

Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery

A guide for those seeking
to enable and support local
organisations in disaster
recovery



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1

Introduction





What is this guide about?

Disasters such as flood, bushfire and drought are occurring with increasing frequency in many Australian communities. A wide range of organisations support communities to recover and to build resilience to future disasters.

These include many specialist disaster recovery organisations, who often enter communities after disasters to support their recovery for a period of time.

Local organisations, such as local government, local service organisations, health and social service providers, community and neighbourhood centres, are also critical to disaster recovery and resilience.

While not typically specialists in disaster recovery, these local organisations often support community members impacted by disasters in the immediate and long term. Local organisations are often the first people approached by those needing support. Their ongoing presence in communities ensures continuity of support to local people after organisations specialising in disaster response and recovery have left.

There is growing recognition that disaster recovery and resilience-building processes are more successful when 'community-led'. This recognition – together with increased demand for services and

supports following more frequent disasters – is leading to greater demand for a wide range of locally-based organisations in disaster recovery and resilience building efforts. However, local organisations typically have limited training and preparation for taking on a role in disaster recovery. They often need support in the form of resourcing, partnership, and collaborations with organisations with specialist expertise and experience in enabling disaster recovery. There is growing demand for funders, government agencies, and NGOs to invest in enabling and supporting local organisations to be partners in disaster recovery.

This guide assists 'non-local organisations' (such as funders, government agencies, and NGOs specialising in disaster response and recovery) to identify key needs of local organisations and understand how they can support and build the capacity of local organisations as part of their work in disaster recovery. This guide was developed as part of the Community resilience, wellbeing and recovery project (see page 41 for details).

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed to assist ‘non-local organisations’ to understand how to support, enable and build the capacity of local organisations in disaster recovery. It identifies and outlines some of the common challenges you may experience when seeking to partner and collaborate with local organisations on the ground in a disaster-affected community.

A ‘non-local organisation’ means any kind of organisation that seeks to support a community after it experiences disaster, but that doesn’t have a long-term presence in that community. In the case of some NGOs, they may have local branches who engage in work other than disaster recovery, but also disaster recovery specialists who enter communities and are considered ‘not local’ as they are not embedded in the local community. Non-local organisations include funders, state and federal government agencies, non-government organisations specialising in disaster response, philanthropic and charity organisations. Examples are provided on the next page.

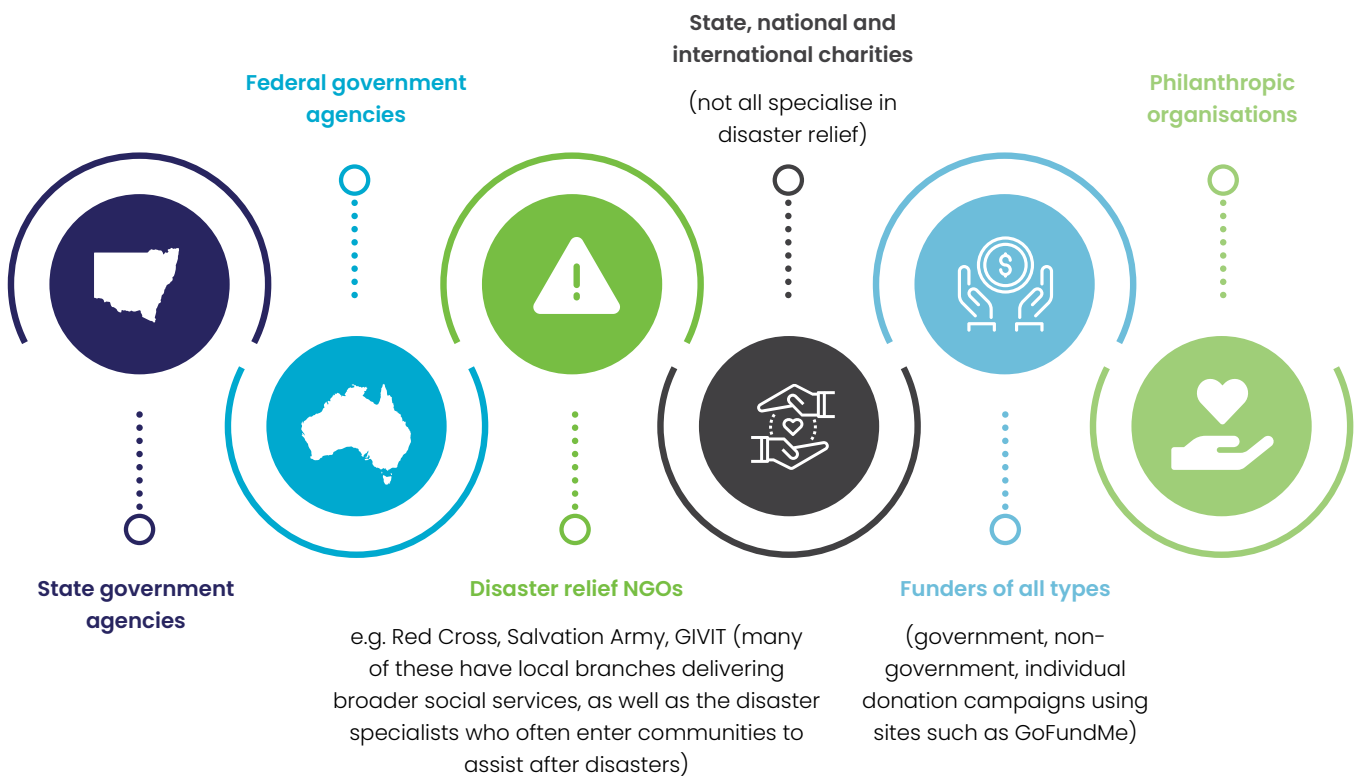
Other resources to use alongside this guide

