet access or mobile devices to record information)
- storing large volumes of goods (requiring storage facilities)
- needing to expand cooking or production facilities.



Expanding activities often requires accessing additional practical resources, such as:

- Storage, sorting, packing, or food preparation facilities
- Meeting rooms or mixed-use spaces
- Transportation
- Mobile phones and/or mobile internet connected devices such as tablets
- Other infrastructure such as power generators

Many of the organisations we talked to reported that it was difficult to rapidly find and obtain these resources or to get permits or approval to use nearby facilities or infrastructure.

Developing a resource access plan before disasters can help reduce these problems.



Use **Worksheet 7** in the *Workbook for community-based organisations* to help you identify the practical resources you might need to support the expansion of your activities, as well as to identify where you might access them and whether you may need to plan ahead for permits or approvals.

Useful resources

There's a lot of information on disaster resilience, and it can be hard to identify which information is most trustworthy and based on evidence. We recommend a few key resources below that you may find useful. However, there are many more than these available to help communities navigate disaster recovery.

Disaster resilience and recovery resources

Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub –

<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/>

The Hub contains a wealth of resources examining different aspects of disaster resilience. We recommend you download the National Principles for Disaster Recovery, as well as explore the Hub more generally.

DRMA – Disaster Recovery Mentors Australia. DRMA – accessed via the Red Cross – links you to mentors who have helped their community through disaster recovery.

Phoenix Australia –

<https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub/recover/>

Phoenix Australia provides a wide range of resources and training for those who are recovering from disaster.

Recovery Capitals (ReCap) – <https://recoverycapitals.org.au/>

The ReCap guide helps you identify the different 'capitals' in your community that can be used to generate resources and support wellbeing during disaster recovery.

Red Cross Resources for Agencies – <https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies> (or search "Red Cross" "Resources for Agencies")

The Red Cross provides a range of resources, including emergency preparedness information in multiple languages, the free Red Cross RediPlan disaster preparedness guide, and others.

Disaster resilience and recovery resources	Resilience NSW – https://www.nsw.gov.au/resilience-nsw Resilience NSW provides a range of resources to support communities after disaster, as well as information on NSW government disaster relief and support. Walk With – https://walkwith.org.au/ Walk with provides an online disaster recovery training tool for family, welfare, health and community support workers.
Privacy, consent and referral resources	Justice Connect: https://justiceconnect.org.au/. Justice Connect provides a wide range of resources that are updated regularly. Also, check out their ‘Not-for-profit law’ website at https://www.nfplaw.org.au/ Office of the Australian Information Commissioner: https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/your-privacy-rights/your-personal-information/consent-to-the-handling-of-personal-information/
Human resources	Contact local providers of training and mental health support, and talk to other organisations similar to yours to ask what they find most useful out of the wide range of mental health resources available to support staff and volunteers. Mental Health Access Line https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx Accidental Counsellor training by Lifeline: This short course has helped many staff and volunteers who become ‘accidental counsellors’ during disaster recovery and rebuilding processes. Lifeline also offers other workplace training. See https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-involved/workplace-training/
Example of cross-organisation information booklet	A helping hand for Western NSW: Pathways to Services. This booklet is a great example of a resource providing residents access to information and contacts for a number of organisations in one place. See https://www.crrmh.com.au/content/uploads/sites/3/Helping-Hands-Pathways-to-Care-booklet_V3-2020.pdf

Resources and reports you can access from this project

This guide is one of seven resources and reports produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project:

Schirmer, J. and Dare, L. 2021. Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery: A guide for community-based organisations. Guide produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

Schirmer, J. and Dare, L. 2021. Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery: Practical worksheets. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

Schirmer, J. and Dare, L. 2021. Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery: A guide for funders, large organisations and others seeking to enable and support local organisations in disaster recovery. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

Schirmer J, Mylek M, Peel D, Sellers H, and Dare L. 2021. *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project: *Evaluating current knowledge of the role of community assets*. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. University of Canberra.

Dare, L. and Schirmer, J. 2021. *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project: *Research report*. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

NSW Council of Social Service. 2021. *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery project: Insights report*. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

NSW Council of Social Service. 2021. *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery project: Final report*. Report produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.

Recommended citation for this document: Schirmer, J. and Dare, L. 2021. *Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery: A guide for community-based organisations*. Guide produced as part of the *Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery* project. Mental Health Commission of NSW, NSW Council of Social Service, and University of Canberra.



Final words

Getting involved in disaster recovery can feel overwhelming for many local organisations. Most do it anyway due to their strong commitment to their community. Even when those efforts aren't implemented perfectly, they make a huge difference to your community.

This guide gives a lot of suggestions and ideas. Remember: you don't need to try to do everything that's been identified in the guide. If you are able to identify one or two actions that are particularly relevant for you and work to put them in place, you're doing well.

Thank you to the thousands of local organisations across Australia who work to support their communities before, during and after disaster. Thanks also to the many government agencies, NGOs and charities who work to help communities when disaster hits and to help them build their resilience to future disasters.

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We thank the more than 100 people who contributed their experiences, time and knowledge to help inform the development of this guide. These included volunteers and staff from local organisations that ranged from local pantries to Men's Sheds, farming organisations, Neighbourhood Centres, family support services and social service providers, as well as staff of government agencies and large NGOs involved in disaster recovery. Many of these participants took time out from ongoing disaster recovery work to generously assist the project team. Without their willingness and generosity to contribute their expertise and insights, it would not have been possible to develop this resource.

Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery – A guide for local organisations

A resource from the
community resilience,
wellbeing and
recovery project