Community Disaster Preparation

Running a full day community disaster planning workshop

www.communitydisasterprep.com.au

This project is funded under the Disaster Risk Reduction Grants Program funded by the Australian Government and the South Australian Government.

NYLGA
NORTHERN & YORKE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Is your community ready for anything?

This Community Disaster Preparation Resource is designed to guide you through the process of running a full day disaster planning workshop with your community group.

If you're short of time, have a look at the Two Hour Community Disaster Preparation Workshop Resource.

Before you start

Think about who will facilitate. The Chair of your group is not always the best person, for three reasons:

1. They should have a chance to be involved, rather than running the show.
2. We want fresh thinking and that means someone different running the session.
3. Facilitation skills are quite different to the more structured process of chairing a meeting.

Think about asking someone from outside your community to facilitate the session, or if you have funding, engage a professional facilitator.

Think about who to include. You'll definitely need the 'go to' people in your community, so make sure they're available when you set the date. Local Government should be at the table, both Elected Members and Council staff. Also emergency services: CFS, MFS, SES, SA Ambulance Service, SA Police – these agencies are generally keen to support community disaster planning as long as they have enough notice.

Invite people who are involved in progress associations, sporting clubs, church and social groups – ideally all groups are in the loop. Finally, think about the people who don't normally get involved (they might be elderly, disabled or isolated): how will you know what they need in an emergency?

What to take to the workshop

- This Resource (to guide you through it)
- Post-it notes
- Permanent markers (for writing on the post-it notes)
- Several copies of your chosen Scenario (one for each group of about 3 or 4 people)
- Enough copies of the ACTION PLANNING SHEET for everyone
- A printed copy of the Community Disaster Preparation Handbook as a reference

Room layout

Workshops should encourage discussion and the arrangement of tables and chairs makes a big difference. Café style (chairs grouped around tables) works best and is easy to adapt for group size.

Is it a 'drop in'?

No, encourage people to be there from the beginning so they understand the process and can make the best contribution.

Running a FULL DAY Community Disaster Planning Workshop RESOURCE

Looking after ourselves

Talking about disasters can trigger old fears and traumas. Be mindful of this and keep the tone positive and supportive. Have information about Beyond Blue and Lifeline available. Be careful about drawing on people's own lived experience, it may trigger deep feelings that can be difficult to manage in a group environment. If someone becomes upset and wants to leave, make sure they have support.

An overview of the workshop format

1. Welcome (usually by the Chairperson or Elected Member)
2. Introductions
3. Purpose of the workshop
4. The Planning, Preparation, Response, Recovery timeline
5. Testing our readiness using a Scenario
6. Developing your Action Plan

Some tips

Mistakes people make when hosting community meetings: https://blog.ioby.org/hosting-a-community-meeting-avoid-these-5-mistakes/

Five common mistakes when organising public meetings: https://www.participationfactory.com/5-common-mistakes-when-organizing-public-meetings/

Six pitfalls (and solutions) of effective community engagement: https://www.kittelson.com/ideas/six-common-pitfalls-and-solutions-of-effective-community-engagement/

The funnel approach to planning

A good plan relies on good process.

We've all been to workshops where people draw pictures and add dots and then wonder at the results. That's not surprising: random ideas are not strategy.

This guide will help you run a workshop that delivers a sensible and achievable Action Plan, one that addresses your community's most urgent and important disaster planning issues.

It's all down to five main steps:

- **Brainstorm** community responses to a possible emergency
  We've provided scenarios for you to use.

- **Group** ideas into areas of responsibility
  Response agencies: actions that will be taken by SES, CFS, MFS, Police and Ambulance
  Individual responsibility: doing what you can to help yourself and your family
  Community responsibility: what we need to do together to be effective
  Local Government responsibility: e.g. urgent town infrastructure, traffic management
  Other responsibility: actions that don't fit into any of these categories

- **Sort** the 'community responsibility' ideas into Ready, Possible and Future
  Start by focusing on the Possible ideas (these are the easy wins) and agree on what you'd like to achieve (i.e. the 'outcomes') of activating that idea.
  Then think about what you need to do to kick start Future actions
  Finally revisit the Ready actions, what can you learn or improve?

- **Prioritise** ROI (effort/results) on the 'Possible' ideas
  Run the Possible ideas past the 80/20 rule (what actions deliver the best results with the minimum effort?), people are encouraged by success, so start with achievable goals.

  Then prioritise the actions in order based on 'best results for least effort'. Don't be concerned if some of these actions look simple or too easy – small things can make a big difference.

  Have a look at the 'Future' ideas, are there any that are clear winners? If so, think about the small steps you can take now (while you're delivering the more urgent 'Possible' actions) that will make it easier when you start working on the bigger 'Future' projects.

