

03

DISASTER RECOVERY TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT





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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: Victorian SES responds to a tornado.

Above Image: Landscapes near Tarra Bulga National Park. Photographer Silvi Glattauer.

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

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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
COMMUNITY FOCUS	05
LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION	06
INFORMED DECISION MAKING	08
COMMUNICATION	17
CAPACITY BUILDING	20
NEXT STEPS	23



INTRODUCTION

The success of recovery will depend in large part on the thoroughness of recovery readiness but when disaster strikes it will be necessary to respond quickly; to assess the impacts and needs arising from the disaster and adapt the governance, information and communication systems to fit the specifics of the actual disaster.

Sometimes, when a disaster strikes there will be some warning – forecast extreme fire weather, rising river levels and so on. Such a warning can prompt a quick review of recovery arrangements to ensure structures and systems can be quickly mobilised and personnel put on standby if considered appropriate.

In the immediate aftermath, council will need to manage both relief and recovery, which will warrant clear interaction and transition arrangements.

This booklet assumes that recovery readiness will have occurred and builds on this preparatory work by addressing the five contributors to recovery success as they relate to the first days and weeks following a disaster:

- community focus
- leadership and coordination
- informed decision making
- communication
- capacity building.

Note:

Aspects of recovery readiness that are concerned with council as an organisation, such as business continuity, workforce planning and resource sharing are detailed in:

Book 5 – Council Business Matters: managing the challenges of disaster recovery.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

In the period immediately following the disaster event, community normality is turned up-side-down. The prospect of returning the situation to a stable and safe environment is challenging when:

- communities are dispersed and have diverse, competing needs
- local, trusted community leaders are unavailable as a result of the disaster
- identifying and engaging vulnerable groups in decision making processes is difficult
- normal life and community structures are disrupted, displaced and under duress
- multiple communities are affected – both geographic communities and communities of interest.

From the outset there are some key recovery issues for local councils that will set the tone of recovery and the relationship with the community. Making sure that the community is involved in decisions that affect their future and setting up structures to achieve this is critical at this time. This is consistent with and advances the national principles of community-led recovery.

Note:

Aspects of community engagement both before a disaster and once a disaster strikes are detailed in:

Book 7 – Engaging the community in disaster recovery.

ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL – PROVIDING ASSISTANCE WITH ‘THE PAPERWORK’

Competent people who are very capable of complicated tasks and paperwork under normal circumstances might need assistance with even the most basic paperwork and forms when they are affected by a disaster. Provision of professional people and support people is important.

‘I’ve got all of this paperwork for the insurance company. Anyway they sent us, I think it was an accountant or something, and he was really good. He just got all the losses and everything and he just added it all up for you, and it just made a real big difference doing that’.

(“Through Women’s Eyes” Project)

http://www.whealth.com.au/work_through_womens_eyes.html

or

<http://www.alpineshire.vic.gov.au> > Emergency > Being Prepared > Community resilience > Through Women’s Eyes Project

LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

ADAPTING TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES

A disaster recovery structure will have been designed with assigned roles and functions, before the disaster event.

When disaster strikes, a quick assessment of its specific impacts and the likely recovery needs will be necessary. This will influence how the structure is implemented or modified. For example a severe storm might have little impact on the economic environment; a human epidemic event might have little impact on the built environment.

Remember that some council officers will not be immune to the impact of local disasters and might be directly affected; be a member of an affected community; or simply identify very strongly with the event.

Other well-meaning council officers might become driven by their own need to 'do something to help' and might neglect existing disaster plans, training or protocols and improvise instead. Their focus will be on the present, concrete and immediate and they are less able to think strategically and think ahead. This means they are less likely to plan, prepare, brief, organise, liaise and coordinate with others. This will potentially create further disorder instead of reasserting structure and certainty – contributing more anxiety and stress to the situation.

Their anxiety is exacerbated by the overwhelming workload, information barrage and uncertainty. With little space to think ahead emerging issues can mean unprepared people and ineffectual systems.

Under these circumstances managers are likely to revert to the 'standard' approaches they are most comfortable with, that is, 'to do what we always do'. 'Standard' approaches presume normal psychological behaviour and intact social fabric. If the changes to individual psychological behaviour and social fabric which result from the disaster are not taken into account council actions might be ignored, misinterpreted or create unexpected problems – despite council's best intentions.

