



Community Based Emergency Management

Working together - before, during and after

Overview

May 2016

Working in conjunction
with Communities,
Government, Agencies
and Business

Message from the Commissioner



Our vision of building safer and more resilient communities can be achieved by working together before, during and after emergencies.

Introducing a community based approach toward emergency management aims to support communities and organisations to better connect and make safer and more informed decisions. This includes enabling people to work together and build on combined strengths, with appropriate support from their community, emergency management agencies, government, business, industry and non-government organisations.

Working together as part of the community creates opportunities for people to learn from each other, while tapping into combined local knowledge, expertise and resources. Building on these strengths can support communities and organisations to develop and achieve mutual goals and solutions, while strengthening relationships that can also support people to cope during critical times of need.

A key part of this community based approach includes developing and using collaborative decision making processes to make more informed decisions. Empowering community members to lead these processes before, during and after emergencies provides opportunities for communities and organisations to offer different types and levels of support to overcome challenges.

Introducing this approach enables people from communities, emergency management agencies, local government and other partners to work together as part of the community. This includes working together to develop and use tailored processes for people to participate in the decision making processes that affect them. These inclusive processes can empower community members including local volunteers and staff, to consider and support a range of views and different perspectives through their networks. This is vital in better connecting and understanding the values and strengths of the community, while considering the emergency scenarios that may occur where we live, work and spend our time. Supporting each other to better understand the potential impacts and develop solutions, is a key contribution toward managing long term stresses and coping with shocks including emergencies.

Further developing and using this approach acknowledges the research, feedback and advice of the many volunteers and staff who are already working together, from within and outside the emergency management sector. This approach recognises their leadership in supporting communities and organisations to develop a sense of ownership and appropriately share responsibilities as part of an ongoing process.

Continuing to work together to introduce, use and improve these processes will provide opportunities to influence everyday decision making processes. Integration with broader programs, projects and activities will also provide opportunities to build safer and more resilient communities through a modern emergency management system in Victoria.

Craig Lapsley
Emergency Management Commissioner

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Introduction

The Victorian emergency management sector is supporting people to participate in building safer and more resilient communities. This includes exploring different ways for communities and organisations to connect and support each other before, during and after emergencies.

This *Community Based Emergency Management Overview* provides key information for communities and organisations to better understand and participate in further developing and using a community based approach. It aims to guide people to build on combined strengths, by working together to identify local priorities and develop mutual goals and solutions. This includes building relationships and using locally tailored processes for communities, emergency management agencies, government, business, industry and non-government organisations to participate in decision making processes that affect them.

Adopting and using this local planning and engagement approach recognises that people can support each other to make safer and more informed decisions by combining local knowledge, expertise and resources. This includes building on the experience and efforts of community members, acknowledging that local volunteers and staff are often well-connected and already working together as part of the community.

By using this overview, you will be able to use the community based principles, processes and supporting information to assist your community to better plan, respond and recover from emergencies, with the support of the emergency management sector in Victoria.

Who should use this Overview?

Communities

People who are interested in working together before, during and after emergencies

Emergency management agencies

Volunteers and staff who work with communities to prepare, respond and recover from emergencies

Government

People from local, state and federal governments who support community development and emergency management programs

Business and industry

People from different types of business and industry that work with, or influence the community

Community Service Organisations

People from non-government organisations and the not for profit sector who work with communities at the local level

Community based facilitators

Skilled, experienced and connected facilitators who support people to collaboratively make decisions

What is the vision?

The vision for the Victorian emergency management sector is to 'build safer and more resilient communities'.

Building safer and more resilient communities is an ongoing process, requiring strong connections and partnerships between communities, emergency management agencies, all levels of government, business, industry and non-government organisations, including the not for profit sector.

This overview provides key information to describe a collaborative planning and engagement approach for communities and organisations. This approach aims to guide a range of different people to connect and build on combined strengths, while better understanding the likely impacts and consequences of emergencies that may affect them. Working together to develop and use local processes also aims to build relationships and the capacity to manage long term *chronic stresses* such as drought, while better preparing to cope and recover from *acute shocks*, such as fires, floods and storms.

Building safer and more resilient communities is an ongoing process that will require different types and levels of engagement and support over time. This planning and engagement approach aims to empower communities and organisations to be innovative in developing and achieving mutual short, medium and long term goals.

