

05

DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT



**Council business matters:
managing the challenges
of disaster recovery**



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DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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

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

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

Cover Image: View of Marysville township. Photographer Silvi Glattauer.

Above Image: Victorian SES attending a damaged house.

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

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 - Wellington Shire Council
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 - Mt Alexander Shire Council
 - Murrindindi Shire Council
 - Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	04
COORDINATION OF COUNCIL BUSINESS AND DISASTER RECOVERY	05
IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL BUSINESS CONTINUITY	06
IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT	10
IMPLICATIONS FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	29
LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE	32
NEXT STEPS	34



INTRODUCTION

Disaster recovery is not simply another council function carried out by specialised council officers. When a disaster strikes, particularly high impact and widespread ones, the recovery effort is likely to affect the entire organisation.

In the case of a major disaster, providing emergency relief services and planning and implementing recovery actions for affected communities can place a major strain on council staff and resources. Many council staff and a great deal of council resources will be directed towards restoring communities, engaging with communities, coordinating activities across agencies and coping with increased demand for services such as the impact of waste and debris on tips, removing fallen or dangerous trees from roadsides, or repairing damaged roads and bridges. This pressure is exacerbated where council infrastructure and operations are disrupted by the same event, for example where council's buildings, facilities or staff are directly affected. While this is happening people in unaffected areas of the municipality will still be expecting the usual council services.

As part of a general approach to risk management, councils develop contingencies to keep council operating during disruptions to their business (business continuity) and plan for fluctuations in demand on their workforce and other resources. This planning is usually focused on short term matters such as, responding if the computer system fails and data is lost or if there is a loss of electricity or water supply for a few days.

To the extent foreseeable the likely disruptions to council business and the strategies to minimise them will be developed in council's Business Continuity Plan and included in other council plans and strategies such as, the Human Resources Plan, Asset and Resource Management Strategy and in standard operating procedures.

The *Australian and New Zealand Standard for Business Continuity* – managing disruption-related risk AS NZS 5050-2010, uses the key concept of 'business impact assessment' to promote a comprehensive approach to business continuity planning.

Note:

Risk management and business continuity software is also available to provide structured processes and resources to assist in the development of plans if council does not already have a format to present such information. Information on such software can be obtained from organisations such as *The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority*.

By contrast recovery following a major disaster can be felt by the organisation for months and years with major impacts on the workforce and on other resources.

Consequently, just as council will need to prepare for and respond to post-disaster community recovery, so too it will need to prepare for and respond to the extreme demands on the organisation – its workforce, budget and other resources arising from its recovery role.

This booklet is designed to go beyond 'business as usual' business continuity, workforce planning and resource management to address the implications for council during periods of disaster recovery.

COORDINATION OF COUNCIL BUSINESS AND DISASTER RECOVERY

Before a disaster, the roles and functions of council operate in a 'business as usual' environment. Following a disaster, council will be operating in an emergency and recovery environment and many roles and functions will need to change or be catered for in a different way.

Council will need to consider how it maintains its critical services at the same time as it coordinates and delivers community recovery activities and manages the impact of the disaster on the organisation.

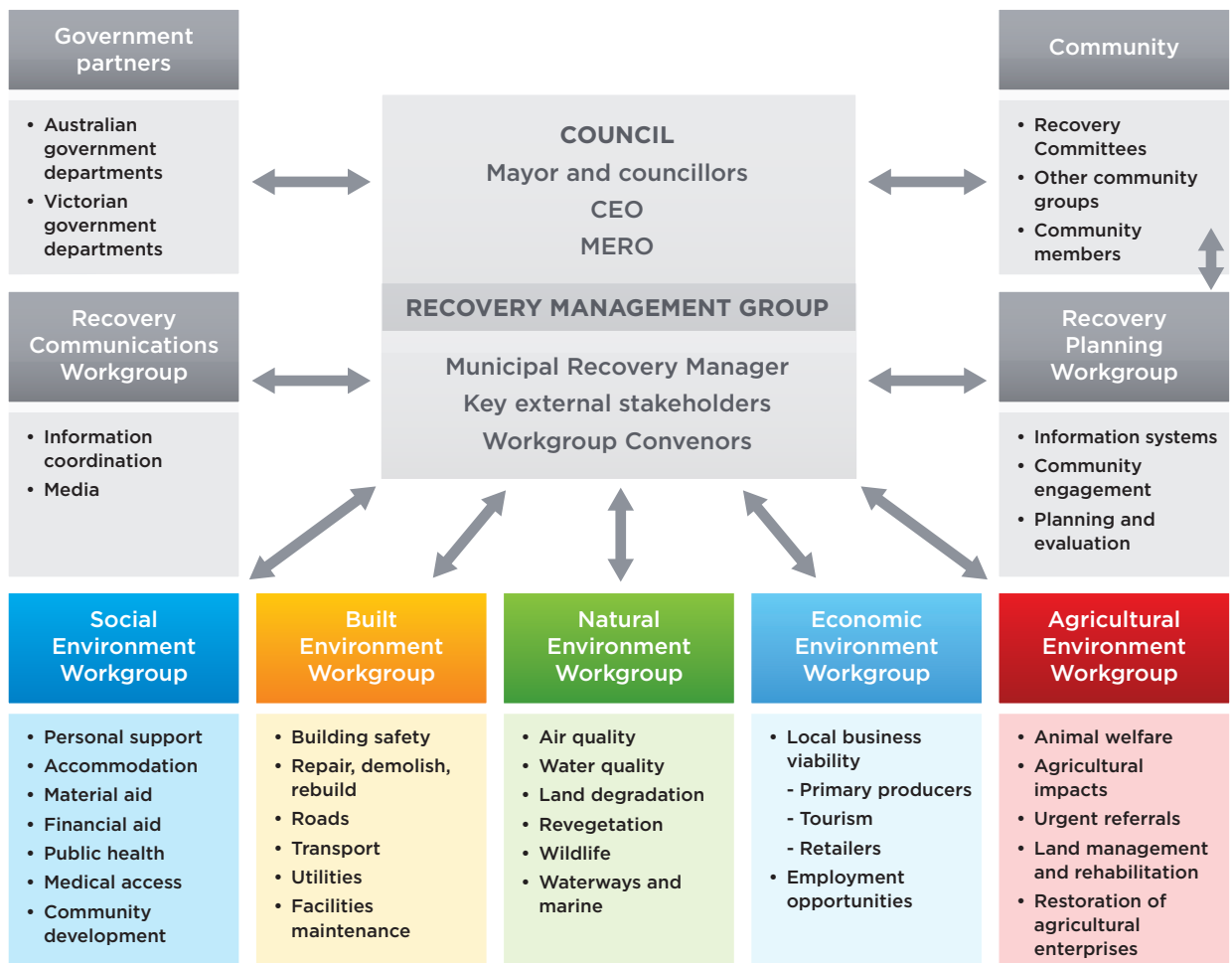
Once the disaster has occurred and the scale and impact is known it will be important to activate the recovery on two fronts: the community recovery

(coordinated through the Recovery Management Group) and the management of council resources (which is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer and executive management group).

Given the effectiveness of community recovery will depend heavily on council's ability to manage its own human and other resources effectively, strong collaboration between the community focused mechanism and the internal council business mechanism is critical.

The recovery management structure below, details the interface between the community recovery response and the recovery management of internal council business.

FIGURE 1: RECOVERY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL BUSINESS CONTINUITY

TIP

In large scale disasters, nominate a manager responsible for coordinating internal council recovery business to assess and manage the impact of the disaster on affected business units, and to liaise with the Recovery Management Group.

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL - INTERNAL RECOVERY WORKING PARTY

A Council Recovery Working Party was established by Nillumbik Shire Council following 2009 Black Saturday to focus on the impact the disaster had on council as an organisation. The Working Party met regularly for about five years and included representatives from all council divisions who worked together to develop and implement cross divisional business improvement strategies.

