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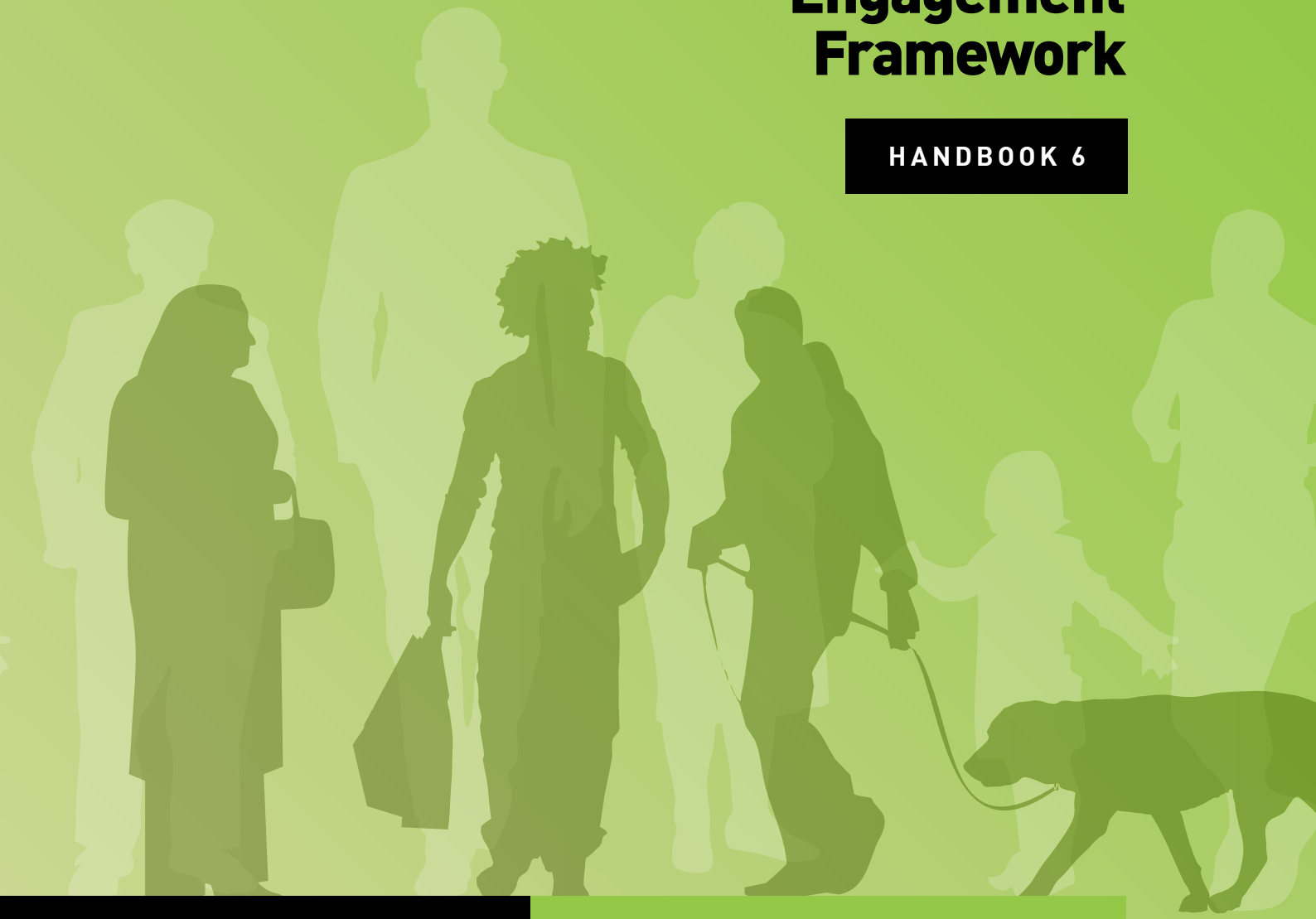
Emergency Management Australia

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RESILIENCE

Community Engagement Framework

HANDBOOK 6



DISASTER RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
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AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK SERIES

Building a disaster resilient Australia

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR
DISASTER RESILIENCE

Community Engagement Framework

HANDBOOK 6

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History of the Manual/Handbook Series

The first publication in the original Australian Emergency Manual Series (Handbook Series) of mainly skills reference manuals was produced in 1989. In August 1996, on advice from the National Emergency Management Principles and Practice Advisory Group, the Handbook Series was expanded to include a more comprehensive range of emergency management principles and practice reference publications.