This guide is one of a set of three resources produced in the **Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery** series:

- 1 A guide for community-based organisations.** This guide focuses on helping locally-based organisations understand and prepare for supporting their community through disaster recovery.
- 2 Practical worksheets.** This set of worksheets provides practical worksheets 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).** 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.

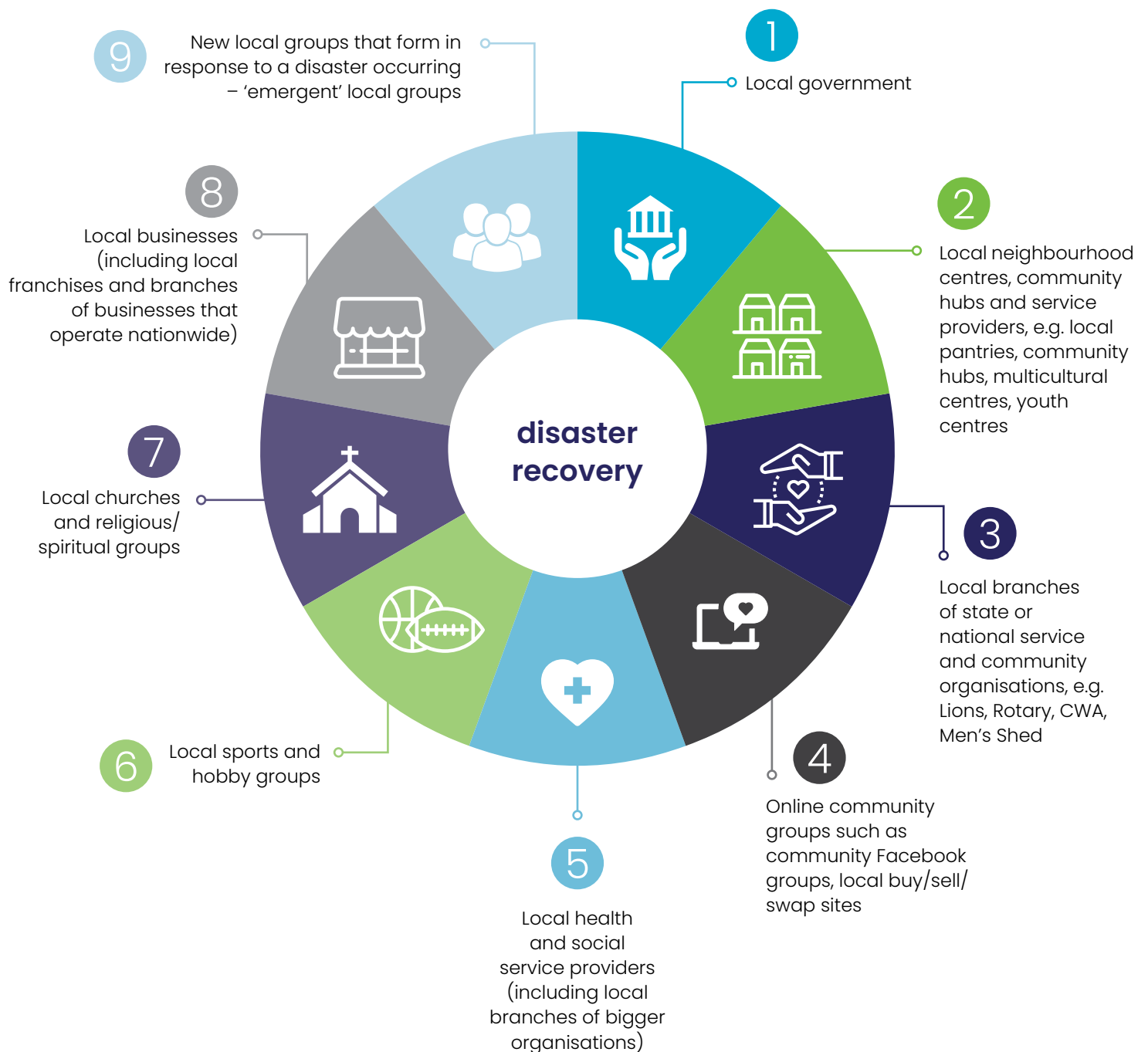
Common examples of non-local organisations involved in disaster recovery and resilience efforts