Following a disaster there will be a need to maintain essential council functions and continue to provide the functions and services required by communities not affected by the event.

At the same time some council functions might be ceased temporarily or be modified to enable the redeployment of some staff and resources into disaster recovery roles.

The action that needs to be taken will be better understood once the consequences of the disaster are assessed and the impact on the council organisation is known. Nevertheless, planning for the likely impact on council can occur before the disaster event.

PRE-DISASTER

In the event of a disaster, opportunities might exist to ease or modify performance standards to release some staff for recovery related roles. An assessment of functions before a disaster might be useful to:

- identify potential staff for redeployment
- undertake professional development and training
- trial how proposed changes in work practice might impact staff and the community. (See examples to the right).

TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF OPTIONS

COUNCIL FUNCTION OR PERFORMANCE STANDARD	OPTIONS
Planning applications processed in 8 weeks	Temporarily extend guaranteed planning applications processing time to 12 weeks for applications outside the disaster affected area
Repairing reported potholes within 3 days	Extend timeframe temporarily
Library services in non-affected areas, operated 5.5 days per week	Temporarily reduce opening hours or the number of open days
General professional services such as environment health, planning, corporate services	Temporarily replace staff with a locum, contractor or staff from another council. Financial considerations and access to different types of funding might influence the employment method chosen
Green waste rubbish collection in non-affected areas	Temporarily reduce from fortnightly to monthly
Administrative reporting that is discretionary or able to be negotiated	Defer. There might be scope to negotiate relaxation or deferment of some statutory reporting requirements
Services in the disaster affected areas that might be replaced by temporary services being delivered, for example some 'meals on wheels' recipients might not require meals as they might be in recovery centres or staying out of the area	Reduce, refocus or reallocate - based on need Services might still need to go with the recipient resulting in additional resource implications

A LESSON FROM CENTRELINK

Following Black Saturday in Victoria in 2009, Centrelink stopped 180,000 debt recovery letters in the fire area over a five month period. This freed up 330 staff that were then deployed into the recovery effort and enabled two new recovery related initiatives to be provided with these staff. Letters were ultimately sent and debts followed up so it did not affect Centrelink's income - the main impact was on the agency's cash flow and dealing with later workloads.

Disaster recovery planning also involves assessing council functions and determining which ones can be modified to release staff and resources and which ones might need additional staff and resource allocations.

Questions to assist the staff and resource assessment of council functions include:

- ***Will the council function be directly involved in immediate community recovery?***
- ***Is this council function essential to other key activities of daily life?***
- ***Would there be an outcry from the community if the council function was suspended in the short term?***
- ***Would suspension impact on the essential services of other organisations and stakeholders?***
- ***Are there other council business units 'work arounds' that would release resources for use on recovery activities?***

Based on council's assessment following a disaster, functions can be identified that must be maintained as essential, or might be reduced or suspended.

TIPS

Conduct an assessment of council functions - to identify those business areas likely to experience increased or reduced demand.

Identify positions that might be redeployed to recovery functions.

For each council business unit, undertake an assessment to check the impact on the organisation of reduced staff numbers due to redeployment to recovery functions.

YARRA RANGES SHIRE COUNCIL - COPING WITH INCREASED DEMANDS ON STAFF AND RESOURCES

Managing business continuity, responding to the immediate crisis and then meeting the ongoing demands of community recovery placed enormous stress on the resources of every department in the organisation. It was difficult to manage normal business and continue to meet the needs of the communities, which were not affected by the bushfires, at the same time as coping with the intensity and immediacy of managing the relief and recovery process. Staff were willing to volunteer to work on recovery, but this then left gaps in resourcing normal work. This was particularly difficult in the early stages, where managers moved off-line to establish response, relief and recovery processes.

Developing Business Continuity Plans was viewed as one of the most critical pieces of planning work to be undertaken by all departments. Closely linked to this was the availability of resources to back-fill positions in order to enable staff to focus on the recovery process and to ensure that there was minimal impact on normal work.

Managers were initially reluctant to bring in additional staff, as they were uncertain as to whether they would be able to manage their budgets.

"In hindsight, I'd just go ahead and backfill the positions and argue for the funds later. It was all about supporting the community - we weren't being reckless." (Council officer)

Importantly, staff stressed the importance of acknowledging that, as the recovery process continued and this work became absorbed into day-to-day activity, additional resources were still required.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF BUSINESS CONTINUITY:

- Provision of sufficient resources to continue with normal business and manage the recovery effort simultaneously;
- Availability of skilled staff to undertake the recovery work at the same time as having skilled staff to continue to manage day-to-day business;
- Establishing databases, forms and other administrative tools that can be immediately put into action when required;
- Using senior managers and directors to lead the recovery process as well as ensuring that there is adequate leadership and direction for business continuity. This might mean acknowledging early in the process that the scale is such that managers need to be taken off-line to manage the recovery process; and
- All staff have personal needs and reactions to trauma, regardless of whether they are working directly in the recovery process or managing normal business. This is especially the case in Yarra Ranges where almost 80 per cent of staff live in the municipality.

Adapted from Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Recovery Response to the February 2009 Bushfires Evaluation Report June 2012

POST-DISASTER

When a disaster strikes it might be necessary to reconfigure council business to respond to surges in demand or to release staff for redeployment to recovery tasks.

Post-disaster the staff and resource assessment of council functions undertaken before the event will provide useful insight into areas where changes to council services might be possible or required.

Review the staff and resource assessment of council functions undertaken before the event and make staff and resource deployment decisions in light of the specific details of the disaster, as follows:

- ***Will the council function be directly involved in immediate community recovery?***

Some essential functions might experience increased demand in a disaster recovery context – for example, current child care services might be expanded in and around recovery centres and affected communities to enable parents to focus on key recovery tasks such as accessing Centrelink support, contacting family, arranging accommodation, dealing with insurance issues, and so on.

- ***Is this council function essential to other key activities of daily life?***

There will be some functions that on face value might not appear essential, however in a disaster recovery context they might become more important – for example, the toy library might not be regarded as an essential service but if toy libraries are part of re-establishing play and normality for children in the affected community, it might even be temporarily expanded.

- ***Would there be an outcry from the community if the council function was suspended in the short term?***

Post-disaster, the community might perceive any reductions in services, such as closing the library, as ‘a sign of council disinterest in their plight’.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

- ***Would suspension impact on the essential services of other organisations and stakeholders?***

The array of other service providers means there is potential for agencies to operate at cross-purposes. For example, temporary scaling back of a function such as 'Home and Community Care' might create increased demand and other consequences for community organisations and support services.

- ***Are there other council business units 'work arounds' that would release resources for use on recovery activities?***

Council functions like parking infringements and local laws compliance might be reduced or temporarily suspended to free up staff for recovery functions. Some of this thinking might have been done pre-disaster through the function assessment.

TIPS

Review council functions – to identify those business areas likely to experience increased or reduced demand and clarify positions that might be redeployed to recovery functions.

Remember to involve and engage with the community and seek their comments and validation of the judgements you have made in your assessment of council functions.

Importantly, this engagement process will help the community to better appreciate the demands and priorities facing council during the recovery period.

The consequences of a disaster can affect every member of staff – and councillors. Some will be emergency management staff directly involved in the recovery effort; others will be redeployed into new roles with new responsibilities; executive managers, councillors and supervisors will face leadership and management challenges – including duty of care for staff; and many staff will feel the impact of the organisation's resources being stretched.

PRE-DISASTER

Once disaster strikes time constraints and workload pressures will limit the ability for council to undertake significant policy development, training and capacity building within the organisation. There are however, several areas where council can predict workforce impacts following a disaster and undertake the necessary planning and preparation beforehand.

BUILD THE CAPACITY OF COUNCIL STAFF TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY RECOVERY

Since recovery might affect the entire organisation, it is necessary to build resilience, flexibility and a good skills mix into as many council roles as possible. Rather than simply seeing recovery as 'someone else's job' or the area that 'emergency management' look after, it is preferable that each council staff member understands that they contribute in some way to the recovery response.