The Handbook Series has been developed to help the management and delivery of support services in a disaster context. It comprises principles, strategies and actions compiled by practitioners with management and service-delivery experience in a range of disaster events.

The series has been developed by a national consultative committee representing a range of state and territory agencies involved in the delivery of support services, and is sponsored by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. The series was expanded to introduce handbooks so that it would better align with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

Details of the Handbook Series are available at **www.em.gov.au**.

Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series (2011–)

Handbook 1	Disaster Health
Handbook 2	Community Recovery
Handbook 3	Managing Exercises
Handbook 4	Evacuation Planning
Handbook 5	Communicating with People with a Disability—*National Guidelines for Emergency Managers*
Handbook 6	Community Engagement Framework

Australian Emergency Manual Series Principles and Reference (1996–2011)

Manual 2	Australian Emergency Management Arrangements
Manual 3	Australian Emergency Management Glossary
Manual 4	Australian Emergency Management Terms Thesaurus
Manual 18	Community and Personal Support Services
Manual 29	Community Development in Recovery from Disaster

Manual 15	Community Emergency Planning
Manual 27	Disaster Loss Assessment Guidelines
Manual 28	Economic and Financial Aspects of Disaster Recovery
Manual 8	Emergency Catering
Manual 1	Emergency Management Concepts and Principles
Manual 23	Emergency Management Planning for Floods Affected by Dams
Manual 5	Emergency Risk Management—*Applications Guide*
Manual 43	Emergency Planning
Manual 20	Flood Preparedness
Manual 22	Flood Response
Manual 21	Flood Warning
Manual 44	Guidelines for Emergency Management in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities
Manual 25	Guidelines for Psychological Services: Emergency Managers Guide
Manual 26	Guidelines for Psychological Services: Mental Health Practitioners Guide
Manual 45	Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Education Programs
Manual 13	Health Aspects of Chemical, Biological and Radiological Hazards
Manual 6	Implementing Emergency Risk Management—*A Facilitator's Guide to Working with Committees and Communities*
Manual 19	Managing the Floodplain
Manual 17	Multi-Agency Incident Management
Manual 31	Operations Centre Management
Manual 7	Planning Safer Communities—*Land Use Planning for Natural Hazards*
Manual 14	Post Disaster Survey and Assessment
Manual 24	Reducing the Community Impact of Landslides
Manual 12	Safe and Healthy Mass Gatherings
Manual 41	Small Group Training Management
Manual 46	Tsunami
Manual 16	Urban Search and Rescue—*Capability Guidelines for Structural Collapse*

Skills for Emergency Services Personnel Series (1989)

Manual 38	Communications
Manual 39	Flood Rescue Boat Operation
Manual 37	Four Wheel Drive Vehicle Operation
Manual 35	General and Disaster Rescue
Manual 33	Land Search Operations *(refer to website http://natsar.amsa.gov.au/Manuals/index.asp.)*
Manual 32	Leadership
Manual 36	Map Reading and Navigation
Manual 34	Road Rescue
Manual 30	Storm and Water Damage Operations information may not be appropriate to all situations.

Executive Summary

This Community Engagement Framework is a key component in the implementation of the Council of Australian Governments' National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. The Framework directly supports the Strategy's direction for a national emergency management approach based on achieving community and organisational resilience.

The purpose of this Framework is to provide guidance for those working in emergency management to effectively engage with the community. It supports the Strategy by outlining a shared understanding of community engagement values, principles and practice in Australia. It is intended that the Framework will be used by state, territory and local government agencies with a role in emergency management, as well as non-government emergency management practitioners.

This Framework has been developed by the Community Engagement Sub-committee of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee and has been informed by a national workshop of senior emergency management and community engagement professionals held at the Australian Emergency Management Institute, Mount Macedon, in September 2012, as part of a formal consultation process. It incorporates a community engagement model for emergency management, which was developed at the national workshop and draws on the internationally recognised Public Participation Spectrum of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

This Framework builds on research and analysis in the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs* to reflect an 'evolving conversation' in education, engagement and building disaster resilience.

It was nationally approved by Ministers at the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management meeting on 4–5 July 2013.