What is a safer and more resilient community?

Safer and more resilient communities are connected communities.

They are healthy and knowledgeable, with the ability to assess, monitor and manage risks, while learning new skills and building on past experiences.

The people have the capacity to identify problems, establish priorities and act, with the support of good infrastructure and services.

Safer and more resilient communities are flexible and resourceful, together with the capacity to accept uncertainty and proactively respond to change.

(Adapted from 'Characteristics of a Safe and Resilient Community' - Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Study ARUP International Development – September 2011© International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2012 <http://www.ifrc.org/>)

Why do we need this approach?

More extremes, more often

Our communities are experiencing more extreme weather events and new types of stresses and shocks. These can have devastating and long lasting impacts for people and the social, economic and environmental assets, values and support systems that are important to them.

Every community is different

Working together provides opportunities to understand the community context including priorities, needs and different perspectives. Building connections and relationships also enables people to combine skills, expertise and resources to manage changing needs and demands over time.

Learning from experience

Capacity building requires a different approach from government and agencies, where communities can be supported to take the lead in planning and decision making processes before, during and after emergencies. These processes take time and organisations can become enablers and advocates for community led initiatives and activities.

Building safer and more resilient communities

Building safer and more resilient communities is often discussed but not well understood. This community based approach aims to support communities and organisations to better connect and build stronger relationships, so that people can respectfully challenge and empower each other to continually learn and improve.

'Bottom up approaches will inevitably involve local debate and negotiation requiring communities and agencies to find new ways of working together.'

(Bushfire Safety Policy Framework)

Changes in emergency management

Emergency management agencies are to provide appropriate support through coordinated 'joined-up' processes under the all 'communities, all emergencies' approach.

This includes building and maintaining connections before, during and after emergencies.

Challenging traditions and organisational culture

Influencing the emergency management sector to use community-based approaches through 'joined-up' processes may require realignment of resources and priorities, together with a shift away from traditional top down attitudes, behaviours and organisational culture.

Changing legislation and government policies

The Australian and Victorian Government support the development of partnerships and approaches where communities and organisations can appropriately share responsibilities and build resilience.

Emergency management planning

Emergency planning processes have traditionally focussed on plans with one hazard type, often managed by a single agency with separate community engagement and education activities. Community based emergency management supports communities and organisations to identify and plan for likely scenarios under the all communities, all emergencies approach. This approach can be adapted to support integration with other programs and projects including community development initiatives.

What is community based emergency management?

Community based emergency management is a collaborative planning and engagement approach, designed to support communities and organisations in developing a safer, more resilient and sustainable future.

This is an ongoing process, where the collective local knowledge, expertise and resources can support people to work together and build on combined strengths. Working together to adopt and use these processes through the development of mutual goals and solutions can strengthen relationships to be drawn upon during good times and critical times of need. Maintaining these processes and relationships before, during and after emergencies also aims to build the capacity and capability to manage long term chronic stresses and cope with acute shocks, including future emergency situations.

Community based emergency management supports communities and organisations to work together and plan for emergencies by understanding:

- **The people** who live, work in and visit the community
- **The assets, values and support systems** of these people, including what they see as important
- **Local priorities** including the likely emergency scenarios that may affect the community
- **What can be done**, including what is already in place, what is considered acceptable and what can be improved
- **The goals and actions** to be completed by organisations, communities and organisations together, and by community members themselves, and
- **Different ways of learning and working together** before, during and after times of need.

The approach supports building community safety and resilience levels by providing:

- **A consistent and recognised approach** for communities to use by connecting local networks, with the support of emergency management agencies and local government
- **Opportunities for other partners** such as other levels of government, business, industry and non-government organisations to become involved
- **A process for working together that builds on local strengths**, by using the combined local knowledge, expertise and resources of the community and supporting organisations
- **Key contacts and supporting information** to build on experience and guide communities and organisations toward collaboratively working together at the local level
- **Locally tailored and facilitated processes** that support the community to overcome challenges and develop opportunities, with appropriate types and levels of support
- **Connections with local leaders and networks** to be used before, during and after emergencies, and
- **Opportunities for community led initiatives to deliver community based outcomes** by working together to develop tailored processes, activities and usable products, rather than focussing on producing plans and outputs.