TIP

Include disaster recovery functions in all affected position descriptions in council – not just designated recovery roles.

This can be achieved pre-disaster by ensuring that all staff are clear about their roles (whether they be designated recovery roles or ancillary roles) and are equipped with adequate skills, knowledge and resources. Any awareness and knowledge conveyed pre-disaster provides a useful skills base that can increase council's ability to respond effectively should a disaster occur.

Effectively matching the skills of staff to specific recovery roles can assist in managing a potentially long term and stressful situation.

Staff will have increased confidence in roles in which they have greatest competence. Damaging stress can occur when staff are engaged in roles for which they are unprepared or have insufficient resources or support.

An annual emergency management and recovery awareness program for all staff can build understanding of the likely impact of disaster recovery on council functions and can contribute to a culture that recognises community recovery as an important council role. In addition to reinforcing the valuable contribution of staff in designated recovery roles, it also provides an opportunity to recognise the critical contribution of staff in ancillary roles who continue to respond to community needs and provide council's 'business as usual' services.

More targeted skill development can be developed for each business unit, focusing on specific functions and how they will need to interact with community members affected by disaster. For example, taking into account what land use planners might expect from people applying to rebuild (where building regulations might prevent people rebuilding their house in the same place or in the same way), or taking into account what customer services might expect from distraught people seeking a range of information.

An assessment of council functions can identify staff who might be redeployed to post-disaster roles. Their existing skills and expertise can be matched to the redeployed roles and skill development put in place to prepare them for these future recovery roles. For example, leisure services staff might be redeployed to Emergency Relief Centres which are located in leisure centres.

TIPS

Develop a council staff capacity building program, including induction for all council officers.

Include staff education on the likely changes in the needs, expectations and behaviour of community members as they recover from a disaster, as part of an ongoing organisational development program.

Include clear role definition and the decision-making parameters for each role, including dealing with exceptional circumstances.

Undertake a skills audit of staff to determine existing skills and experience that will support recovery actions. Some of these might not be evident in current roles.

Establish a process for recruiting, inducting and managing staff who volunteer or are redeployed to disaster recovery. This could be established as a function of council's human resources department.

Think about how skills used in current roles can be applied in redeployment situations, for example, a customer service staff member in the rates collection area might have the 'good people skills' required in a recovery centre or a dedicated community liaison role in their own section, which might see considerable demand after an emergency.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL - PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF CENTRE STAFF

A diversity of people can attend an Emergency Relief Centre, some traumatised, anxious or with challenging behaviours.

Following several incidents, Emergency Relief Centre staff felt they required training to help them identify and deal with people with challenging issues. As a result, 25 Wellington Shire Council Emergency Relief Centre staff will undergo Mental Health First Aid training.

Skills gaps can be augmented following a disaster using '*rapid induction*' and '*quick skilling*' activity when the specifics of the event and the recovery needs are better understood. To deliver such training it is important to have training providers and training arrangements worked out.

TIP

Develop a directory and list of recovery terms to be available to use in briefings and induction processes.

RAPID INDUCTION

Lawyers did it well in Black Saturday in Victoria - a Network of Victorian lawyers sent out teams of pro-bono lawyers to recovery centres with mentors available on the phone. Teams had a rapid 'sheep dip' induction by a professional psychologist who specialises in disaster recovery (Dr Rob Gordon) on what to expect when they arrived; the states of mind that people in the community might present with; and how to appropriately respond in this environment. A similar rapid induction was also provided by the coroner.

These lawyers provided advice on specific legal situations such as:

- Dealing with equipment of a major contractor on your property and/or half finished work where the contractor died in the fire
- House being built and at the framed up stage with builder's vehicle, tools and materials on site when all damaged by fire - who owns and insures/claims what?
- Local shop damaged and owner indisposed - suppliers not paid and stopping further deliveries resulting in no local fresh food - situation regarding consignment of goods, contract transfers to other sites
- Family of parents and children - died in the fire - need to understand a complex hierarchy of probate within blended family circumstances

Providing this rapid induction and support to prepare lawyers was necessary for this environment which was different to the normal client interaction. Information included - the importance of active listening, repeating key points and taking time - rather than the normal quick timed lawyer's office discussion with a pen, paper and lots of questions.

USE STAFF FROM OTHER COUNCILS TO COVER KEY POSITIONS

Some essential business functions of council might require specialist expertise or operational knowledge, such as the manager of the sewerage treatment plant or the coordinator of Meals on Wheels. Thought is required on how these functions will be maintained in the event that key people are not available for whatever reason. Planning should consider identification and training of likely deputies or fill-in's for these roles.

Alternatively, arrangements might be put in place to borrow replacement staff with the necessary expertise from neighbouring or 'buddy' councils. In a recovery situation support from other councils is likely to come from those not affected by the disaster. This might mean working with neighbouring councils or councils from further afield with different approaches to council business. Using common language, terminology, practices and documentation makes it much easier for both council staff and the visiting staff.

It is essential to have arrangements in place to induct and manage staff from other councils. These should include arrangements for accommodation, transport, reporting, authorisations, duty times, mentoring and support, buddy systems, pay, briefing, debriefing, and so on.

Council should be conscious that some staff might not want others to come into 'their' workplace and get involved in 'their' disaster. This is because the tendency for individuals affected by disaster to personalise their interactions can also apply to staff. This can encourage workplace parochialism that pushes back assistance from other councils and organisations offering support. The more staff are familiar with those who come into the workplace the less severe this reaction is likely to be.

This is also less likely to be a problem when staff appreciate their own reactions and the value to the community of the extra assistance.

TIPS

Consider which roles require local knowledge or skills and which roles can be filled by visiting staff.

Consider whether there is a need for local authorisation for specialist roles such as environmental health officers or local laws officers.

Consider whether external personnel can go into frontline disaster services or back-fill local staff redeployed to recovery activities. (Check emergency grant funding arrangements as the way you construct and allocate positions can determine if they are eligible for funding or not).

Work with Regional Recovery Networks, Regional Recovery Committees and other emergency management structures to discuss develop cooperatives arrangements, and adopt common language and practices.

Foster relationships before a disaster between council staff and those from other councils who might end up working together, for example through joint training or less formal 'getting to know each other' events.

PRACTICE AND EXERCISE RECOVERY

Planning and classroom type training can be quite theoretical – increasing knowledge but not necessarily providing practical experience. Conducting specific recovery activities or council functions under a recovery scenario can bring the theory to life and assist with creating a much more practical understanding of what is likely to be confronted in a real-life recovery situation.

Regular emergency management exercises improve readiness and can be extended to test council's involvement in community recovery and subsequent impacts on council business. Exercises can include council activities for individual business units, the whole organisation and with partners. Other initiatives might be arranged across municipal boundaries – which will often be organised through the regional recovery network.

An effective method of exercising is using a 'moments in time' hypothetical approach. This involves desktop exercising and discussion of the recovery issues at different times, for example, at 'week one', 'week three', 'week six' and so on.

Every three to five years, consider conducting a major emergency management exercise which tests both municipal recovery arrangements and council's business continuity arrangements.

TIP

Develop joint exercises with other councils and recovery partners to practice how you will work together in disaster recovery, including operating across municipal boundaries.

This will also provide an opportunity for staff who might come to work with your council to get to know each other.

DEVELOP POLICIES TO SUPPORT STAFF

Active involvement in disaster recovery can be taxing and demanding on council personnel. Some staff might be directly impacted by the emergency, while others might be caught up in the urgency of the recovery process. The imperatives for council are to get the work done to support community recovery but also to make sure staff are looked after both during the recovery and when it comes to an end.

The experience of a disaster and the recovery effort can take a toll on staff and increase the rate of turnover – particularly if disaster recovery is not managed well. This is clearly a poor outcome for staff. For council the loss of staff results not only in costly recruitment exercise; it also means loss of knowledge, information, skills, community connection and corporate memory.