Every failed action is perceived by the community as a symbol of council's indifference or incompetence. It doesn't matter how often you get it right – getting it wrong once can undo so much great work.

The recovery structure established in recovery readiness provides a mechanism for recovery coordination and operational management. Separating the strategic thinking and planning activities from the immediate operational imperatives will help to maintain clarity about what needs to be done.

TIPS

Obtain briefings early and do a quick assessment of the impact of the disaster on communities and likely needs.

Activate a recovery structure appropriate to the event and impact, including filling designated roles and triggering partner protocols and liaison mechanisms.

Make sure that the approaches developed through Recovery readiness fit the impact of the disaster, including the identified needs and capabilities of affected communities and the availability of recovery resources.

Modify the structure if necessary. If you need a temporary or alternative model of governance to cope with the disruption, put it in place – it does not suggest a failure of existing or pre-planned structures but the exceptional nature of disaster recovery.

Continue to modify the structure as necessary by scaling it up or down as the recovery effort evolves.

RECOVERY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE TOOL



Use this resource to review the management structure in light of the actual circumstances of the disaster and who is still available.

YARRA RANGES SHIRE COUNCIL – RECOVERY PLANNING AND STRUCTURE

Yarra Ranges Shire Council established a Municipal Recovery Structure within three weeks of Black Saturday in 2009. The structure included a Municipal Recovery Committee to oversee and direct recovery activities and take responsibility for coordinating council's response across all areas.

This group was drawn from various state and local government representatives, including the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer of Yarra Ranges Council, the chairs of the Municipal Recovery Structure sub-committees, representatives of Victoria Police, the State Government Departments of Human Services, the then Sustainability and Environment, the then Planning and Community Development, and the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA). This committee was chaired by an independent person, who was also Chair of Council's Audit Committee.

The recovery structure had a series of sub-committees responsible for different areas of community recovery – Community Recovery; Rebuilding; Natural Environment & Public Infrastructure; and Economic Recovery.

Importantly, two Directors in the organisation were responsible for particular areas and had responsibility for chairing sub-committees. Not only did this ensure that senior management in the organisation were aware of the day-to-day issues regarding recovery, but it facilitated speed and timeliness in decision making. Staff indicated that this was particularly important in relation to resource allocation.

These sub-committees had several working groups supporting them. Membership of the Municipal Recovery Committee (and the working groups and sub-committees) comprised relevant staff, a range of agencies and co-opted community members. The Terms of Reference for each reflected priorities identified by the membership, with leadership from Yarra Ranges staff. The exception was the Community Reference Group, where an open invitation was issued to the community to recruit interested residents.

The objectives, in facilitating recovery across the municipality, were to:

- ensure that development and delivery of recovery services were undertaken in a planned, strategic and timely manner
- engage with and involve the community in the recovery process
- keep the community informed of recovery actions, programs and services
- cost the impact of response and recovery actions accurately
- work in partnership with State and Federal Governments in the delivery of the recovery effort
- maintain the provision of centre-based recovery services in the Yarra Valley for as long as needed.

The specific features of this structure, recognised as successful in the Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Recovery Response to the February 2009 Bushfires Evaluation (June 2012) were: comprehensive nature; high level; accountability in the organisation; co-ordination through the Municipal Recovery Committee; building on existing networks and expertise; consistency with the culture of the Council; small teams in each designated area; the Recovery Action Plan.

The structure allowed for an integrated approach across the organisation and encouraged external agencies and community members to participate. However, it also resulted in high expectations to attend meetings and involved considerable work and some suggested that email or teleconferencing could have been substituted in some instances.

A Recovery Action Plan was also developed rapidly, with the first draft completed on 5 March 2009 and the final draft in June 2009. The Action Plan focused primarily on the first six months, in recognition that further medium and long-term recovery actions needed to be identified. Each of the four recovery sub-committees (Community Recovery; Rebuilding; Natural Environment & Public Infrastructure; and Economic Recovery) was responsible for implementing the relevant suite of initiatives in the Municipal Recovery Action Plan and reporting on their progress.

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

INFORMED DECISION MAKING

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL – EMPLOYING LOCAL PEOPLE

Where possible and as soon as possible following 2009 Black Saturday, Nillumbik Shire Council employed local people in fire affected areas.

This was a symbol of support for local communities; provided local employment; and took advantage of local knowledge and goodwill.