The community based emergency management approach is based upon:

- **Recognising the history of the community** including past experiences and efforts of the people who have contributed toward making the community what it is today
- **Collaborative decision making** through the development and use of locally tailored and appropriately facilitated processes to plan for the future
- **Working together** to collectively understand the strengths and challenges
- **Recognising different types of communities**, including those that are:
 - Establishing and working together through community-led processes
 - Facing significant issues including long term stresses potential impacts from shocks, and
 - Recovering from recent impacts and events
- **Local leadership** through trusted people and potential leaders, including the community volunteers and staff from organisations who are often the 'quiet achievers'
- **Building on community strengths** including local people, processes and networks
- **Using local community networks** to connect and support the community to overcome challenges, develop opportunities, and
- **Developing community based goals and solutions** in an emergency management context, with the potential for integration into broader community development programs and processes.

Guiding principles

The principles that underpin the community based approach are:

- Each community is unique, with existing and evolving levels of safety and resilience
- Locally tailored planning and engagement processes are to support community and organisational leadership, through the development of mutual goals and solutions
- These processes draw upon combined community and organisational strengths
- Information may be captured in a plan, but developing a plan is not the reason to work together
- Collaborative processes aim to support people to manage long term challenges (chronic stresses) while better preparing to cope and recover from emergencies (acute shocks)
- Integrated community development principles, approaches and methodologies such as Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Appreciative Inquiry also underpin this approach
- This approach can be adapted for use before, during and after emergencies, and
- Not all communities are interested, or have the ability to undertake collaborative community based decision making processes.

Working together to build on combined strengths

Working together to build on combined strengths can be achieved in many ways. This includes promoting opportunities for people to connect and participate in decision making processes that affect them. Working together to design, implement and continually improve these processes in an emergency management context, can support people to learn and support each other to make safer and more informed decisions. Tailoring these processes to include the development of community based roles and responsibilities can also develop opportunities for people to strengthen 'lifelines' with the people, organisations and support systems that may become vital during critical times of need. Integrating these processes into part of our everyday lives and broader decision making processes may also assist to better manage long term stresses and cope with shocks, including future emergencies.

The following key focus areas have been developed to support these processes. Each reflect the research, feedback and advice from a range of community based projects from within and outside the emergency management sector. Adopting and using these processes aims to support a common sense approach to build community safety and resilience levels, without prescribing set processes and developing a reliance on using templates.

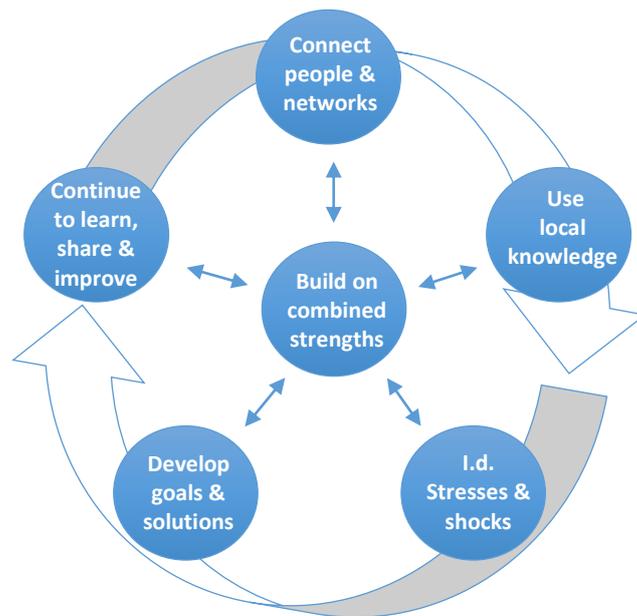


Figure 1 – Key focus areas to guide discussion

These key focus areas have been designed to support an ongoing community based discussion. Whilst developed in an emergency management context, each key focus area is designed to support the development of collaborative and inclusive decision making processes. With an opportunity for individuals and organisations to identify and work together in each area, all are linked and can be revisited and improved over time. These processes are likely to evolve if more people are invited to participate and supported to offer new information and perspectives. This is not a linear process, but an opportunity to bridge the gap between traditional 'top down' approaches by organisations, with more inclusive or 'bottom up' community based decision making processes. Collaboration aims to achieve 'co-design' and 'co-production' of goals and solutions. Adapting and tailoring this approach may also support other sectors and the broader community to participate and deliver outcomes that also build resilience. Each of the key focus areas are described below:

Connect people and networks

Who are the people who live, work in and visit your community?