Policies and practices that add to the supportiveness of the work environment are more likely to encourage staff to stay with the organisation. Key policy areas for focus are how staff are deployed; the length of shifts; how they are supported following a shift and how they are encouraged to rest outside work hours.

Deployment policies

Staff deployed into the community need to be as prepared as possible for what they will encounter.

This includes potentially upset or confused members of the community who might have unreasonable expectations of what staff can do for them.

One approach that has worked well involves deployment of staff members in pairs or small groups. This promotes a wider mix of skills in outreach teams and enables better matching of individual staff members to specific tasks. It also builds in an immediate peer support and developmental structure for individual staff members and strengthens relationships with community members through better sharing between the pair or among the group.

TIP

Develop deployment policies to apply in disaster recovery situations, including arrangements such as pairing staff or skill mix groups.

Ensure staff are provided with a short brief (five minutes) before going into the field, including:

- where they are going
- what they will find there
- what their job and role will be
- how their role intersects with other roles
- the limits of their responsibility
- who they are accountable to
- what they can decide and what is outside their role
- who they report to in the field – and back at the office if applicable
- where they get advice or decisions
- what the arrangements are for the end of their shift.

THE CITY OF WHITTLESEA - STAFF HEALTH AND SAFETY

About a week after Black Saturday, when council staff were allowed access to the affected area to complete the field based impact assessments, the environmental health officers and other staff concerned were provided with health and safety inductions by council's occupational health and safety staff. They were issued with protective clothing and equipment – boots, overall, safety hats and so on; and details were provided about council's contracted Employee Assistance Program which provides psychological support if required.

After the first couple of days, council arranged for a psychologist to speak with the officers doing the field impact assessments to check on their health and wellbeing and arrange follow-up and appropriate responses accordingly.

There were some officers who requested not to be further involved in this work and arrangements were made to move these staff to alternative roles and reallocate other staff to the impact assessment tasks. Ongoing support continues to be available for all staff through the Employee Assistance Program.

Shift policies

The demands of disaster recovery will be extensive and many staff members will want to work longer shifts to meet these demands. The high energy associated with disasters will mean some staff will simply lose track of time; they will have little regard for their own wellbeing; and some will be reluctant to take a break or hand over to the next shift. This is because the normal feedback systems that enable a person to recognise when they are tired or reaching their limits can fail. Clear shift policies that are well established and sensitively enforced will help people to protect themselves against becoming overwhelmed by their work.

Sometimes workplaces plan for 12 hour shifts during emergencies. While this might solve immediate staffing problems, it will quickly lead to poor performance and decision making and is highly likely to damage staff involved – especially if they are inexperienced or unaccustomed to their role. Long shifts on a frequent basis do not necessarily serve the staff member or the community well.

Experience suggests that, for ongoing emergency management roles, it is better to plan for six hour shifts. This allows for briefings and handover at the beginning and end of shifts, enables 24 hour coverage, and allows staff sufficient time to return home and rest.

For some tasks such as disaster impact assessment where there has been significant loss of life and property, the realistic and appropriate shift length in direct contact with the community, might be two to four hours. This does not mean that staff necessarily need to go home after their frontline work – it means limiting and managing exposure to the intense and stressful tasks.

While management of short and sustainable shifts is clearly desirable, it is also recognised that from time-to-time surges in demand and activity will mean that staff and the council need to respond. This can be unavoidable at times, however, active management is required to ensure that this situation is not allowed to continue for extended periods.

For some staff there will be an increase in out-of-hours' work associated with attending community meetings and the like. This also needs to be factored into realistic working weeks.

TIPS

Develop policies that apply in disaster recovery situations including:

- maximum shift times
- rostering, especially out of hours commitments such as community meetings
- minimum breaks
- time in lieu agreements.

Post-shift policies

If staff are left to simply go home at the end of a shift they can internalise what they have seen and experienced. The toll of intensive and emotional tasks involved in some aspects of the recovery cannot be under-estimated.

Demobilising at the end of each shift can be used to help staff get their experience back into perspective and enable them to rest and revive. Demobilising includes reporting the experience, dealing with anything that might be on their mind and being reassured that immediate follow-up tasks will be attended to. Demobilising can be done by a shift leader or manager, preferably who has not been on scene.

From time-to-time debriefing will also be required. Debriefing is a more intense facilitated process usually conducted when immediate work demands are over and there is a need to go back and put it all into perspective. This might be needed at the end of a few shifts or before an extended break from the workplace. It is unlikely to be necessary after each shift – unless the shift has been traumatic. Debriefing should be undertaken by a skilled supervisor, by a designated council specialist or by an external contractor.

TIPS

Develop demobilising and debriefing policies and procedures.

Consider training council staff to create a pool of council specialists.

Consider putting arrangements in place for external professional supervision or counselling services.

LATROBE CITY COUNCIL - PHONING-IN FOLLOWING AFTER-HOURS SHIFTS

Latrobe City Council's practice has been that any recovery staff member attending a community meeting or engagement activity in the evening is required to call their coordinator (or colleague if the coordinator is not available), on the way home or when they get home from the activity. The conversations normally last about half an hour.

This process was designed to monitor staff members arriving home safely and to provide an opportunity for them to reflect on the activity, discuss follow-up requirements and generally demobilise.

The process has proved an important staff welfare initiative, ensuring that they are more likely to get a good night's sleep - having shared information and perspectives with someone who understands and appreciates the circumstances.

MURRINDINDI SHIRE COUNCIL - STAFF COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT

During the recovery phase of the 2009 fires Murrindindi Shire Council staff were provided with access to counselling and provision was made for staff to take leave. Council was also inclusive in the way they allowed staff to become involved in the recovery effort and provided staff with access to disaster and recovery information. A lot of staff felt they needed to be part of what was going on - even if they were not in designated recovery roles. All staff at Murrindindi Shire Council were involved and have contributed substantially to the community recovery effort.

Off work policies

Sustained recovery effort can be demanding and draining. Different staff will react in different ways. Some might have the ability and personal support networks to leave the job at work and to rest and revitalise after hours. Others might have difficulty 'switching off'. For example, unless directed otherwise, it is easy for staff to choose to respond to work-related phone calls, text messages and e-mails after they leave work.

Council needs to actively manage this situation - with supervisors monitoring and managing overtime, 'time off in lieu' accrual and the risk of 'informal' extra time.

Providing staff with skills in understanding and managing these risks will help them get their own work style and personal needs in perspective and better equip them to avoid working in unhealthy ways.

Each staff member is an individual and will be affected by a disaster in their own way. While staff need to take responsibility for their own 'self-care', some will require monitoring and intervention by supervisors because they will lose sight of their own health and wellbeing needs. Sometimes it will be the ones who appear to be coping well who are not.

TIPS

Provide training in self-care to staff, especially in the post-disaster context.

Incorporate self-care into staff appraisal and performance management processes.

Ensure that managers and supervisors are also involved in this training.

Actively supervise and manage staff where their capacity for self-care is impaired.

Developments in technology also mean that staff can be contactable 24 hours a day and have access to work related information through e-mails or electronically available data at any time. In addition, if the work culture allows, staff will call other staff members out of hours or while they are on leave to follow up quite trivial matters or matters that could easily wait until the next work day. Council needs to create an expectation that time outside working hours is for rest and separation from work – and promote a culture of ‘leaving people alone on their days off and outside working hours’.

Sometimes individual staff members will need to be told by their supervisor – ***‘you are having the next three days off; leave your phone here and do not look at any e-mails.’***

TIPS

Consider policies to manage out of work contact, such as:

- designate mobile phones for certain recovery functions that are handed over to replacement staff and remain within the workplace – not given to individuals to take home. A single number attached to a function can also make it easier for key agencies and the community.
- where council provided mobile phones are taken home direct that they are to be switched off outside working hours.
- staff members are not to be phoned outside working hours unless the issue is deemed to be critical (based on agreed protocols).
- direct staff that e-mails are not to be accessed or responded to after hours.