Local organisations, in contrast, are typically embedded in a community, have a range of relationships with specific groups of people in that community, and rely on local residents for their staff and volunteers. Some may be local branches of larger nationwide organisations (a local Men’s Shed, CWA branch, health service, Rotary, etc.), while others have no links to larger organisations.



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



After a disaster, it is common for specialist organisations such as government or non-government organisations to enter communities and provide critical time-limited disaster recovery support. These specialist organisations have to build relationships and trust quickly and often rely on local organisations to help them identify, contact and build relationships with local residents; to understand local needs and strengths; and to continue providing support when specialist organisations leave the community.

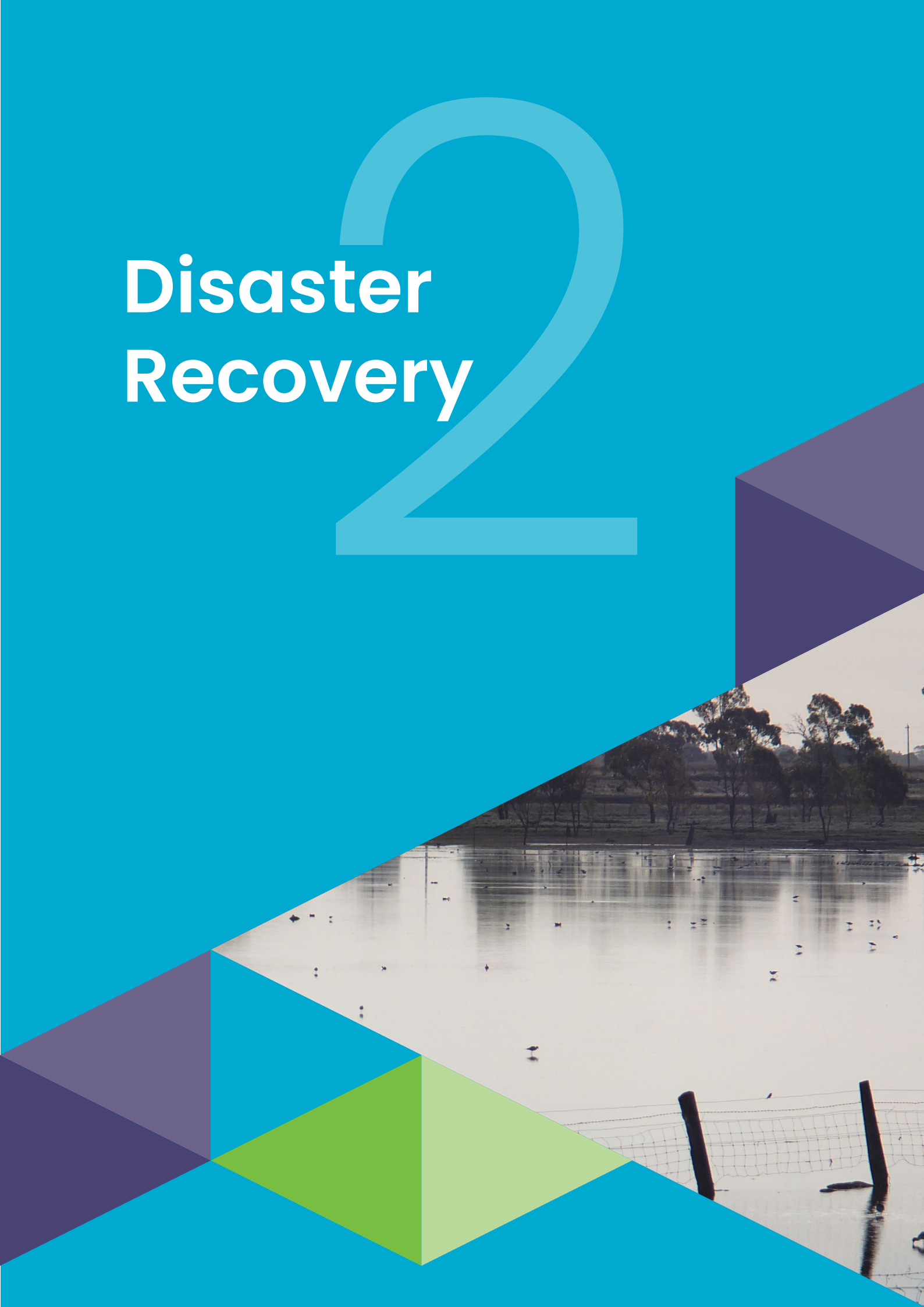
How to read this guide:

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.