- **Write** your Action Plan
  Keep it simple and real, you don't have to do everything. A good first plan might have half a dozen actions that can be achieved in a few months. Once you've got into the swing of planning (and you've achieved your outcomes), you can do the funnel activity again and update your plan with more ambitious goals.

The workshop

These steps will guide you through the process of running a community workshop.

Don't get too concerned if people don't stick to the topic – any discussion of disasters usually gets people talking - but if the discussion goes on too long, you will need to get them back on track. You might say something like "That's useful background, right now I'd like you to …"

Be realistic and know what resourcing is available – there's no benefit in developing plans that rely on people or funds that simply aren't there. If people suggest grandiose ideas, bring them back to reality by asking exactly who would drive the project and do the legwork. Similarly if the suggestion starts with "Get a grant and …", ask exactly which grant and be realistic about your community's ability to source funds of that type. If you're new to grants, it's unlikely you'll be able to attract big funds. Start small and achievable, you'll get more done in the long term.

1. Welcome

It's usual for a convenor, chair or elected official to welcome people to the workshop. Tell this person what you'd like to include in the welcome, such as:

- Acknowledgement of Indigenous country and culture
- Acknowledgement of VIPs (e.g. Mayor, Council CEO)
- The purpose of the workshop (to develop a community plan to prepare for disasters)
- Their support or endorsement of the process

2. Introductions

Don't assume everyone knows each other. It's important not to skip this step even in a small close-knit community. Apart from the basics

1. Your name
2. The local organisations or groups you're involved in (especially volunteer groups like CFS)

There's one part of the introduction that's critical to the process:

3. **Your interests or concerns about the community's readiness for disaster.**

When you're facilitating this part of the workshop, keep the focus on interests/concerns, don't allow people to get into solutions – that's covered later.

Make a note of these interests or concerns and revisit them when you're doing your action plan, it's a good way to check that you've addressed everyone's concerns.

3. Purpose of the workshop

Even though the purpose of the workshop was covered in the Welcome, it's good to restate it. You might say something like: "To understand the community's role in preparing for, responding to and recovering from a disaster. At the end of the workshop we'll have a plan so that we'll be as ready as possible."

There may be questions about this and it doesn't hurt to make sure that you're all on the same page. If people suggest that the workshop should be about something else, don't let them pull you off topic, there's always the opportunity to run a separate workshop about the issue they suggested, e.g. you might say: "That's a whole workshop by itself, let's park that idea for now and we'll come back to it at the end to see if we need to schedule another time to discuss it."

4. Planning, Preparation, Response, Recovery

Throughout the workshop you'll be referring to these four stages.

Planning: knowing what you have to do
Preparation: getting ready
Response: looking after each other- saving lives and property during an event
Recovery: getting back to normal

It's especially important for people to understand what happens during an emergency (the RESPONSE stage), and that priority of first responder services (CFS, SES, MFS, Ambulance, Police) will be to save lives and property. Individuals need to look after themselves and each other.

It's also important to understand which organisations are involved in the RECOVERY stage. This largely depends on the size and nature of the emergency. Disasters that affect a wide area or a lot of people like a big bushfire or the 2022/23 floods may be able to access state or commonwealth government clean up and recovery programs, while recovery from a local emergency (such as a house fire) might rely on local service groups, charities or informal support through neighbours. We often underestimate the length of time it takes for people's mental health to recover after an emergency – often much longer than dedicated support services are available. When you're considering the recovery stage, think long term: how are you going to support each other years after the event?

There's a lot more information in the **Community Disaster Preparation Handbook**, including the role of local government, so make sure you're across the respond and recovery stages before the workshop.

You might introduce this section of the workshop by explaining the four stages, then asking people to give examples. Be careful about drawing on people's own lived experience, it may trigger deep feelings that can be difficult to manage in a group environment.

5. Testing our readiness using a Scenario

The purpose of using scenarios is to get people thinking laterally. If we focused on an emergency that has actually occurred in our community, people tend to analyse the way they responded to that particular situation. By using an abstract idea, they are more likely to suggest responses that are 'outside the box', which in turns activates more creative thinking.

We've developed scenarios to get people talking about the level of readiness in your community. These have been purposely designed to capture events that are less likely in South Australia so that we're not triggering trauma for people who have been through more common disasters like motor vehicle accidents and bushfires.

Choose ONE scenario for your workshop (everyone will be working on the same scenario). You can read out your preferred scenario, or print copies of the scenario you've chosen for people to read in their working groups (don't hand out all scenarios, just the one you're using).

This is how you run this activity:

1. **Get people to work in groups of 3 or 4.** If you only have a small number of participants (up to 4) you can do it as a single group, but if there's any more than that, divide them into smaller groups – it's easier to manage and it ensures everyone can have input.