Introduction

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (the Strategy) recognises that emergency management is a shared responsibility for all of society. It is important for those working in emergency management to understand the key role the community plays in contributing to its own safety, and to develop and strengthen the partnership between emergency management agencies and the community.

What is community engagement?

There are many different kinds of communities, including communities of place, interest, belief and circumstance. Communities are dynamic—they change over time and interact in different ways.

Community engagement, for the purpose of this Framework, is the process of stakeholders working together to build resilience through collaborative action, shared capacity building and the development of strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect.

This nationally agreed Framework provides guidance for effective community engagement across the emergency management sector, while acknowledging there is no one-size-fits-all approach—each community is different as is the context for engaging the community.

Many emergency services organisations, not-for-profit or non-government organisations, the private sector and other stakeholders already have their own methods for engaging with the community. These methods are tailored to their experience, priorities and objectives. This Framework should be considered alongside such existing community engagement arrangements. It encourages those working in emergency management or with related responsibilities to consider best practice when engaging with the community, including the importance of evaluating effectiveness of their engagement and a commitment to its continuous improvement.

A changing approach to emergency management

> *We need to develop and embed new ways of doing things that enhance existing arrangements across and within governments, as well as among businesses, the not-for-profit sector, and the community more broadly, to improve disaster resilience.*
>
> **National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, p 1.**

A 'community safety approach' to building disaster resilience recognises active engagement with and empowerment of the community as central to achieving resilience over the long term. This approach does not reduce government or agency responsibility in emergency management, but strengthens community participation and influence. It recognises that resilience is enhanced when communities play a key role in their own safety.

Whilst an approach that seeks to empower communities is relatively new in the emergency management sector, it has been the basis of community development work over many decades, particularly in the social sciences. Connecting with the knowledge and expertise in this field will build capacity within the sector and demonstrate sound community engagement practice.

Working with communities

Disaster resilience is based upon existing strengths and relationships. Individuals and communities are the starting point to build disaster resilience and the way to work with communities is to connect with what is already there. At a practical level this means working in partnership with the community, building on existing networks, resources and strengths, identifying and supporting the development of community leaders and empowering the community to exercise choice and take responsibility. It means adopting flexible approaches in the way we communicate with, and within, communities. This concept requires decision makers to recognise the fundamental role of social capital and social resources in building disaster resilient communities.

Engagement as core business

In the emergency management sector, community engagement has often been seen as peripheral to the core business of emergency management organisations. This means that embedding engagement within the culture and practice of emergency management organisations is a key challenge for the future. Such a change requires sustained resourcing, commitment and cross-sectoral partnerships, as well as new ways of measuring and evaluating success.

An important aspect of this shift is for organisations to build their capacity and capability to undertake community engagement activities. Resourcing and supporting community engagement is a front-end investment that ultimately builds the capacity of organisations and communities to work more effectively together. Sustainable engagement requires substantial resources. This does not necessarily mean more money and people, but requires time to identify and develop different skills, bring existing know-how to the process and build partnerships and networks. Every community has capabilities, experience and local knowledge that it can contribute. Engaging a community in how it can prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies is more likely to result in decisions and outcomes the community is confident about and will act upon, and this in turn will support the work of emergency management organisations.

Where resources are to be invested in community engagement activities it is important to know whether or not such activities are making a difference. An early part of the engagement process should be to understand and agree what is expected of the process and to establish measures that are meaningful for communities and agencies, against which the engagement process can be assessed.

Effective engagement across the emergency management spectrum

Effective community engagement should be part of day-to-day business in the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery phases of emergency management. Communities need to be engaged before, during and after major emergency events. As the different phases of emergency management overlap and intersect, different types of engagement will be necessary.

Provision of information has a useful role but is rarely effective in isolation from more interactive strategies. Different types of engagement and levels of community involvement are required for different phases of an emergency. For example, when preparing a town fire plan, a collaborative approach incorporating community experience, priorities and knowledge is appropriate. However, when a fire threatens a town, the legislated obligations of response agencies to manage emergencies will mean a command-and-control approach, that provides clear direction and information for the community, is likely to be necessary. Experience shows that relief and recovery are most effective when led by an empowered community working in partnership with government and emergency management organisations.