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.

In successful community-led recovery, all organisations, local and non-local, work 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 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:

“...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)

The table on the next page summarises some of the key ingredients needed for community-led processes to succeed and provides examples of what it looks like when community-led processes work – and what it looks like when they don’t. The role of non-local organisations in enabling each ingredient is highlighted.

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

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?³

Ingredients needed for success	What does it look like when it works?	What can it look like when it goes wrong?	What can non-local organisations do to enable this?
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 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.	Critically evaluate whether those claiming to represent a community represent all groups within it. Provide resources to enable marginalised groups to participate in engagement and leadership, and to build capacity and skills. This might include providing funding to cover time taken away from paid work, support for transport, phone and internet costs, or access to specialist knowledge and training.
Skills and knowledge	Local people and organisations can contribute their skills to disaster recovery and resilience. They can 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.	Provide resources to enable disaster recovery specialists to invest time in supporting, advising and working with local people and organisations.

³ The examples are drawn from real world experiences provided by people involved in disaster recovery processes as part of the project used to develop this guide.

Support tailored to community needs	The community is enabled to articulate its needs. 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 unmet. This results in waste of some resources, community frustration, and slower recovery of wellbeing after disaster.	Consider what flexibility can be built into criteria related to eligibility for funding, services and supports, and how these are delivered; while ensuring appropriate governance and oversight of how funds and resources are utilised.
Financial and physical resources	Local organisations can access short- and long-term funding to deliver 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 have little or no additional funding to cover supports and services needed or lack the specific infrastructure or physical resources to make delivering them easier. Staff and volunteers experience fatigue and burnout, and there is a high turnover of staff. 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.	Explicitly design funding processes to enable local organisations to apply. This may involve simplifying and shortening application forms and content requirements. Consider making some funding available explicitly for small organisations to reduce the impacts of differences in grant application capability of smaller local organisations compared to larger organisations that may employ professional grant writers.

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

Local organisations have access to resources from 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 over-burdened, and recovery may slow. Conversely, 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.

Make it easy for local organisations to contact you and collaborate with you when you enter a community. Include local organisations in any disaster recovery committees or networks established post-disaster. When you ask local organisations to help you reach people in the community, do referrals, provide information, or help in other ways, make sure you help them get access to the additional resources they need to do these things.

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 community engagement processes cause fatigue amongst 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.

Build skills in a range of community consultation and engagement techniques, including techniques that can be implemented rapidly when fast action is needed. Develop clear policies regarding when it may be appropriate to implement supports without consultation or engagement to reduce negative impacts, and when consultation and engagement with local organisations is required.

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 helps build longer-term resilience to disasters.

It's easy to think of disasters as occurring in a series of distinct steps, like those shown on the next page. In this thinking, the time before disaster is when an organisation might invest in actions seeking to reduce the incidence of disaster and in planning and preparing for its role in disaster. When disaster occurs, the organisation shifts into enacting its disaster response. This is followed by supporting the community through the short, medium and long-term stages of disaster recovery.

In reality, disaster cycles are not linear. There aren't clear boundaries between disaster planning, response, and different stages of recovery. To make things even more complex, 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 occur 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 widely 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 the disaster cycle. There is no 'good time' to prepare for disaster recovery. Instead, at any point in disaster cycles, 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.

Pages [20 to 21](#) match stages of the disaster cycle to the types of activities you may want to focus on.

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

What is likely to be happening?

What can non-local organisations do to support and enable local organisations at this stage?



'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.

Support local organisations to build skills, knowledge and capacity through:

- Workshops, seminars, training, simulation activities
- Funding to invest in developing and maintaining networks and directories
- Support to develop local disaster plans.



Disaster response



Everyone is working to minimise damage to life, property and assets, and to keep people and animals safe. Communities 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.

- Contact local organisations to let them know you're in the community.
- Make small amounts of relatively untied funding available for local organisations to help them implement immediate activities.
- If you ask local organisations to help, make sure they have the resources to do so – and help them get the resources they need to deliver the roles you're asking them to do.



Early recovery



In high profile disasters, a lot of people want to help the affected communities. 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 local communities need. In contrast, if the disaster is not 'high profile', local communities may have little access to funding and resources from those outside their community. In either case, it's often hard for residents to know who's who, what's available, and how to access resources. Residents are in 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).

- If you ask local organisations to help you, ensure they have access to resources to support them in these activities.
- Talk to local organisations providing similar services and supports before you start on-ground work to make sure you are not duplicating efforts.
- Provide support and advice to local organisations.
- Ensure funding provided in early recovery stages is accessible and available for a suitable period of time – a common problem is funding having to be spent in unrealistically short timeframes.