Communities and organisations already connect and communicate in many different ways. Locally tailored and appropriately facilitated approaches can enhance these processes by providing opportunities for people to meet and build on existing relationships and networks. Some communities also use advanced technologies to connect people with community volunteer groups and organisations for a range of different purposes. Working together to identify and connect with the people who live, work in and visit a community provides opportunities to strengthen and enhance the existing community connections and networks before, during and after emergencies.

Use local knowledge

What is important to these people?

Working together to strengthen connections and networks provides opportunities to understand the history of the community, including what people value as important now, and for the future. This may include the people and their connections with each other, plus their links with the social, economic and environmental assets, values and systems or 'lifelines' that support the community to function and survive. Identifying and capturing this information aims to assist communities and organisations to develop a shared understanding of what is important, while providing opportunities to collectively support and enhance these community values, strengths and 'lifelines' for the future.

Identify stresses and shocks

What can go wrong?

Working together to connect and develop a shared understanding of the community and their values, aims to assist in identifying the potential impacts and consequences that people and their support systems may face when things go wrong. The all 'communities, all emergencies' approach provides opportunities for communities to raise and discuss the issues that they believe will most affect their safety. This approach also provides opportunities to discuss how the strengths and any underlying or long term problems may affect the ability for the community to better prepare, respond and recover from shocks. Similarly, organisations including 'joined-up' emergency management agencies can provide key information and valuable connections, drawing attention toward priorities that may have been identified through their experience and broader risk management processes.

Develop goals and solutions

What is already in place? What is acceptable? What can we improve?

The collaborative development of mutual goals and solutions aims to support the community in becoming safer and more resilient in the short, medium and long term.

Short term goals provide opportunities to support people in becoming safer while considering how to best maintain and use their 'lifelines' including social, economic and environmental values and support systems. Concurrent medium and long term goals may be developed for the community and organisations to adapt and integrate actions and activities into broader plans and community development processes. Coming together to develop and work through likely scenarios can also provide opportunities to exercise, challenge and improve plans and 'lifelines' in a safe learning environment.

Continue to learn, share and improve

Who needs to know? Where to next?

Communities and organisations can support each other to publish locally generated information, including plans and results. This will support the ongoing development of a modern Victorian emergency management system where information and any corresponding GIS/ maps can be captured, shared and improved. Further development of an online community based portal will assist to provide communities and organisations with key information to be available over the internet before, during and after emergencies. Continual improvement processes will also assist collaboration and the ability for plans and activities to evolve, particularly as community based issues and priorities change over time. While completion of a community emergency management plan is a significant milestone, support should be available for documentation, reflection and review to promote a culture of ongoing learning.

If successful we should see...

- A range of communities working with emergency management agencies, local government, business, industry and broader networks, supporting people to build on strengths, better understand risks and collaboratively develop solutions
- Participatory planning processes and activities that are well supported, coordinated and mutually respectful. These local processes draw extensively from the knowledge and experience of community members, trusted networks and leaders
- Alignment of community and organisational priorities and resources, supporting the delivery of community based outcomes. This increases community connections and safety and resilience levels, while enhancing community based information and local knowledge
- Community based information and local knowledge available for people to make safer and more informed decisions
- Effective processes for collaboration to better understand
 - the community
 - issues and priorities including long term chronic stresses and acute shocks
 - potential impacts and consequences of emergencies
 - local community 'lifelines' including connections, networks and systems that are vital in achieving greater levels of community resilience, and
- Community connections and plans maintained, supported and improved before, during and after emergencies.

Supporting policies and programs

This approach is supported by legislation and government policies including the *Victorian Emergency Management Act (2013)* and the Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper (2012).

The Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan (2015–18) and A Modern Emergency Management System for Victoria also describe the challenges and priorities toward achieving the vision of building safer and more resilient communities.

This *Community Based Emergency Management Overview* provides a practical approach toward implementing the intent of the White Paper and Strategic Action Plan, while developing a modern emergency management system that integrates community based planning, response and recovery arrangements.

This approach also supports further engagement to enhance Victoria's Bushfire Safety Policy Framework together with the development of:

- Victoria's Community Resilience Policy Framework
- Victoria's Emergency Risk Management Framework, and
- Victoria's Community Based Relief and Recovery Framework.