YARRA RANGES SHIRE COUNCIL – MAKING TEMPORARY CHANGES TO WORKING CONDITIONS

Yarra Ranges has identified key internal Council actions through the Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Recovery Response to the February 2009 Bushfires Evaluation. These actions included:

- developing a business continuity strategy
- having the right people for the right job
- having established administrative systems
- leadership
- supporting staff to understand and manage trauma (especially in a case like Yarra Ranges where almost 80 per cent of the staff live in the municipality).

Following Black Saturday, council quickly enacted a Crisis Response Strategy to support all staff. This included provision of up to two weeks of leave for staff who were directly affected or lost their homes, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) sessions for all staff (up to three sessions without cost), as well as flexible working conditions for staff in the weeks and months following the fires. These sessions were also available for Councillors.

Consistent with the values of the organisation, Yarra Ranges continued to give staff the message that their contribution to the recovery effort was greatly appreciated. The majority of staff indicated that they felt supported by the organisation.

This was also evident through the levels of WorkCover stress leave. The organisation reported that there was no change in the WorkCover claims in the 15 months following the 2009 bushfires and no increases in staff turnover.

“Many staff did feel burnt out from experience in Relief Centres – but for many it was an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and learn skills and identify within the organisation as a ‘rising star’ “. (Council manager)

Adapted from Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Recovery Response to the February 2009 Bushfires Evaluation Report June 2012.

SUPPORT MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

The task of management in a disaster recovery context is extremely complex and demanding. Managers can face tensions between staff directly affected by the loss of life and property in the disaster and those not directly involved and can be labelled in one camp or the other – *‘how would you know what it’s like!’* Managers might also find the impact of the disaster can extend to contractors who are dysfunctional as a result of their direct impact of loss of life and property in the event.

Additional challenges in the workplace include:

- workloads are stretched
- staff require additional monitoring and support
- business functions are reconfigured with extended hours and shifts
- ‘strangers’ in the workplace on loan from other councils and agencies
- new structures and lines of reporting are established
- a traumatised community requiring leadership and support.

Council also needs to look after its managers and provide support through initiatives such as workplace chaplaincy, psychological care, professional debriefing. Rapid induction or quick skills development might also be needed for managers to identify triggers for staff support and suggestions on disaster recovery staff management and support techniques.

Some training and awareness raising of the likely impact of disasters and disaster recovery can be implemented before the disaster through proactive professional development.

During highly stressful and demanding times of disaster recovery key structures in the council organisation such as executive management group meetings and manager meetings need to dedicate time for checking how managers are coping. Similarly, one-on-one time between managers and their line managers needs to be scheduled to check on workload management and personal wellbeing.

There might also be opportunities to relieve some tasks which can add to the feeling of being overwhelmed by the workload – such as council reducing its demand for corporate reporting and other non-recovery related administrative requirements.

TIPS

Provide training in self-care to managers, especially in the post-disaster context.

Establish peer support mechanisms between managers at a similar level or with similar responsibilities so they can talk informally about what they are doing and obtain advice or support.

Develop external professional supervision policies and arrangements with supervisors.

ENGAGE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a potential addition to the workforce that council can mobilise during disaster recovery. Planning is required however, to recruit, manage and deploy volunteers. Some of these planning needs might readily be addressed on a regional or multi-municipality basis.

For example, if one use of volunteers is as drivers, there might be scope for the development and adoption of common registration forms, health and safety checks and induction programs that can be applied and shared across municipal boundaries.

Regional Recovery Networks provide a forum for such discussions and the development of the necessary policies and practices. Some regional groups of councils use an online instrument such as a 'volunteer passport' to capture and record and share common volunteer information, speeding recognition and transferability after disasters.

Community organisations such as 'men's sheds', community transport, home and community care, service clubs, sporting clubs and so on are potential sources of volunteers to assist with recovery. Utilising these existing organisations can be a highly efficient arrangement as they will come with their own 'management' structures, contact lists and resources, and generally their own volunteer and liability insurance. Such organisations can be identified before a disaster, agreements reached, roles assigned and disaster recovery awareness and skill development programs delivered in preparation for their involvement after an event. Such arrangements can be formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding if appropriate.

TIPS

Develop policies, resources and systems to manage volunteers and visiting specialist personnel.

Ask the questions:

- Who will cover liabilities?
- Where and how will they be accommodated?
- What induction will they receive?
- What support will they receive?
- Who do they report to?

POST-DISASTER

Following a disaster the workforce environment will change. Some staff can be directly affected or traumatised by the event and others will be redeployed or have changed to roles, functions, priorities and workloads. In addition there might be new or temporary personnel in the workplace and staff needing to rapidly learn new skills or refresh past ones.

As time goes on, council will also need to manage the transition of staff from temporary or redeployed positions back into their substantive roles or into new roles and positions as the disaster recovery scales down. Casual and temporary staff and those on loan or seconded from other councils and organisations will be leaving the organisation - and the group that has given so much of themselves in the recovery roles.

MANAGING STAFF PERSONALLY AFFECTED BY THE DISASTER

The dimension of the disaster and the impact on staff might include very close and personal involvement and loss for some. However, it might not necessarily be obvious who is directly affected. Just because a staff member did not live in the affected area and did not lose family members does not mean they are not closely connected to that community in some way.

Sometimes staff might be providing assistance and support to family and friends after they leave work. Similarly, they might take on additional responsibilities at a community level, for example, as a volunteer member of the local fire brigade or State Emergency Service Unit and be dealing with the conflict of wanting to be in two places at the same time - their volunteering role and at work.

Some staff not deeply involved in the disaster work, might also be significantly distressed by it because of their past experiences or other personal factors. The severity of such reactions cannot always be related to the level of exposure.

Councillors and management need to appreciate this and understand that it will affect the capacity of impacted staff to perform consistently and to the required level during recovery.

Some aspects of their work might even trigger unexpected psychological and emotional reactions and unusual behaviour, which might not be easily understood by colleagues and community members. Common staff reactions to a disaster include:

- inability to concentrate
- obsession with disaster event
- frustration with trivial or unnecessary demands
- sadness and anger.

Monitoring all staff closely – particularly those directly affected by the disaster, is a key management responsibility. For some staff members being at work and in a supportive environment will be best – albeit appropriate time away from work needs to be identified and scheduled.

For other staff who might not be ready to return to work and potentially should not be there, options for time off and a managed return to work should be considered. The need for this support might not be obvious at first. It might emerge slowly over time or in a sudden incident. Recognising how they are affected and making decisions about the best way forward will require sensitivity on the part of supervisors and professional expertise from council's human resources staff or employee assistance provider.

It is important to recognise that people experiencing major trauma or in a highly emotional state following a disaster might not have the necessary objectivity to make decisions about returning to work.

They might also be driven by incorrect assumptions, for example, a staff member might want to return to work because they do not believe that can afford to lose their pay. In fact, they might have adequate leave entitlements.

Part of the role of management is to ensure that employment conditions are in place to meet the needs of staff in this situation, and that staff are aware for the available support and provisions.

GOOD PRACTICE IN SUPPORTING STAFF

Following a major emergency event which impacted the municipality and council staff, the Chief Executive Officer of one municipality mailed personally addressed letters to all council staff, informing them of what had happened, what council was doing, any special arrangements and what support was available to them.

For a small cost, this action kept all staff members informed and initiated the staff care process. It was extremely well received and set the 'tone' for council's leadership and involvement in the emergency.

TIP

Be alert to signs of stress among staff directly affected by the disaster and seek professional expertise if there are any concerns.

CREATE A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

Disaster relief and recovery work are intense and emotive. Not all staff will be able to be equally involved nor involved in the way they want. The intense demands will disrupt normal business and inevitably increase the load of routine work on those who are not involved in the disaster work. It is common that tensions develop between those doing the disaster work and those remaining on routine work. It is important to anticipate such tensions as they can manifest in serious disruptions as time progresses and staff can easily sustain high distress.