2. **Read out the scenario.**
   People generally want more detail, but what's written in the scenario is all you know: remind them it's normal to have incomplete information in an emergency. Managing the unknowns is part of community planning and preparation.

3. **Start with the 'Response' stage:**
   - What does your community need to do to respond to the emergency at the timing stated in the scenario (e.g. Earthquake is dawn, Train Derailment is as it happens, Electricity Outage is two days later):

     Ask people to **brainstorm what the community should do to respond**: write each separate idea on a post-it note. It doesn't matter if ideas are duplicated, focus on getting the ideas flowing. Don't judge or edit, just get the ideas down.

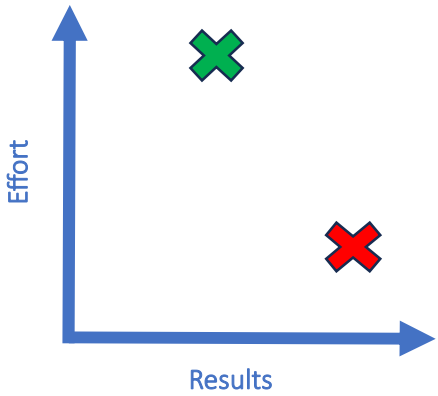
   - Now, group the ideas by moving the post-it notes into the following headings:
     Response agencies: actions that will be taken by SES, CFS, MFS, Police and Ambulance
     Individual responsibility: helping yourself, your family, friends and neighbours
     Community responsibility: what we can do together to be effective
     Local Government responsibility: e.g. urgent town infrastructure, traffic management
     Other responsibility: actions that don't fit into any of these categories

4. **Understanding our strengths and weaknesses.**
   1. Use the Community responsibility group of actions, create three piles (Ready, Possible, Future) and ask each group to sort their actions into one of the piles:
      1. READY: Are we ready to do this without any further planning or preparation?
      2. POSSIBLE: Could we do this with better planning or preparation?
      3. FUTURE: We know we should do this, but we're a long way from being ready.
   2. When they're all sorted, ask each group to tell the others what they've put in each category. It's a good way of demonstrating that people have different perspectives that need to be considered in an emergency situation. It should also identify some issues that people haven't thought of. They can add more post-it notes if new ideas come up.
   3. **The actions in the READY category are our strengths.** That's great but does *everyone* in the community know about these, or is it the 'active few'? Almost certainly your disaster preparation will include a communications plan, we need to tell people about the things we can already do, as well as the things we need to work on.
   4. **The actions in the POSSIBLE category are the things we can activate quickly.**
   5. **The actions in the FUTURE category need planning and possibly funding: they're important but they won't happen in a hurry.**

6. The Action Plan

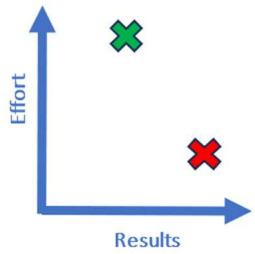
Hand out the Action Plan sheets. Ask each group to look at their POSSIBLE ideas:

- Place the actions/post-it notes from the POSSIBLE pile on the effort/results chart, for example: the actions that take the least effort but give the best results will be on the bottom right (where the red X is).
- When you've placed all the actions from the POSSIBLE pile, repeat the exercise with the actions/post-it notes from the FUTURE pile. Most of these will be in the upper part of the chart (green X).



- Now share the ideas that each group has placed in the 'good results from little effort' category. As the facilitator, try to guide discussion so that participants are in agreement on overarching activities that deliver a number of outcomes. This will simplify your plan and make it more strategic. For example, you might think about doing a Risk Assessment to identify the greatest disaster risks for your community, that way you'll be responding to your highest priorities, rather than people's pet ideas. Even so, there are likely to be some simple actions that are 'no brainers', a good example of this is to organise a CFS Bushfire Preparation session for your community.

From here, it's easy to build the action plan:



1. Start with the actions on the bottom right of the chart. These are your 'quick wins'.
2. Use the Action Planning Sheet to help you decide how you're going to achieve these actions. You can add as much detail as you need. We've included an example (*drinking water at the hall*) to get you started.
3. Now work your way up the right side of the chart (we don't want to waste effort on actions that don't produce results). You'll find that the actions at the top right will take a bit of planning. Rather than getting bogged down in detail at the workshop, plan to plan! (See the example: *emergency siren in the middle of town*).
4. When you've dealt with the priority actions (the ones that produce the best results), you'll need to think about how to communicate with the people who didn't attend the workshop. If you haven't already included it, create a new action called "A communications plan", and insert the result you want to achieve, e.g. "Everyone knows what to do in an emergency", then allocate responsibility and timelines.

7. What about the other ideas?

So far we've focused on actions that meet the 80/20 rule (20% of the effort achieves 80% of the outcomes). It's likely that you've run out of time to consider the other ideas, but if you have time and people still have good energy, you can go to the next stage.