Five local people were employed on recovery projects.

THE CITY OF WHITTLESEA – COORDINATING VOLUNTEERS

Following the 2009 Bushfires, the City of Whittlesea was inundated by spontaneous volunteers who turned up at the relief and recovery centre.

In order to handle this situation, council established a site away from the relief and recovery centre to receive, coordinate and manage these volunteers. Council engaged a community organisation, Whittlesea Community Connections, to undertake this task, establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with them to document the agreed arrangements.

ASSESSING IMMEDIATE RECOVERY NEEDS

Initial Impact Assessment might provide a clear description of what happened but not a useful picture of need. Immediate recovery activities will be driven by the identified needs resulting from the disaster event, the ongoing vulnerabilities of affected communities and the priorities for community recovery actions. Information and reports from Relief and Recovery Centres will provide good information on impact and needs.

An immediate recovery needs assessment undertaken between day one and day three following the disaster will provide this key information. An assessment should be conducted for each locality or community reported as directly or indirectly affected. Any implications for the municipality as a whole should be derived from the aggregated analysis. Regional or state-wide implications can also be derived from this core information.

This assessment will provide an overview of the disaster situation across each of the five environments; social, built, natural, economic and agricultural. Information will be drawn from a quick collection of primary data and the review of secondary data. Experience suggests that, in the first few days, social and built environment needs will be the most urgent.

While an immediate recovery needs assessment is expected to be as detailed and accurate as possible, the urgency associated with this assessment will mean Information collected will be constrained by time and other practical considerations. The assessment is not likely to be comprehensive, statistically sound or provide in-depth qualitative analysis and should therefore be regarded as an approximate assessment only. This should be made plain to those making planning decisions, plus key informants and affected communities. Nonetheless, this assessment should provide sufficiently reliable information to support early decision making, in particular, informing immediate recovery goals and actions and identifying practical short-term recovery solutions.

Immediate recovery need assessments must often be conducted rapidly by non-specialised personnel. The capacity to quickly mobilise such personnel to collect key information can be strengthened by collaboration and coordination across agencies and the use of common tools. For example, the Personal Hardship Assistance Program and early outreach services will provide an excellent source of detail as response unfolds.

Victims, wherever possible, should only need to tell their story once. Therefore, the collection of information from affected individuals and families should be carefully considered and well-coordinated to ensure that information collection is not overly intrusive and does not add to the burden being felt by those affected by the disaster.

It is anticipated that responsibility for assessments and recommendations would be the responsibility of environment workgroups in the recovery management structure, with immediate recovery decisions endorsed by the overarching Recovery Group.

TIPS

Activate information collection and management systems – just collect the minimum to start. This will identify essential short term needs and establish a contact process that will enable expansion and refinement as events unfold.

Use Relief and Recovery Centres for collecting information and other direct surveys of affected individuals sparingly.

Keep current with developments in technology to aid impact assessment. Emerging technologies include vehicle mounted cameras and palm readers that support ‘drive by’ inspections and crowdsourced mobile data from people on the scene.

Assess the immediate and short term needs and risks presented by the disaster across each of the five environments and for each affected community.

Remember that sound information can be vital to council and the community in putting together a case to obtain funding under the *Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements* or through the *National Development Finance Agency* and other sources.

RECOVERY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOL



Use this resource to identify the immediate impacts of the disaster several, estimate needs and ongoing vulnerabilities of the affected communities and define the priorities for planning community recovery actions.

SETTING RECOVERY GOALS AND ACTIONS

Recovery readiness planning involves drafting likely recovery goals (See **Book 2: Recovery readiness – preparation for recovery before a disaster**). Once the disaster strikes and the recovery management structure is activated, these draft goals can be quickly reviewed and modified as appropriate, in light of the specifics now known about the disaster and the recovery situation.

Once the recovery goals for the particular emergency event are established, actions designed to achieve these goals can be developed and implemented through the relevant workgroups in the management structure.