'Communities are more likely to become involved and to take initiative if government and agencies value their experience and knowledge of their locality. The [Bushfire Safety Policy] Framework encourages an approach to dealing with risk at the local level and provides opportunities for the community to identify key issues and to become involved in finding solutions.'
(Victoria's Bushfire Safety Policy Framework)

EMV is also supporting the collaborative development of an integrated program and online community based portal to assist communities and organisations to engage and adopt this approach.

Initial priorities include developing:

- A snapshot of community based priorities and projects
- Funding priorities and investment opportunities
- Key indicators of change
- A hierarchy of supporting documents
- Research priorities and opportunities for application
- Further information and connections
- Opportunities to receive stakeholder feedback and advice

Continual improvement

This Community Based Emergency Management approach has been developed and piloted using community development principles. Stakeholder feedback and independent evaluations will continue to support further development and scalable implementation.

Emergency Management Victoria and the broader sector is committed to supporting the ongoing collaborative development of this community based approach and broader Resilience Framework. This will include further refinement and the development of guidance material and tools to support implementation as lessons are learned and experience grows. It is also recognised that the benefits of developing and implementing mutual goals and solutions may not be realised until tested under emergency situations.

Further information

The Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper provides key policy direction toward achieving the vision through the development of a modern emergency management system for Victoria.

This Community Based Emergency Management Overview supports the ongoing development and connection with this system through collaborative community based planning and engagement processes. This includes supporting community led approaches while seeking engagement with broader audiences including other community networks, emergency management agencies, local government and other partners.

This approach may also provide a common starting point for organisations when planning community engagement activities. The intent is to guide and support planning and engagement activities that are tailored toward community needs. This approach can be adapted to guide and support locally facilitated processes that integrate with other approaches and models. Further information, including facilitator guides, case studies and local action plans are under development and will become available via the EMV website and online community based portal.

Community based planning and activity aims to support communities and organisations to develop a greater combined understanding and capacity to manage the issues that may impact the community over the long term. This includes long term chronic stresses such as drought and the combined impacts of a dynamic and changing climate. The approach also supports the ability to identify and build surge capacity to better prepare and collectively manage emergencies described as acute shocks.

These processes aim to support communities and organisations to better connect and support each other to develop mutual goals and solutions. This can be supported by developing an understanding of who makes up the community, what is important to these people, what can go wrong, what is already happening and how can things be managed to improve community based outcomes in the future. Further information about building safer and more resilient communities including local examples is under development and will also become available via the EMV website and online community based portal.

Capturing and sharing this information is important and the development of an online community based portal will aim to support communities and organisations to access, store and make information available for further use. It is envisaged that the information and 'plans' developed through these processes will be updated by communities and made available to broader audiences as communities and their information evolves. Further opportunities to integrate this information and technology with broader community resilience goals and processes (such as goals for health and wellbeing, or community safety and confidence) will also be explored.

To find out more, visit <http://emv.vic.gov.au/> where you can also request further advice and provide feedback by using the **Contact Us** section on the front page.

Suggested Information and links for EMV Website/community based portal

Relevant Victorian Government Legislation, Policies and Strategies

- *Victorian Emergency Management Act 2013*
- Victoria's Emergency Management Reform White Paper 2012
- Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan
- A Modern Emergency Management System for Victoria
- Community Resilience Policy Framework
- Bushfire Safety Policy Framework

Getting Started

- Getting started guide, including key questions for communities and organisations

Questions, case studies and example plans

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Case studies
- Example outputs

Facilitator guides and tools

- Good Practice Guide for communities, organisations and facilitators
- Facilitator job description (sample)
- Example tools, artefacts and handouts for ready use
- Example scenarios to test ideas or planning
- IAP2 spectrum
- Australian Emergency Management Institute Community Engagement Framework
- Overview of Asset Based Community Development and Appreciative Inquiry

Continual improvement

- Monitoring and Evaluation guide
- Outcomes from the Harrierville Pilot and other community based examples
- Lessons Learned Network links and examples

Research Information

- References to relevant research information including papers and application
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Characteristics of safe and resilient communities
- Community Indicators Victoria <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/>
- Monash (MUDRI) compendium

Guiding National and International Strategies and Policies

- National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and supporting documents
- Sendai Framework