Mid- to long-term recovery

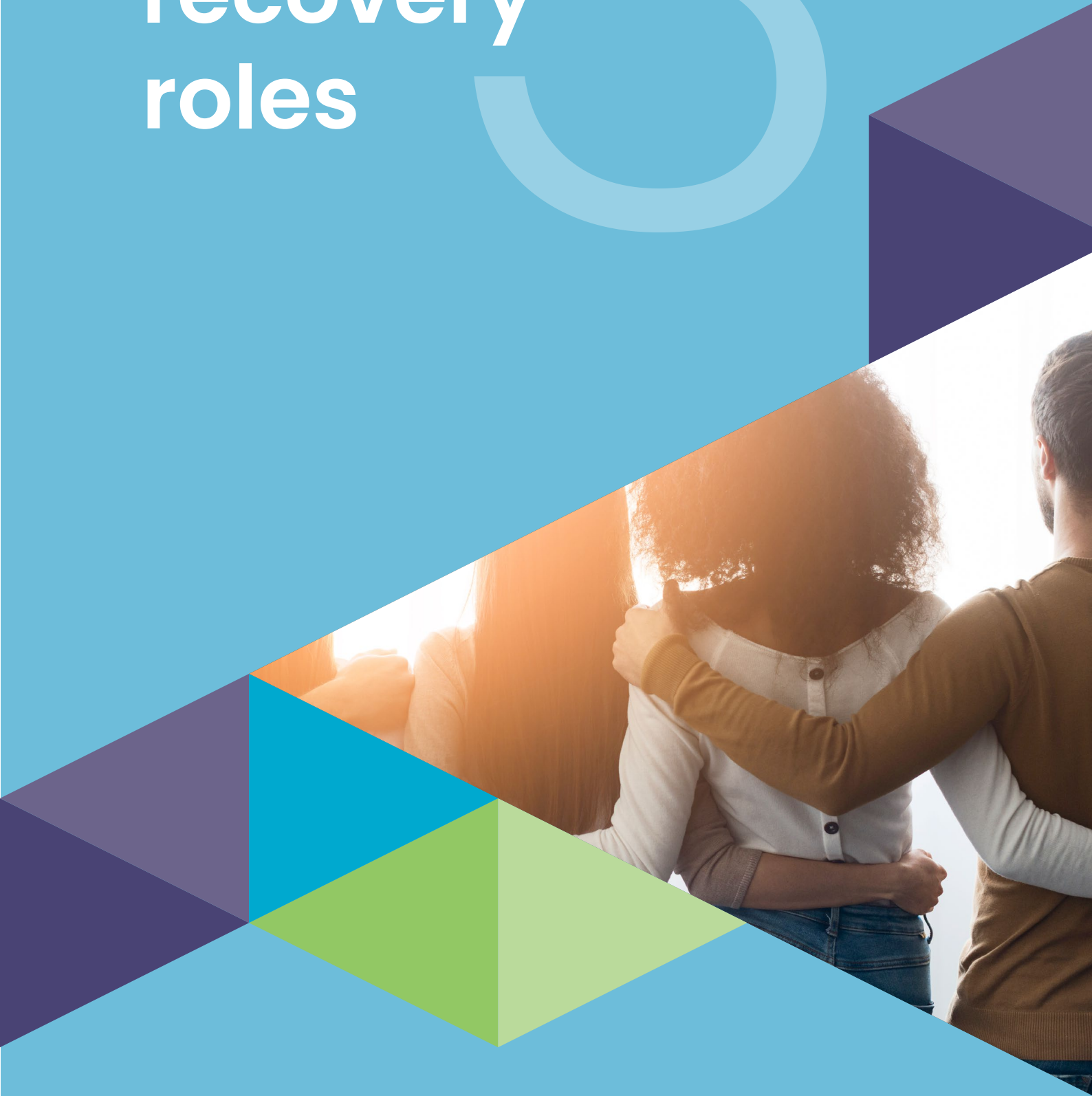
Mid-term: The initial shock has worn off. Many people have received basic supports to help them through the early stages, but it's still a long road to getting their home, work and lives to the place they'd like them to be. They are now starting to make sense of what has happened and face hard decisions about what to do next. The initial intense attention given to the community by others has died down, and communities may feel forgotten. While disaster recovery staff are often still available on the ground, as this stage progresses, many recovery services and supports will be withdrawn.

Long-term: 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.