Some goals and actions might continue to evolve in response to the particular needs expressed or as the capacities of local communities become clearer. This means that early recovery actions will need to be monitored and reviewed and improvements fed into subsequent planning efforts. Examples of immediate actions for the draft goals are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1: RECOVERY GOALS AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

SOCIAL

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To assist those affected by the disaster with access and referral to personal support and counselling services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Not an immediate priority for recovery – relief services focus</i>
To assist those affected by the disaster with access to safe accommodation suitable to their needs, including access to their own properties as soon as practicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with Department of Human Services and partners to coordinate temporary accommodation• Work with other environment workgroups to support access and re-establishment on own properties for example, council building and planning departments
To assist those affected by the disaster with opportunities to reconnect with their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify opportunities to deliver or support community based projects and events that will help to re-establish community connection• Support social media initiatives, notice boards and so on• Work with other environment workgroups to make available community meeting spaces and facilities
To provide access to timely information about post-disaster circumstances and recovery activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and activate communication channels matched to post-disaster needs and capabilities• Schedule regular community briefings
To assist with the coordination and distribution of material relief to those affected by the disaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activate MOUs with NGO partners and work with relief agencies to coordinate volunteers and material aid

TABLE 1: RECOVERY GOALS AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

SOCIAL (CONTINUED)

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To reduce risks to public health following the disaster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take action to minimise public health risk, for example, removing hazards and advising all people within the affected area about air and water contaminants and other health and safety issues
To build trust in council in the affected communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate openly with affected community and emergent groups Acknowledge limitations in services Work with government agencies and regulatory authorities to ease regulatory burden by temporarily modifying policies and rules
To identify emerging social issues for incorporation into medium and long term recovery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To engage affected communities in identifying their medium and long term issues Work with other recovery workgroups and the community to identify issues, needs and aspirations for inclusion into recovery plans

BUILT

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To reinstate, replace or remove as appropriate infrastructure that was damaged either directly or indirectly by the disaster, taking into account the protection and preservation of heritage or cultural sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist with the provision of temporary infrastructure and facilities, such as meeting areas, toilets/showers, laundry, and so on) to support recovery needs Undertake works to allow safe access for resident and relief and recovery staff, for example roads, bridges, signage and road furniture Undertake works required to make safe, for example, removal of unsafe buildings Undertake works required to restore functional facilities, for example, re-establish burnt buildings, water tanks and outbuildings on council land Work with other environment workgroups to make available community open space and facilities Work with other environment workgroups to ensure local heritage or Koori cultural sites are protected and preserved
To facilitate the clean-up of homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate immediate clean-up efforts and waste disposal including of hazardous waste such as asbestos, treated timber residue and chemicals Facilitate key works on affected private properties for example, fence restoration

TABLE 3: RECOVERY GOALS AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

BUILT

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To assist those affected by the disaster to rebuild following the disaster should they choose to do so	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not an immediate priority for recovery – but will be key focus in medium and longer term</i>
To consider the future disaster resilience of infrastructure as part of reinstatement plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not an immediate priority for recovery – but will be key focus in medium and longer term</i>
To identify emerging built issues for incorporation into medium and long term recovery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage affected communities in identifying their medium and long term issues • Work with other recovery workgroups and the community to identify issues, needs and aspirations for inclusion into recovery plans

NATURAL

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To minimise public risk and make roads and public land areas safe for emergency services, utilities agencies and residents to enter the disaster affected areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake works to allow safe access for resident and relief and recovery staff, for example dangerous trees and debris on affected roadsides • Work with other environment workgroups to make available community open space and facilities
To minimise the effects of erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake erosion control measures as required to minimize risk of asset failure
To assist with overcoming air, water and soil contamination issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate clean-up efforts and provide for the environmentally responsible disposal of hazardous waste such as asbestos, treated timber residue and chemicals
To facilitate the re-establishment and rehabilitation of the natural environment following the disaster, taking into account the protection and preservation of heritage or cultural sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not an immediate priority for recovery – but will be key focus in medium and longer term</i>
To identify emerging natural environment issues for incorporation into medium and long term recovery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage affected communities in identifying their medium and long term issues • Work with other recovery workgroups and the community to identify issues, needs and aspirations for inclusion into recovery plans • To include environmentally friendly and sustainable energy sources in rebuilt and restored assets