Effective engagement is complex and requires a long-term commitment to build and maintain relationships with the community. Organisations must be clear about the purpose of the engagement in any particular phase of an emergency, what the engagement aims to achieve, and the degree of influence a community is able to have. Being upfront and clear about the engagement process is essential for establishing and maintaining trust.

Community engagement model

To assist practitioners in their work with communities, this Framework incorporates a model that details principles and approaches of community engagement in the emergency management context (Figure 1). The model draws on the internationally recognised International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum*—a tool designed to assist community engagement practitioners select the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program.

It builds on the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs* which emphasise the importance of localised programs and activities, establishing an evidence base to inform future activity, and striking an appropriate balance between agency operational requirements and specialist expertise on the one hand and community expertise and participation in planning, decision-making, preparation, response and recovery activities on the other.

Weblinks

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
Public Participation Spectrum

www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum

Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness and Engagement Programs, Manual 45, Australian Emergency Management Handbook and Manual Series

www.em.gov.au/Documents/Bookmarked%20PDF.PDF

Fig 1 Community Engagement Model for Emergency Management

The Community Engagement Model for Emergency Management is circular to show that one engagement approach is not necessarily better than any other, and that different approaches are legitimate depending on the purpose and context of a particular situation.

The model makes clear that for all types of engagement it is essential to be guided by community engagement principles, to understand the broader context of the engagement, and have a clear purpose for engaging the community in the first place.

Good engagement practice relies on choosing the right approach or combination of approaches for engagement in different situations.

Principles of effective community engagement

There are three fundamental principles for effective community engagement in the emergency management context. Each of these principles is supported by some key actions.

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

The knowledge, experience and shared history of communities are invaluable resources that emergency management practitioners should draw upon. Communities know how they functioned pre-disaster and what they aspire to post-disaster. They can be trusted to identify solutions to mitigate against the risks they face.

Understanding communities is the first step in harnessing this knowledge and effective community engagement practitioners recognise this and take the time to appreciate the environment they will operate in. This involves identifying and understanding networks and relationships, and working in partnership with existing and emerging community groups and leaders. Developing understanding involves putting time and effort into creating trust and building relationships across all phases of emergency management: before, during and after an event. It recognises that community engagement in the emergency management context is a long-term process and, to be most effective, must take place well before an event occurs and continue long after it is over. It is a two-way communication process where each participant can learn and benefit from the knowledge and experience of the other. People will get involved and stay engaged if their input is respected and valued.

Understanding the community involves:

- respecting and using local knowledge and experience
- tapping into existing networks
- identifying and acknowledging community capability and sharing resources
- appreciating the risks faced by communities
- assessing risk and levels of community awareness and preparedness.

2. Recognise complexity

Effective community engagement recognises the inherent complexity in engaging with the community. It embraces community diversity, including groups or individuals with specific vulnerabilities, and formulates strategies to engage in meaningful, inclusive and culturally appropriate ways. To be effective, practitioners will seek to understand the needs of the community, taking into account gender, age, culture, ability, and challenges such as geographic isolation, inadequate services or infrastructure, transient populations, accessibility issues and entrenched disadvantage. Practitioners must also recognise that in any community there will be differences of opinion, experience, knowledge, resources and capacity.

Community engagement that recognises complexity involves:

- embracing and respecting difference and diversity, including different perceptions of risk
- using genuinely respectful and flexible approaches
- identifying and addressing barriers to engagement and making participation accessible to all
- recognising that communities evolve and change over time.

3. Partner with the community to support existing networks and resources

Every community has networks, structures and ways of working that are familiar and meaningful to its members. The formation of partnerships that connect with and reflect these characteristics is crucial to effective community engagement. Partnerships should be based on mutual interests, values and goals for increased disaster resilience, creating a sense of shared responsibility, and a commitment to coordinated planning and response. Partnerships are about community members being 'at the table', being listened to, and being able to influence and make decisions on issues that affect themselves and their community. Often the most complex and pressing problems are resolved through engagement with local knowledge, experience and capabilities.

Partnering with the community to support existing networks and resources involves:

- building and maintaining partnerships
- fostering relationships with community leaders
- respecting community choices
- aligning emergency management activities to build on existing social capital
- identifying and employing strategies that empower local action.

Context and purpose of community engagement in emergency management

Sound community engagement requires an understanding of the context, and a clearly defined purpose, for the engagement. These are described below.