- Prior to ceasing to provide services and supports in a community, make sure you invest in a handover process with local organisations who will be working to meet the needs you were previously supporting. Support them to access the resources they will need to do this – for example, assistance with grant writing, access to personnel, training and skills building.
- Make longer-term funding available that supports longer-term recovery needs. This prevents a 'sudden drop off' in which a community experiences withdrawal of supports while still experiencing ongoing impacts.
- Invest in debriefing with local organisations and documenting lessons learned for next time you enter the community

Disaster recovery roles

3



Disaster recovery roles: opportunities and challenges commonly experienced by local and non-local organisations

Sometimes organisations that enter communities after a disaster ask local organisations to help them with what seem to be small things. They're often unaware that they may be creating a significant burden for local organisations, particularly those that rely on a small number of staff and volunteers who also have other 'day jobs'.

It may seem easy to ask a local organisation if they can provide you with some contacts, make introductions, refer people in need to you, or accompany you on a visit to disaster-affected households or localities. In reality, these types of requests can be big asks of local organisations who aren't resourced to provide this assistance.

We're not suggesting you stop seeking help from local organisations. We encourage you to do more of it – the table on the next page helps you identify a wide range of possibilities. However, it's important to ensure it's not a one-way relationship where a local organisation provides help to larger organisations without getting anything in return.

There needs to be a genuine two-way partnership and collaboration. In other

words, as well as providing support to non-local organisations, local organisations need to receive support and resources from the non-locals asking them to do these things. This can take many forms, from formal funding to sharing staff and volunteers, shared delivery of services, or making infrastructure and practical resources available.

Collaboration and partnerships take planning and work. A good first step in planning is to identify how you are likely to ask local organisations to collaborate and work with you in disasters. For each of these, start planning how you can enable and build the capacity of those organisations as you work with them during disaster recovery.

Common roles of local organisations during and after disaster

Role	Are you likely to ask local organisations to work with you, or are they likely to seek approach you, for the following...
Referring	...referring people to appropriate services and supports, such as those your organisation provides.
Connecting	...helping your organisation identify and connect to local people who may benefit from your assistance.
Communicating with specific groups	...local organisations may have existing connections with specific groups of people you need to reach, particularly those who are at-risk, vulnerable, or 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', assess the impacts of the disaster on their community, and identify emerging needs.
Advocating	...advocating for the needs of people, environment, infrastructure.
Networking	...helping the different organisations involved in disaster recovery connect, communicate, and collaborate.
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. completing forms, assisting with appointments, language translation.
Distributing information	... distributing information, e.g. about types of support available, meeting places, locations people can go to seek support.
Meeting/gathering	...providing a meeting or gathering place for community members that you also use.
Psychosocial support	...providing psychosocial support, e.g. helping people manage daily tasks, make social connections, complete forms, undertake work or study, or participate in the community.
Case management	...acting as a case manager to support those impacted by disaster as they navigate accessing a range of supports and services.
Mental health support	...providing formal mental health support, e.g. counselling, crisis support, clinical supervision.
Education	...providing education, training, skills building.
Food preparation	...preparing meals.

Food and water distribution	...distributing food and water (e.g. a pantry service, distributing pre-prepared meals).
Accommodation	...providing or helping people find accommodation, ranging from rental homes to caravans and other temporary accommodation.
Distributing goods or financial assistance	...identifying what goods are needed, sourcing and distributing goods or financial assistance, e.g. clothing, household goods, vouchers, small grants.
Providing volunteers	...providing volunteers to help with rebuilding activities such as fencing, cleaning.
Wildlife care or animal welfare	...caring for wildlife and animals.
Natural resource management	...acting to help restore environmental health, including the health of the land, vegetation, waterways, and fauna.

For the roles you may ask local organisations to help with, which of the following resources or capacity building could help the local organisations in the role?

- Funding to cover staff time?
- Funding to cover operational costs such as transport, printing, web design, postage, cost of goods?
- Support with technical aspects such as IT systems?
- Training/skills building?
- Advice and support?
- Access to supports such as counselling, debriefing sessions, clinical supervision that you may be able to help provide?
- Others?

How could you help them access resources or build capacity?

Planning

4



Local and non-local organisations: planning to work together

When disasters occur, it is common for a large number of organisations to 'hit the ground' in disaster-affected communities.

Common challenges experienced by non-local organisations when trying to work effectively with local organisations in disaster recovery include:

- Local organisations often have limited funding, staff and volunteers
- Local organisations may have limited experience in disaster recovery and require support and mentoring
- Multiple organisations may claim to represent the local community
- Constraints on how funding can be used, particularly constraints that prevent non-local organisations from easily sharing funding with local organisations.

Plan to work with local organisations by investing time in the following:

- Identify and get to know local organisations you can partner and collaborate with
- Allocate resources to building capacity of staff and volunteers in local organisations
- Ensure your staff and volunteers are encouraged to work with local organisations

- Share resources with these local organisations, such as templates for referral and consent processes that will enable you and the local organisations to share information
- Share information about working with your organisation that can help the local organisation partner with you
- Include local organisations in funding applications, ensuring you can be active partners and collaborators.