TABLE 3: RECOVERY GOALS AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

ECONOMIC

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To support local businesses to re-establish themselves after the disaster, especially those critical to community re-establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and facilitate the re-establishment where possible of local grocery and fruit and vegetable shops, fuel supplies, hardware newsagent, chemists, doctors and so on • Work with small business mentoring services and business groups to support local businesses • Work with other environment workgroups to address any need for temporary premises • Work with other environment workgroups to address any barriers to suppliers or customers • Encourage donations of cash – to assist distribution of money to affected families which enable them to buy local and support local traders • Encourage non skilled employment in the retail and farming sector • Work with recovery agencies to ensure that vouchers are redeemable at local businesses
To retain and improve the local employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local businesses and business groups to attract local employment and training • Re-establish main employers • Seek government support for employment initiatives
To attract customers back to local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local businesses and business groups to address barriers to customers returning to businesses in local communities, for example tourism operations? • Include messages encouraging people to buy from local businesses and/or tourists to visit and support local businesses in media releases and communication
To reduce immediate and ongoing economic impacts to the community of restoration and rebuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote combined insurance rebuilding plans
To identify emerging economic environment issues for incorporation into medium and long term recovery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage affected communities in identifying their medium and long term issues • Work with other recovery workgroups and the community to identify issues, needs and aspirations for inclusion into recovery plans

TABLE 3: RECOVERY GOALS AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (CONTINUED)

AGRICULTURAL

GOALS	IMMEDIATE ACTIONS
To support the wellbeing of rural communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in community activities and events to support affected communities
To revitalise the economy of rural communities through reestablishment of agricultural enterprises.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice and assistance to affected land holders through workshops, field days and printed material
To address the animal welfare needs of livestock, pets and wildlife in the affected areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other animal welfare groups to coordinate animal welfare services • Arrange urgent stock feed and water • Provide veterinary care to animal welfare cases • Work with partners to coordinate response to wildlife in the affected areas
To identify emerging agricultural environment issues for incorporation into medium and long term recovery plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage affected communities in identifying their medium and long term issues • Work with other recovery workgroups and the community to identify issues, needs and aspirations for inclusion into recovery plans

TIPS

Choose actions that will support the achievement of recovery goals. Draw on what has worked elsewhere or in the past.

Document goals and actions in a simple format and use this to seek community and council endorsement for recovery activity.

Recognise that recovery needs change, sometimes rapidly. Plans and actions need to be flexible and respond to changes in circumstances.

Be prepared to share, communicate and integrate goals with other groups such as regional recovery committees; a regional health board working on a disaster related mental health strategy; or a water catchment board managing vegetation regeneration where council has an interest in public access.

Remember a plan is a guide only – do not continue to deliver services or activities if you have confirmed with the community that they are no longer required and do not miss opportunities just because they are not in the plan. If they support your goals they are probably worth the effort.

IMMEDIATE RECOVERY GOALS AND ACTIONS TOOL



Use this resource to refine immediate recovery goals and actions for consideration and modification by workgroups within the recovery structure.

CHECKING PROGRESS

Once actions are decided it is important to check that they are occurring as intended for example, getting to the right areas and to those in greatest need.

In the first days and weeks this monitoring needs might be quite basic, for example, asking the question:

- ***What has been done for the community? – What and how much has been delivered – to whom and where?***

Most of this information will focus on quantities, for example:

- the number, characteristics and locations of people attending and using specific services
- the time, resources, locations, type and costs associated with infrastructure restoration
- the amount and type of natural environment re-establishment and rehabilitation
- the type and amount of support provided to local businesses.

As time passes monitoring reports might also ask questions such as:

- ***What are the key achievements?***
- ***What has worked well?***
- ***What needs additional effort or improvement?***
- ***What additional recovery needs and issues have been identified?***
- ***What additional support or resources are needed?***

This information will focus on quantities as described above but will add more subjective views and longer term perspectives that examine the quality of what has been done, for example:

- Participant satisfaction with specific services
- Level of and changes in disruption to residents and visitors affected by damaged infrastructure
- Changes in the health, diversity, stability and ecology of the natural environment
- Viability and business prospects of existing local businesses.

Most of the information sources needed to answer these questions will have been identified in preparing for disaster recovery – (see **Book 2 – Recovery readiness: preparation for recovery before a disaster**) and will have been activated to assess need when the disaster struck. It is this information that you will be drawing on for monitoring reports. However, it might also be necessary to establish simple data collection systems for new projects or activities.

TIPS

Start with regular updates of the information used in establishing recovery needs.

Align the monitoring timeframes and frequency with recognised decision making and planning schedules. (Consider weekly reporting initially and extend to monthly quarterly or half yearly as the recovery progresses).