Those staff maintaining normal business need to be acknowledged and valued as contributing by enabling the other staff to be released. Their commitment as shown by the high level of work can be recognised. They also need to be informed regularly about what their colleagues are doing when away from the office and to ensure they do not have idealised views of exciting work.

This might mean there is a temporary need for a different meeting routine so that staff can come together and share information and experiences. This will facilitate supportive relationships. Some of this might be done in council sponsored events during break times, for example, a morning tea or lunch provided to show management's appreciation for what all staff are doing above and beyond their job descriptions.

Acknowledgement by senior executives is a powerful way of staff feeling valued whatever their role.

Providing information and education about stress and its manifestations in the social setting of the workplace as well as in personal terms is a valuable asset. This might be done as a combined process with staff involved in disaster recover roles and the staff maintaining normal business activities.

TIPS

Look for ways to maintain relationships and share information between staff deployed in recovery roles and those maintaining ongoing council business.

Review meeting and communication approaches system to ensure staff support needs are met.

ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL - RECOGNISING BOTH STAFF WITH RECOVERY ROLES AND THOSE MAINTAINING COUNCIL'S NORMAL BUSINESS

Recovery is a long, slow process and can be exhausting both physically and mentally, for those working directly with affected communities.

There is a real danger once the immediate emergency has passed, that other people working in the same organisation will just assume 'business as usual' and make unrealistic demands on the people who are working in recovery. Progress in recovery should be regularly communicated to all staff so they are aware of the workload and appreciate the demands on their colleagues.

YARRA RANGES SHIRE COUNCIL - ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPORTANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF STAFF DOING THE BUSINESS AS USUAL WORK

Staff felt that it was important that the organisation acknowledge the importance of business continuity. Several members indicated that they were aware that some of their colleagues felt that the greatest contribution they could make to the recovery process was to continue to do their own job and that of staff who were working on recovery at the same time - backing up and ensuring that residents were not disadvantaged.

'[it is important to] communicate to staff that their role in business continuity is just as important, even if it is without the glamour.'
(Council officer)

'... need praise and visibility from leadership to all staff.' (Council officer)

Adapted from Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Recovery Response to the February 2009 Bushfires Evaluation Report June 2012

BUILD CAPACITY TO MEET KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL GAPS

The scope for capacity building will be limited when a disaster strikes. The use of *'rapid induction'* or other professional development therefore will be an important strategy to addressing skills or knowledge gaps in the first days and weeks.

As time goes by, other capacity building needs might emerge, particularly as recovery planning begins to identify projects and activities to be supported by council.

TIPS

Provide rapid inductions on an emerging needs basis.

Consider if any capacity building will be required to support recovery activities. This can occur in parallel with any recovery planning processes.

BAW BAW SHIRE COUNCIL - LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF

For Baw Baw Shire Council staff involved in the 2009 fires there was much to do and plenty of pressure to get things completed during the response and recovery phases of the emergency management.

However, even with these pressures, for some this emergency response and recovery program presented a huge opportunity for personal and professional development and many embraced the training and new skills and the chance to gain confidence in dealing with difficult situations.

BAW BAW SHIRE COUNCIL - INTERNAL RECRUITMENT AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE FOR KEY POSITIONS

In response to the 2009 fires, a current council staff member was selected to fill the position of *Bushfire Recovery Community Development Officer*.

Appointing an existing Council staff member to the emergency community development role made dealing with community members much easier as the person knew the area well; had already formed a number of useful relationships; and had an existing level of credibility as a current council employee.

MURRINDINDI SHIRE COUNCIL - EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FIRE COORDINATORS

Murrindindi Shire Council has benefited from the addition to its staff of an Emergency Management Fire Coordinator who is a shared resource with Mitchell Shire Council. This position, which is one of many similar positions funded by the Victorian Government to operate across multiple municipalities, has forged relationships across municipal boundaries.

This new role has importantly assisted in strengthening relationships at a state and regional level including building partnerships with key agencies, such as the Country Fire Authority and Victoria Police - which has lifted the bar in emergency management response and recovery.

The position also plays an important role in building the capacity of council as a whole in managing and communicating risk and developing the professional skills of individual staff members and work units.

BE RESPONSIVE TO PRESSURES ON STAFF

As recovery proceeds some staff's circumstances might also change such that they require different or more flexible work arrangements.

This might include:

- a period of part-time work
- clear time in lieu arrangements
- changes to working hours (start and finish times) or variable working hours
- working from home and other options for staff unable to physically get to work
- short notice requests for leave
- requests for short periods of leave without pay or leave in advance (where annual or sick leave entitlements have been used).

Specific staff management and supervisory practices are required for inexperienced staff and particularly those working in disaster recovery roles for the first time. If their health and wellbeing, safety and quality of work is not monitored and effectively supervised then serious consequences could emerge down the track.

This should include regular contact to ensure the staff have what they need to do their job; feel that they are not working in a vacuum; feel supported with difficult decisions; and feel that gaps or needs that cannot be met immediately are being addressed.

TIPS

Ensure staff have the resources they need to undertake their role effectively. If necessary second, re-assign and contract additional staff and resources.

Recognise and acknowledge staff for their efforts individually and publically (bearing in mind that different staff will appreciate different forms of recognition and acknowledgement).

Involve individual staff members, staff groups and business units in decisions that affect them.

Be alert to signs of staff stress. These might include uncharacteristic behaviours, such as verbal outbursts, becoming rigid in delivering services, becoming withdrawn or angry.

Seek professional expertise if you have any concerns.

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL - SUPPORTING CUSTOMER SERVICE STAFF

From day one, the Customer Service Call Centre looked like a room from a police investigation series on television. A3 sheets of paper were stuck to walls and doors with contact phone numbers, lists of Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre personnel on duty, lists of the roads that were closed and even which kindergartens were open or closed. The set up enabled a quick response time compared with searching through emails.

Every day a chart was drawn up on a piece of A3 paper listing the Customer Service Officers on duty that day. Against each name a column was inserted for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. A staff member was then nominated to monitor that all staff took their breaks and marked it off on the chart. At a quick glance, it was possible to see who had missed a break and rectify the situation.

To enable Customer Service to relay correct and timely information, the Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre Manager would call into the Customer Service Call Centre at least twice daily to update the staff on current events which would impact on the community. Staff were often too busy answering calls and attending to counter enquiries to source the information themselves. This was extremely effective, especially in the first few weeks.

Customer Service staff were witness to some distressing calls and visits from affected residents. Staff were given an opportunity to receive counselling in the early stages of the recent fires. This helped the staff to release tensions which would normally have gone home with them. Follow-up counselling was also made available.

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL - CONTRACTED STAFF WELFARE ORGANISATION

Following the 2009 fires Nillumbik Shire Council engaged an external organisation to monitor staff health and wellbeing. The organisation (The Mandala Foundation) which specialises in psycho-social support, responded to individual staff needs and managed weekly sessions with groups of staff. These weekly sessions were undertaken initially to develop and implement staff welfare tools.

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL - ALWAYS SOMEONE IN THE OFFICE

During recovery from the 2009 fires there were often several recovery staff members working in the community. Council's practice was to always have someone in the office to ensure support when staff returned and to reduce the sense of isolation for individual staff exposed to trauma in the community.

Staff lunches were held regularly to maintain strong relationships and support across the staff group, with the Chief Executive Officer attending a couple of times a year to recognise the staff efforts and provide access for direct feedback on key community issues.

The staff group were conscious for the need to check on how each other were coping on a daily basis. A system was developed to prompt discussions for this checking process. A wall chart was developed that had four quadrants - **Frustrated, Denial, Peaceful, Elated**. At the start and end of each day, each staff member placed their symbol on the wall chart to indicate how they felt. This had a serious side but also created the opportunity for some light hearted interaction - especially when staff suggested they were coping really well in such extreme circumstances. The use of the wall chart supported useful debriefing and more intensive follow-up when required.