Funders can plan to enable local organisations to access their funding through actions such as:

- Providing access to workshops and/or professional grant writers for those organisations who have limited experience in applying for disaster funding
- Requiring non-local organisations to partner with at least one local organisation when applying for funding, unless they can demonstrate there are no suitable local organisations to partner with
- Ensuring funding and reporting application processes are designed to be easy for small organisations.



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. Local leaders talked about the benefits of having access to specialist expertise to guide their work supporting 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.

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 help apply that knowledge to best help the local community. Local organisations build skills in disaster recovery and rebuilding by 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 reduces 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 their work 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 what works best in disaster recovery and rebuilding. This results in poorly targeted support that doesn't meet local needs, e.g. funding, programs, 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 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 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

5 Networks and coordination



Cross-organisation networks: making sure they include local organisations

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 typically involve multiple organisations (local, non-local, government, NGOs, and others). Achieving good outcomes often hinges on whether these organisations can 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.

Being able to tap into a network of local organisations established before disaster can help non-local organisations who are entering communities to support them after disasters. However, this type of network often doesn't exist. You can help support development of local networks by inviting local organisations to be part of any cross-organisational committees or networks that are established by specialist disaster recovery organisations to help with disaster recovery activities.

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 deliver services more effectively. It reduced duplication of activities and wastage of resources and enabled more rapid action. However, often networks only formed after disaster and took some time to achieve effective coordination. 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 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 exclude some local organisations providing important services and support. Including all organisations, particularly smaller local organisations providing support to those impacted by disaster as part of their everyday work, can increase the effectiveness of networks.



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.

Communicating with a single voice

A common challenge during and after disaster is a lack of consistent communication about what's happening. All too 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. However, local organisations aren't always included when distributing information, or organising access to the most up to date information. Ensure you support sharing of information with local organisations, many of whom are regularly asked for information by local residents, but who may not have easy access to the information that larger organisations have at hand. Involve local organisations when establishing 'single point of truth' sources that all agree to use.

If you develop a Disaster Dashboard or similar source of information, ensure it can be contributed to, and accessed, by local organisations.

Local organisations may also find themselves dealing with a high volume of media enquiries, while having limited training and expertise in managing these. Building networks that include local organisations can enable you to support these organisations as they engage with the media, and developed shared communication approaches."

Directories and mapping 'who's who' in disaster recovery

A common challenge in disaster recovery is figuring out which organisations provide what services and supports and what individuals are currently responsible for different roles.

Many local people will start by approaching the local organisations they have existing relationships with, rather than unfamiliar organisations that have come into their community since disaster. Local organisations often spend a lot of time figuring out who they should refer residents to for support and services.

Non-local organisations can reduce the confusion and complexity involved in this by:

- Actively contacting local organisations to let them know who they can contact, what services and supports are being provided, and for how long.
- Ensuring their organisation's details are included in existing publicly available directories.
- Providing resources to help develop and regularly update a directory of contacts that includes all the local and non-local organisations providing disaster recovery supports and services.
- Providing resources to make this directory easily available to residents.
- Supporting the establishment of a central contact point residents can go to – including a phone number, email, and central office – which is staffed by people who are resourced to help ensure residents are assisted in finding the right organisations and making contact with them.

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. 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.

Referrals and information sharing

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 had experienced in a disaster to multiple organisations, has potential to re-traumatise those impacted by disasters.

Community members and those involved in disaster relief and recovery told us that these challenges often led people to give up trying to get assistance. Clear referral processes and pathways are important in reducing the burden on people seeking support.

The process of accessing support 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 trying to access services and

support after disaster. A warm referral 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 organisations to:



1 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.



2 Have a regularly updated directory of organisations and people, with information about their roles, available for all staff and volunteers (see previous section).



3 Have policies and procedures in place that enable the 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. While this can be frustrating, restrictions on sharing information exist to protect privacy and confidentiality. Organisations must have sound processes for obtaining consent prior to the sharing of personal information. Non-local organisations can help support local organisations by working with them to develop agreed processes for sharing information and for ensuring informed consent is given by residents for that information sharing. The partner guide to this one discusses this in more detail.



Supporting staff and volunteers





Supporting staff and volunteers

Working and volunteering for organisations that are part of disaster response and recovery is often stressful and can have a high risk of burnout if not managed well. While many larger organisations have supports in place to help staff, such as employee assistance programs, access to counselling, and clinical supervision, many small local organisations do not have these. As a result, these local organisations are at higher risk of issues such as burnout and fatigue (see the partner guide to this one for more information).

Funders and other organisations can help local organisations to support the wellbeing of staff and volunteers during disaster recovery by:



- 1 Ensuring that funding can support longer, rather than shorter, staff contracts. It is common for disaster recovery funding to enable staff to be appointed for periods of only a few months and for positions to cease just as staff have built the type of local knowledge and relationships needed to make real headway.