Remember, a single snapshot does not constitute effective monitoring as the changes and the magnitudes are equally important. However, routine monitoring can alert you to areas that require more through consideration.

CHECKING PROGRESS AND RECOVERY PLAN REVIEW TOOL



Use this resource to check progress of immediate recovery actions.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL – ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY RECOVERY COMMITTEES

Following the 2009 Black Saturday fires Wellington Shire Council supported the establishment of several broad based Community Recovery Committees (CRCs).

The CRCs represented their local communities prioritising community issues and developing individual community recovery plans. CRCs then implemented these plans, coordinated projects and ran activities, supported by Wellington Shire Council recovery staff and stakeholder agencies.

COMMUNICATION

ACTIVATING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communication is a prime tool of successful recovery and a key component in developing and monitoring recovery initiatives. Messages about disaster relief and disaster recovery will circulate around affected communities from a whole range of sources, some informed and some not. Council's immediate task is to provide communication that is relevant, timely, clear, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent.

As the disaster might have damaged previous communication channels, an immediate assessment of what avenues of communication are available will be critical.

Keeping in touch with people who might be evacuated or otherwise dispersed will make communication even more challenging.

TIPS

Review your communication options to make sure communications are effective across the municipality, including being tailored to each locality and population group.

Collect contact information as soon as possible from affected persons and communities, for example, those attending recovery centres.

RECOVERY COMMUNICATION MAPPING TOOL



Use this resource to review and update mapping of communications channels after the disaster.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

In the interests of expediency in disaster situations and to reduce the need for people to repeat their traumatic stories, exemptions from privacy legislation can apply. This means for example, that Telstra might be able to provide a list of telephone numbers for an affected community to enable recovery related communication such as an invitation to a community recovery meeting, without breaching the legislation.

Protocols regarding sharing information are best negotiated as a recovery readiness activity. However, such protocols might still be required at this stage if they are not in place.

TIP

Read the Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner, 2010, *Info Sheet on Emergencies and Privacy*¹ to gain guidance on these matters.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Given the developments in technology, social media should be used along with more traditional methods in the communication process.

Given the prevalence and resilience of mobile technology information is no longer limited to that released by authorised sources through formal media. Facebook, text messaging, Twitter and other technologies have become widespread with the risk that inaccurate information can circulate quickly and is not always helpful or constructive.

A SEARCH FOR BODIES?

During the aftermath of a major bushfire where there was extensive property loss, community members saw police officers in white overalls searching through the debris of destroyed houses. Some assumed that the police were looking for or had found bodies and communicated this via social media. This reached the broadcast media who then announced that the police were looking for bodies in the fire area.

This was not the case and the police department had to correct this information reporting that they were not conducting a search for bodies.

Indeed no lives were lost in the disaster and the social media reports had created a level of anxiety among that community that was unfounded and unhelpful.

While research suggests that misinformation of this kind tends to be addressed by users of social media themselves, and that this is assisted by 'myth-busting' by recovery agencies (as demonstrated by the police action in the example above), damage can be done in the meantime.

On the positive side, these same technologies operate quickly after a disaster, connect people wherever they have dispersed to and provide an effective option for canvassing community opinions and gathering real time on-the-ground intelligence. This capacity can be used to go direct to the community to seek reports and obtain immediate consultation feedback. Providing online access and phone chargers is an increasing need at many relief and recovery centres.

This highlights the need for proactive and accurate communication being driven by the recovery communications workgroup and council's recovery structure – with a capacity to provide information that is right and to correct misinformation provided by other unauthorised sources. For example, while a report that 100 homes have been lost might be technically correct, it can create a more accurate community perception to also report that 60 of them were holiday homes.

TIPS

Develop or review council's social media policy to reflect the way this technology is likely to be used by the community in recovery.

Develop council's own social media capacity.

Directly connect council's posts with those of the disaster. Pick up on the recovery by ensuring the appropriate # tags on council's posts.

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL – SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

Following the 2013 Aberfeldy fires, established community groups within the Seaton and surrounding areas, worked closely with Wellington Shire Council and service agencies, such as Rotary Australia, to support their residents and improve facilities in their areas.

Interaction with these groups and improved communication, have assisted in the recovery process for these communities.