Community engagement context

All engagement activities occur in a wider context and it is essential to identify and understand this context, including:

- ✓ existing strengths, capacity and capabilities within the community
- ✓ key risks that the community face
- ✓ the community profile—including the diverse needs, values, perspectives, priorities and expectations of the community
- ✓ the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of organisations
- ✓ the phases of emergency management and long-term nature of community engagement including before, during and after events
- ✓ the scale of the engagement to be undertaken, for example, at a household or wider level
- ✓ time, resources and skills needed for the engagement activity.

Community engagement purpose

All engagement activities should have a clearly defined purpose. This means having a clear understanding of:

- ✓ what the engagement aims to achieve
- ✓ who the key decision makers and key stakeholders are
- ✓ what issues or questions are negotiable with the community
- ✓ what is within scope and what is out of scope
- ✓ both stakeholder and agency interpretation of the issue/concern/question being addressed, and whether either need more information
- ✓ the preparedness of people to engage
- ✓ the resources required to undertake the engagement and whether they are available.

Community engagement elements

The model outlines five elements of engagement—information, participation, consultation, collaboration and empowerment—with each having a particular goal. Any given engagement activity may incorporate one, several, or all elements, depending on the required outcome of the activity.

The goal of each of these five elements and some key considerations are described below.

1. Information

Goal: Sharing information with and between communities and agencies to come to a mutual understanding. Everyone is informed and able to take responsibility for decisions and actions.

- ✓ Communication is relevant, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent
- ✓ Communication is two-way
- ✓ Information is accessible to audiences in diverse situations, addresses a variety of communication needs and is provided through a range of channels
- ✓ Mechanisms are established to ensure coordinated communication with organisations and individuals
- ✓ Key messages are repeated.

2. Participation

Goal: Building connected networks and relationships, ownership and trust through active involvement.

- ✓ The community has an opportunity to be actively involved in decisions or actions that potentially affect or interest them
- ✓ There are multiple entry points or pathways to participate
- ✓ The community has the opportunity to input into how they want to participate
- ✓ Participation is possible for all members of the community.

3. Consultation

Goal: Sharing information, questions or positions to obtain ideas, feedback, knowledge or an understanding of objectives and expectations.

- ✓ Sufficient time is allowed for the community to consider an issue or question and provide input, and for agencies to consider this feedback
- ✓ The consultation process is as broad as possible while appropriate to the scope of the issue
- ✓ Opportunities are created so that many voices can be heard
- ✓ Information received from the community is recorded, stored and used appropriately
- ✓ The community is informed as to how their input is considered and influences outcomes.

4. Collaboration

Goal: Partnering with communities to support action, including developing alternatives and identifying a preferred solution..

- ✓ Opportunities are created for the community to take action in areas that could affect their lives
- ✓ Relationships are developed where agencies and organisations work collectively with the community—each contributing their share
- ✓ There is recognition and communication of the needs and interests of all participants, including decisions makers/agencies
- ✓ Seeking out and facilitating involvement of all who are potentially affected by or interested in a particular issue.

5. Empowerment

Goal: Individuals and communities have capacity to understand risk and accept responsibility and implement initiatives.

- ✓ Knowledge is shared between agencies and the community
- ✓ The community leads and owns the process
- ✓ Joint action and inclusion leads to empowered individuals and communities
- ✓ Opportunities for deliberation are an integral part of the process.

Conclusion

Every year, Australian communities face devastating losses caused by disasters. Floods, bushfires, storms, other hazards and their associated consequences have significant impacts on communities, the economy, infrastructure and the environment. Given the increasing regularity and severity of natural disasters, developing Australia's capacity to withstand and recover from them is critical.

This Framework provides guiding principles for engaging with Australian communities as vital partners in building disaster resilience. It focuses on strengthening existing social networks and assets fundamental to community resilience. Community engagement approaches should build upon and connect the knowledge, experience and strengths of the community, with the expertise, resources and capabilities of emergency management agencies and organisations. Establishing these partnerships requires long-term commitment, cooperation and goodwill. It is a challenging and complex process that is critical to ensure more resilient communities and better outcomes for all Australians.

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Further Resources

Further resources for community engagement in emergency management, including case studies and practitioner forums, can be found on the Australian Emergency Management Knowledge Hub **www.emknowledge.gov.au**.

Australian Emergency Management Website www.em.gov.au