THE CITY OF WHITTLESEA - WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT

Before the 2009 Bushfires, the City of Whittlesea's experience was that relief and recovery centres were opened and closed again after a couple of days. The days after Black Saturday centres were swamped by thousands of people coming to the recovery centre and the facility had to be staffed beyond normal business hours for several weeks, with the centre remaining open for some months.

A key council function at the recovery centre was public health and food safety, with community donations and material goods being dropped off; over 20 refrigeration trucks on site; people setting up barbecues; food provision in a dining area and so on.

The environmental health officers were present at the recovery centre, with a minimum two officers at a time rostered for all meal times on a three shift per day basis to ensure adequate breaks were being taken between shifts. The routine environmental health officer tasks were temporarily suspended – though the capacity to respond to customer complaints and critical public health issues was maintained.

The City of Yarra offered support and six environmental health officers were deployed to assist the City of Whittlesea. They were predominantly used in the recovery centre – where the skills required were less dependent on local knowledge. This enabled the City of Whittlesea environmental health officers to undertake other roles such as disaster impact assessment – where local knowledge and first hand understanding of septic tank installations was beneficial.

One of the environmental health officers was seconded to council's bushfire recovery team which was a cross-council group dedicated to recovery. This officer was predominantly responsible for the fire affected area and their local knowledge and understanding of the public health issues was a valuable contribution to the team. This officer's position was backfilled by an environmental health officer on contract – sourced through a recruiting agency.

MANAGE ADDITIONAL PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

After a disaster there are likely to be different people in the workplace – in temporary positions; on loan from other councils, government agencies, other organisations; and volunteers. This will change the dynamics of the workplace and will require active management.

Accepting staff on loan from other councils will require clarity on the terms and scope of the engagement and issues such as the chain of command.

Boundaries and employment issues such as line management, payroll and entitlements including salary and classifications, overtime, allowances, arrangements and protocols for the loaning council to involve the loaned staff members in past and current work at their council; and so on will need to be agreed between the two councils.

Authorisations might be required for staff from other Councils with statutory roles such as local laws, health officers, and planning and building services. The level of formality of such arrangements will be determined, in part, by the length of the secondment or employment. Where possible, the councils most likely to be offering support should be identified in the pre-event disaster recovery planning process and preliminary discussions and in-principle agreements put in place with them before the event.

TIPS

Use a range of activities to introduce new people to the staff group and the work environment and fast-track the identifiable stages of group development (forming, storming, norming, performing) such as:

- informing current staff of additional personnel by correspondence and e-mails and in staff meetings – before the people starting, including any identifiable impact of changes this will mean for current staff
- individual meetings with staff most affected by the changes
- personal introductions of new staff to all staff
- induction of new staff including site visits
- welcome and introductions of new and existing staff including backgrounds, roles and responsibilities at relevant meetings
- establish mixed teams and mentoring arrangements
- run informal social activities – staff afternoon teas or barbeques
- providing ongoing communication to staff in relation to changes to roles and positions
- advising of completion of roles and temporary staff leaving the council – with appropriate thanks and farewell celebrations.

MANAGE THE REINTEGRATION OF STAFF BACK INTO SUBSTANTIVE POSITIONS

Disaster recovery can result in reassignment of staff to dedicated recovery tasks for months and even years, during which the council as an organisation and the community might have changed dramatically.

In council, there might have been council elections resulting in new elected members; managers and other staff might have come and gone; different strategic priorities and projects might have emerged; and new organisation structures or processes might have replaced previous or familiar ones.

So when it comes to staff that have been taken away from their substantive positions to work on the recovery effort, returning to their normal job can have significant transitional issues, such as:

- Leaving the role and relationships they have invested in during the recovery effort. This might have brought with it intense emotional connections and a higher profile. Their recovery work might be perceived as more significant at a personal, organisational and community level than their routine work.
- Staff who were left to operate in the business units that staff assigned to recovery were taken away from might have introduced new ways of doing things and a new dynamic might now exist in the unit.
- Current issues and projects might be quite different to those they were dealing with when they left the unit after the disaster occurred.
- Relationships might have changed within the business unit and with the people the business unit works with.
- Some staff who have been in the business unit on a temporary basis and who might have established themselves as a well-liked, valued and productive member of the unit will be leaving and displaced by the return of the former staff member.

- Some of the staff who were in the business when they left might have moved to another unit, resigned or retired, and new staff might have been employed.
- Reduced salary – as they might have been paid an allowance or acted in a position with a higher classification in their recovery role.
- Returning to a position where there is a large workload and the current staff have high expectations and are looking forward to the staff member returning – and being highly productive immediately to do this work

Re-integrating staff back into their substantive positions therefore will be a change requiring active management, as some restlessness and tension can be expected.

At the same time, staff are likely to have benefited from the experience and bring a greater skill base, expertise and insight into the community back to the business unit.

TIPS

Re-introduce staff who have been on recovery tasks back into their substantive worksite and actively re-establish a cohesive business unit using a range of activities such as:

- informing current staff of the changes – well in advance (acknowledge up-front to all staff that a transition is occurring which might be disruptive and that their support and feedback on progress is welcome)
- acknowledging and value the contribution of temporary staff leaving the business unit with the whole group
- acknowledging and value the contribution of staff who have 'kept the normal council business wheels turning' with the whole group
- allowing recovery staff to showcase what they have been involved with and allow non-recovery staff to showcase what they have achieved since the disaster and current project, activities and priorities
- conducting individual one-on-one meetings between managers and staff to check on progress and issues
- creating clear boundaries and expectations in relation to staff moving back to their roles and recommitting to that position
- allowing staff some time to 'let go' of their recovery responsibilities
- scheduling a few days leave between the end of a staff member's time in a disaster recovery role and them recommencing in their substantive position to assist create the separation from the recovery role
- stepping in with guidance and support if some staff have difficulty letting go
- designing projects and tasks that facilitate staff working together to build or re-build relationships
- holding informal social activities – staff lunch, excursion or site visit to recovery initiatives in disaster affected communities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The impact of a disaster will not only affect councillors and staff, it will also affect the physical resources, systems and processes and financial assets of the council.

PRE-DISASTER

Before a disaster likely resource demand areas for council can be predicted and planning arrangements put in place in readiness for when an event occurs. This involves understanding council's current resource capacity; making plans to augment resources as needs arise; and being ready to access available disaster recovery funding as required during disaster recovery.

The Municipals Emergency Management Plan should guide council's considerations as to the events that are likely to impact their communities and the responsibilities of Council.

UNDERSTAND RESOURCE CAPABILITIES

The demands on council resources to support community recovery can be enormous. Existing resources can be quickly exhausted and it will be necessary to look elsewhere for support. This might be available through the generosity of other councils or through the financial support of state or federal government.

It is important to know the types of resources that are likely to be needed and their likely sources.

TIPS

Detail the resources that council will need to manage the impact of a disaster on the organisation and identify and assess likely gaps.

Identify what equipment and supplies are likely to be required to respond to the impact of the disaster on the council organisation and how quickly they would need to be available – for example, office equipment and supplies, communication equipment, systems support and maintenance.

Engage with critical suppliers to ensure they have planned for equipment and resource supplies following a disaster, and that an emergency supply arrangement is in place.

Audit suppliers to ensure they have capacity to continue service delivery and supply. Consider practices such as dual and/or multi-sourcing of materials; stockpiling supplies; business continuity plans in place; determining other key customers and where your municipality is in the priority order of supply; significant penalty clauses in supply contracts; identification and pre-acceptance of alternative suppliers.

PUT IN PLACE RESOURCE SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

A key source of additional resources will be from other councils.

Often offers of assistance occur when a council or region is under siege from events such as bushfires or floods. In other cases, these arrangements are built on pre-existing agreements.

The *Municipal Association of Victoria Resource Sharing Protocol* provides a broad framework for resource sharing.¹ Additional work might be required to customise and formalise the specific arrangements as they relate to the particular resources and particular councils.