LATROBE CITY COUNCIL – ADDRESSING GENDER SPECIFIC RECOVERY

Latrobe City Council organised gender specific workshops and activities to engage people in different neighbourhoods following the 2009 Black Saturday fires. The workshops looked at the impact of the fires on individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities.

Women's activities would include a two course meal. This workshop was held about two weeks before the men's workshop and included information and approaches to assist the participants to encourage men to attend workshops over dinner too.

Workshops were also promoted as 'bring a friend' to assist those who did not want to attend on their own, and all workshops included take home gifts – flowers for women and other practical and useful items for men.

A counsellor from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement was based in the council office and part of their role was to work on support material for distribution at the workshops and in the community. They also developed workshop activities and support materials to focus on the future, particularly understanding trauma and its potential impacts and building understanding of how men and women often react differently to a traumatic experience.

Prompting questions like – *'where do you hope to be in 6 and 12 months' time?'* and *'what might be useful to help you get there, and when you get there?'* The information gathered was also useful for recovery planning at a neighbourhood level and identified what was normal in the situation following a disaster, reducing isolation and identifying common themes and concerns.

Following the separate workshops, neighbourhood events were organised to bring the women and men together. The process highlighted common effects of disaster trauma on health and wellbeing – helping to explain to participants some of their experiences of increased incidents of shingles, voice loss, sleeplessness and involuntary facial movements.

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL – SERVICE PROVIDER COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

In the aftermath of the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires, Community Centres and Multi-purpose Centres were used as recovery centres to assist Wallan and Wandong communities through the recovery efforts.

These recovery centres housed many organisations and support services specific to bushfire recovery. The recovery centre permitted services to coordinate their efforts, learn from each other's work and network – providing a 'one stop shop' to assist the community.

Assistance from neighbouring shires in both the recovery centres and on the ground contributed to a coordinated recovery. This approach assisted with the large workload involved in the disaster aftermath in small townships and rural districts.

CAPACITY BUILDING

SUPPORTING SKILLED RECOVERY

In the immediate period following the disaster, the opportunity to undertake extensive capacity building of the community and stakeholders will be severely limited. Councils will need to be able to recognise capacity that already exists in the community and mobilise and support it for local recovery purposes.

As specific recovery needs emerge however, and organisations and individuals are designated to recovery roles and functions, rapid inductions and skills development will be needed.

Councils need to have resources in place, ready to take up the immediate capacity building and community development initiatives required.

Much of the capacity building in this time immediately after the disaster will be reactive, and councils need the ability to identify and respond to capacity building needs quickly.

TIPS

Get community development officers on the ground quickly to identify and pursue capacity building needs of existing and emergent groups.

Customise and distribute information and resources (some of which may have been drafted before the event), to organisations and groups.

Tap into the capacity building and community development resources and expertise available through neighbouring councils, regional committees and councils in other areas offering resources and support.

Coach and mentor individuals and organisations in areas where skills and/or additional capacity is required, including facilitating communication and debriefing processes.

Undertake or arrange specific and key roles, such as chairing a community meeting using skilled people able to manage the emotions and dynamics of the situation.

Support existing local community committees or organisations such as township community associations, residents associations, progress associations or resilience committees in the affected areas taking on recovery roles.

Support the establishment of new community recovery and resilience groups where they do not exist in the local affected areas, ensuring that new groups are representative of the community and inclusive. Support might include resources, administrative support, facilitation and mentoring.

Councils are in a unique position to provide an 'arm's length' role in local communities. Where community leadership is evolving, Councils can provide services such as chairing meetings, managing election processes, and acting as a neutral third party in dispute resolution.

Initiate and model tasks with an expectation that they will be taken over by other groups in the community over time. Consciously plan for a supported transition for this to occur – for example, council may arrange and lead the first couple of community meetings, however, the clear expectation is that this should lead to a community-led committee which council would support and mentor to build its capacity as it becomes established and operational.

BAW BAW SHIRE COUNCIL - SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

Following the 2009 Black Saturday fires, Baw Baw Shire Council supported a number of local community initiatives such as:

Employing a Youth project officer who ran many very successful events for fire affected young people such as trips to the snow, beach, camps and so on. There was also a 'Youth Lounge' developed at Labertouche that was open to young people on Friday nights. They could play games, listen to music or just sit around on bean bags and chat.