- 2 Encouraging – or in some cases potentially making it mandatory – for local organisations to apply for funding for personnel supports such as clinical supervision, access to counselling, debriefing sessions, or sessions with peer support networks. This requires ensuring available funding is sufficient to provide for these types of supports.



- 3 Providing information that helps local organisations identify and access these types of supports.



- 4 Making training, counselling, and other services your organisation uses to support its staff and volunteers available to local organisations you partner with.

Resources



Financial resources

After a disaster, funding is often made available by governments, NGOs and philanthropic organisations through grant rounds in which organisations have to apply for funding. It is 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.

Critical to enabling genuine community-led recovery is ensuring that community-based organisations have a 'level playing field' with larger organisations. Nowhere is this more important than in the distribution of typically limited funding grants. In many cases, local organisations are at a disadvantage when applying for funding due to their small size, which reduces their ability to hire professional grant writers or invest dedicated staff time to identify and submit applications to multiple potential funders and grant rounds.

Funders can help ensure local organisations can access the resources they need to support community-led recovery in several ways. These include:

1 Making support available to smaller local organisations to help them apply for funding. This might include running workshops or having a grant writer to review and provide feedback on draft applications.

2 Having a dedicated funding stream that provides support to local organisations.

3 Ensuring grant application processes are as simple as possible to complete. This might include having an expression of interest process that narrows down the field of applicants based on an initial 2-3 page application before asking only those with a high chance of success to submit a full application.

4 Ensuring reporting requirements for funding recipients are not overly onerous and providing guidance to assist often inexperienced local organisations to report on how funding was used and distributed. Providing reporting templates that can be easily completed and guidance on how to complete them can be a big help for smaller and less experienced organisations.

5 Providing longer-term funding that can support longer-term disaster recovery operations.

6 Providing funding to develop disaster plans and preparation, to support development and coordination of networks, and to create and regularly update directories of contacts.

7 Requiring non-local organisations to partner with local organisations when applying for any funding intended for community-led recovery, ensuring that resources reach local as well as non-local organisations.

8 Making small amounts of relatively untied funding available for local organisations to help them implement immediate activities, particularly in the early stages of disaster recovery.

9 Building flexibility into how funding can be used and the period of time it can be used for. This can enable the funding to be better directed to support local needs and extension of time to use funding if there are difficulties distributing it within the initial intended timeframe.

10 Providing resources to local organisations that help them establish appropriate governance, oversight and reporting processes and meet grant governance requirements.

Practical resources

Many local organisations rapidly expand their operations during and after a disaster. Often this requires additional resources such as transportation, meeting rooms, storage spaces, or telecommunications and IT infrastructure. You can support local organisations by providing opportunities to share resources, ensuring that resources non-local organisations access in the community are also available for relevant local organisations to use, and ensuring funding processes can help cover the costs of applying for permits or approvals needed to use new spaces or infrastructure.

Common challenges small organisations experience, and strategies funders can use to minimise these, are described below.

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 an 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



Enabling local organisations

Government agencies and large NGOs may control access to resources and have expertise not available to many local organisations. This can result in a power imbalance between local and non-local organisations.

It's important for all types of non-local organisations – funders, government agencies, NGOs, charities and philanthropic organisations – to consciously enable local organisations to say 'no' when appropriate and to provide the resources they need to be able to say 'yes' to involvement in disaster recovery activities.

Enabling local organisations to say no

Local organisations should be enabled to say 'no' to:

- Disaster recovery roles they aren't well suited to do
- Funding that comes with so many obligations or requirements for matching in-kind input that it is more hassle than it's worth
- Well-meaning donations that don't help (and that may clog up storage spaces and take a lot of staff and volunteer time to sort through).

Enable local organisations to say no by:

- Asking them what resources they need to be able to take on a role
- Tailoring funding requirements so they are not overly onerous for small organisations, for example, by providing easy to complete templates that can be used to report on funding outcomes
- Asking what is needed before making donations – and listening to the response.

Enabling local organisations to say yes

Enable local organisations to say yes to involvement in disaster recovery by

- Ensuring that when local organisations are asked to get involved, that involvement is supported through appropriate resourcing
- Providing access to disaster recovery experts and specialists to assist local organisations in training staff, planning and implementing disaster recovery activities
- Being aware of the constraints local organisations are operating under and ensuring funding processes, collaborations and partnerships are tailored to their existing capacity, and where possible, provide opportunities to build that capacity.

Resources and reports you can access from this project

This 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 and four reports 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. All reports and resources available from the project are listed below.

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.

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Planning and preparing for community-led disaster recovery

**A guide for those seeking to enable
and support local organisations in
disaster recovery**