Often cooperative arrangements between councils have emerged where there has been an existing connection between staff. For example:

- when a manager from one council has moved to another and has kept in touch and wants to assist
- through relationships that have developed between chief executive officers or elected members through Municipal Association of Victoria committees, Regional Manager's Groups or events
- through relationships that have developed between other staff participating in emergency management training events at the Australian Emergency Management Institute or other joint projects
- as a result of participation in regional structures such as Regional Recovery Committees, Regional Emergency Management Enhancement Groups, or Emergency Management Collaboration projects.

Putting time and effort into building relationships and engaging with other councils is a clearly worthwhile investment.

Formalising a memorandum of understanding or other 'in-principle' agreement ahead of a disaster provides greater certainty for planning recovery. Such agreements can fast-track the management of issues such as payroll, leave and conditions, on-costs of phone and vehicles and so on.

This is particularly important for small rural and remote councils with fewer resources where there might be scope to build such arrangements with the larger and well-resourced councils in greater Melbourne.

Once such arrangements are in place, they can be included in joint training exercises and practiced to ensure their effectiveness.

TIPS

Make sure your council is aware of and signed up to the *Municipal Association of Victoria Resource Sharing Protocol*.

Participate in regional structures such as Regional Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement Groups, Regional Recovery Committees or collaboration projects.

Participate in or establish a regional recovery network with your neighbouring councils.

Prepare a resource sharing memorandum of understanding template that can be used to develop agreements and that be easily customised following a disaster to formalise new resource sharing arrangements.

UNDERSTAND SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL FUNDS

Once a disaster occurs, council can be eligible for financial assistance and support from the Victorian and Australian Governments under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements and other support initiatives.

A good understanding of these arrangements before a disaster enables councils to maximise funding and support and access it quickly. Understanding the structure of these funding programs also means being able to develop a response which maximises the funding opportunity. For example, some of these funding arrangements will not pay for backfilling of staff. Sometimes councils have reassigned staff to new roles and sought funding to backfill which has not been approved. In similar circumstances other councils have sought funding for the new roles where staff have been reassigned, and these positions have been funded.

Most funding agencies and authorities are happy to provide information and interpretation of the funding guidelines. Insight on accessing funding can also be gained through organisations such as the Municipal Association of Victoria.

Understanding how the system works, using the right terminology and applying for eligible support can significantly improve the financial and other support received.

Where some councils have been confident of being eligible for and receiving financial assistance from the Victorian or Australian Governments and had the cash flow to do so, they have funded some recovery initiatives before confirmation of the funding.

Those councils that delay funding decisions until receipt of detailed written post-disaster advice might find that limited availability of key service agencies, contractors or employees compromises potential program timing and success.

The process of applying for funding programs requires time and capacity to think strategically and comply with the funding guidelines. Often staff with operational recovery roles will find it difficult to take on funding application tasks at the same time as their operational roles. Ideally preparing funding applications would be completed by staff not on the recovery frontline, who would consult operational people to inform the application.

Sometimes applying for disaster recovery funding will be a task allocated to the planning function or incorporated elsewhere into the Recovery Management Structure.

TIPS

Familiarise yourself with financial assistance and support options available for recovery – to maximise available funding to the council and the community.

Advocate directly or through relevant bodies such as the Municipal Association of Victoria, Regional Emergency Management Committees or the State Municipal Emergency management Enhancement Group for improved application processes that take account of the pressure facing council in supporting community recovery. For example, in some instances councils might be responding to a fresh disaster while still dealing with the recovery from previous events.

Ensure that people responsible for preparing funding applications are not too stressed or engulfed in emergency work to do so adequately. Provide them with support and access to the resources and information they need.

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE

POST-DISASTER

Once disaster strikes, things will move really fast and the rewards of investing in preparation and planning before the event will be evident.

TIPS

When disaster strikes complete an initial impact assessment to gauge resource requirements and match this with resource capability to determine needs and gaps.

Activate resource sharing arrangements and partnerships.

Review the specific details and guidelines of available disaster recovery funding and allocate non-operational staff to prepare strategic and professional submissions. Separate and support people staff preparing disaster recovery funding applications.

Approach other potential sources of funding and resources that do not necessarily have a structured application process – such as private sector businesses, politicians, peak bodies and industry groups, charities, philanthropic trusts and foundations, service clubs.

Connect with relationships and partnerships such as regional recovery networks established before the disaster.

Ask for assistance early – seeking or accepting assistance early can fast-track the initial recovery effort.

Remember to clearly define recovery roles in temporary position descriptions. This can assist in substantiating the new and additional roles that have been assigned. Such position descriptions can largely be drafted in recovery planning and refined if required after the event.

The disaster recovery experience and the consequences for council will be significant. It is therefore important to understand what has worked well in managing council's business through recovery and what can be improved to prepare for recovery from future disasters.

Ongoing monitoring and feedback on achievements, performance and how staff and resources are coping will be part of the role of the recovery management structure.

Consideration might also be given to a more formal review or evaluation once the major recovery initiatives have been implemented and had time to take effect.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL - EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE REVIEW

Disaster recovery is no stranger to Wellington Shire Council with the municipality experiencing natural disasters on an almost annual basis. With emergency management practice constantly evolving council's Emergency Management Group has undertaken a review of its emergency management organisational structure, internal operations and roles to improve flexibility, reporting lines, role definition and processes.

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL - LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Based on the experience of the 2011 floods, Mount Alexander Shire Council modified the systems that were put into place in response to the 2012 flood event. Some of these systems included:

Short Term Response:

- Adequate rotations of Municipal Emergency Resources Officer, Municipal Recovery Manager and Emergency Relief Centre staff. This was to ensure that staff were fresh for each shift and also exposed those new to the role with first-hand experience. The roster system lasted two weeks and then defaulted back to the normal recovery staff rotations.
- A script was developed for customer service staff and they were also trained to answer and manage food related enquires. Details of affected residents were also captured via a database. This process enabled council to respond to needs in a timely manner and also provide information about other agencies that could assist if necessary.
- Council's website was used as a portal for general information to the community. Newsletter's were also printed and located in places of regular use or interest such as the local post office.

Longer term response:

- Council undertook a resource assessment of the recovery coordination aspect in response to this most recent event. Council determined that in order to coordinate effective recovery activities in response to an event of this size, 0.94 of a full-time position would be required for at least three to six months to ensure that recovery is captured, actioned and embedded into existing council arrangements. This role was very successful in ensuring that council and support agencies worked collaboratively in responding to community needs. As a result the community recovery process was shortened.
- Council also identified that emergency management roles need to be captured in business continuity planning to ensure that council can respond to any emergency event - small, medium or large. This process has now been embedded and continues to happen in line with the emergency management plan.

NEXT STEPS

To ensure council is well placed to manage the demands of community recovery, review your council's existing policies and practices as they relate to the post-disaster recovery context.

Use the following checklists.

WHOLE OF COUNCIL BUSINESS MATTERS REVIEW

Options for redeployment of staff to recovery tasks have been considered	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adequately skilled people are identified, inducted and trained and available to implement recovery actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Policies are in place to support staff during recovery, including deployment, shift provisions, leave and employee assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resource sharing protocols are in place and are tested or practiced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recovery funding sources are understood and able to be quickly accessed	<input type="checkbox"/>

Take action to address any gaps or deficiencies by using the resources referred to in this booklet. They can be found in **Book 8: Recovery tools and other resources** which also includes additional reading such as existing recovery resources; materials and web links.

TIP

Remember to review policy and practice documents routinely (at least annually) and ahead of any known periods of local danger such as fire or flood.

Re-check if conditions are forecast that make the risk of disaster high.

Conduct regular training, testing and exercises.

ENDNOTES

1 <http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/emergency-management/Pages/resource-sharing-protocol.aspx>

This resource is available electronically on the internet at:

www.emv.vic.gov.au

If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format please phone (03) 9027 5472 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required.

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