Community Gardens were constructed at the Nilma, Labertouche and Drouin West primary schools, which have been well received by the school communities.

Jindivick community developed Nangarra Reserve, improving the walking tracks, adding bollards and artworks throughout the reserve and including a 'pause place' where anyone can come, sit and contemplate. There is also a second 'pause place' at the other end of Jindivick that was built on the Kidd Park Reserve where the cricket ground is located. Eventually the town of Jindivick would like to see a walking track linking both. There is a fantastic community garden at Kidd Park Reserve that was established using bushfire funding and that addressed needs identified in the local Community Recovery Plan - specifically, for members of the community to get together with sculptures, colour, garden beds, history and humour.

MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE COUNCIL - WORKING TOWARDS RECOVERY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The Recovery Arts project was a way for the young people in the Maldon and Baringhup areas to express their views on disasters in an artistic way. This was undertaken through a series of workshops.

Another Arts Project - *Young West* was first launched as a series of portraits of young people from the west of Mount Alexander Shire, identified and produced with assistance by young people. The images were made into one metre high laminated banners and exhibited outside the Centre during the Maldon Artists' Walk coinciding with the Castlemaine State Festival. The portraits were then displayed in shop windows in Maldon. They continued to be displayed at various community events and programs. Various activities, events and communications were promoted by a *Young West* Facebook page group.

Young West Facebook page and three vimeo productions - go to <https://vimeo.com/66715274> and <https://vimeo.com/66708886> and <https://vimeo.com/66708884>

MURRINDINDI SHIRE COUNCIL - USING EXPERIENCE TO SUPPORT OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Murrindindi Shire Council made staff available to Mitchell Shire Council following the recent fires in 2014, to share some of the lessons from the Murrindindi experience. This provided some insights into what Mitchell Shire Council would be facing and solving problems on the run.

'Information sharing and experience of emergency events is something acknowledged at state, regional and local levels of government that needs to be captured and planned for. Councils and other response and recovery agencies understand the hazards and associated risks, it's what government collectively with its respective communities can do to reduce these risks and provide clear messaging about why it is important for us all to take responsibility for where we choose to live.'

The longer term capacity building needs that require more strategic thought and planning should be identified and addressed in a more proactive manner by the recovery structure.

NEXT STEPS

To respond to recovery needs when a disaster strikes review your council's existing recovery processes and plans and commence implementation.

Use the following checklists to assess the status of your recovery response in the first days and weeks.

MAYOR AND COUNCILLOR IMMEDIATE RECOVERY RESPONSE REVIEW

Immediate recovery roles are understood and carried out	<input type="checkbox"/>
Satisfied that their council is responding to immediate identified needs in appropriate ways	<input type="checkbox"/>

CEO IMMEDIATE RECOVERY RESPONSE REVIEW

Legislative responsibilities are met	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governance mechanisms are activated and understood across council and by partners	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adequate resources (physical, financial and human resources) are allocated to emergency management including recovery to meet legislative responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immediate recovery actions are implemented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special financial cost centres are established, activated and monitored	<input type="checkbox"/>

CROSS-COUNCIL IMMEDIATE RECOVERY RESPONSE REVIEW

Governance mechanisms are activated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for community-led recovery are supported	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrangements and agreements with partners are reviewed and triggered	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication channels are reviewed and activated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social, built, economic and natural needs of the community are assessed and monitored	<input type="checkbox"/>
Draft Goals across each of the five environments are reviewed and actions agreed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adequately skilled people are deployed to implement these actions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilities and resources are mobilised to meet their role in recovery	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vulnerable populations have been identified and responses implemented	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local communities are adequately informed of disaster risks and recovery activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local businesses, including primary producers, are adequately informed of disaster risks and recovery activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Roads and other transport access infrastructure is maintained to meet their role in recovery	<input type="checkbox"/>
The progress and effectiveness of recovery actions is routinely checked	<input type="checkbox"/>

Take action to address any gaps or deficiencies in immediate recovery 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.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner, 2010, *Info Sheet on Emergencies and Privacy*, OVPC, Melbourne

[www.privacy.vic.gov.au/privacy/web2.nsf/files/emergencies-and-privacy/\\$file/info_sheet_02_10.pdf](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/privacy/web2.nsf/files/emergencies-and-privacy/$file/info_sheet_02_10.pdf)

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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