Fine-tuning the ideas in the READY category

Go back to the READY ideas. Now that you've worked through POSSIBLE and FUTURE, are there any actions in this pile that need attention? You might ask:

- Does everyone know about this?
- Do you have enough volunteers?
- What if the person who usually does this is away or busy with their CFS/SES (etc) roles?

Update your Action Plan with anything you need to do to improve your READINESS.

Considering RECOVERY

Surviving the emergency is just part of the picture. Afterwards, it can take months or years for people to feel safe and 'normal'. A well connected and supportive community is an important part of the recovery process.

If you have time, you can repeat the posit note exercise with a focus on the recovery stage. This time, group your ideas into these responsibilities:

Individual responsibility: doing what you can to help yourself and your family
Community responsibility: what we need to do together to be effective
Local Government responsibility: e.g. waste management, consistent communications
Other responsibility: services like Red Cross, LifeLine, BlazeAid

Once again, focus on the Community responsibility ideas and follow the READY, POSSIBLE, FUTURE process and add these to your Action Plan.

8. Don't overdo it!

It's likely that your Action Plan has become frighteningly long. Take a breather.

Now come back to the Plan and for each task, ask: "What happens if we don't do this?" and "What happens if we do this later?"

You'll find there are a few things that are important but not urgent. Can you defer the whole task? Can you plan now so that when you have the energy and time, you know what needs to be done?

Are a handful of actions enough? If they're the right ones, yes! A strategic approach will always deliver better results than a scattergun approach to random ideas – and by now you should be sold on the idea of 'Planning to plan'.

If the key tasks in your Action plan look like this:

1. Do a Risk Assessment at the next committee meeting and identify the urgent and important tasks that we can achieve in the next six months.
2. Set aside half an hour at each committee meeting to review progress and make sure we're on track.
3. Organise CFS to do a community preparation session before the next bushfire season.
4. Keep the broader community informed about disaster planning via the town newsletter and Facebook page.
5. Revisit the plan in six months and set new priorities and actions.

You're on the right track!

Refine your ambitions. Set reasonable expectations and schedule a review of the Plan when these are nearly complete. That's when you can revisit the items you've just removed.

9. Who's driving this plan?

It's all very well putting people's names in the Responsibility column of the Action Plan, but who's checking that those tasks get done?

The overall responsibility for delivering the Action Plan is usually the committee of your local Progress Association or Community Management Committee – but it can be any group with the interests of your community in mind.

Shouldn't this be the responsibility of our Local Council?
Well no. They have their own emergency plans, aimed at protecting assets, adapting services such as waste, and (possibly) providing emergency shelter in libraries and other Council-owned buildings. Your community disaster plan can identify where you need to communicate or work with Council, but **it's your plan with actions your community needs to take to help each other through a disaster.**

Scenarios

Select *one* scenario for your workshop. Everyone will be working on the same scenario.

Earthquake

At 2:43 am, a major earthquake strikes the largest town in your area.

The noise and shaking woke you up, but no-one in your home is injured. You check the Geoscience Australia website – the epicentre was in your neighbouring town. It looks like a big one. People are posting on social media, there are blurry photos of building collapses. You try to ring friends in that town but all calls all go to voicemail. Your electricity goes out. Emergency vehicles rush through town, sirens blaring.

You and your neighbours gather at the Institute Hall. There are different opinions about what to do. An argument starts. Some people get in their cars and race toward the affected town. Others start preparing for an influx of people fleeing the disaster, although without electricity they're restricted in what they can do.

By dawn, frightened people are flooding into your town …

Train derailment

It's midday on a blazing hot summer day. The stockyards are full and the sale is in full swing. Despite the heat, the town is pumping.

A long screech, a crash that shakes the ground, silence, then screams: 'The train's derailed!'

No electricity for days

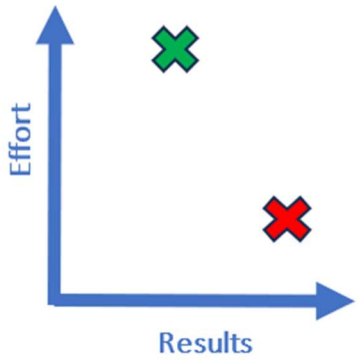
There's been a major failure of the electricity interconnector and the town is dark. All we know is that we have no electricity. The phone system is down. The internet is down. We have no idea whether it's just our town, or more widespread, and we have no idea how long it's going to last.

Two days later, we've had a trickle of news. The local police provided an update, it's affected most of the state and no-one has any idea when it might be fixed. They've organised a generator at the service station but fuel is available for emergency services vehicles only. More and more travellers are stranded in your town, with no cash and no way of getting home. Your town isn't on mains water, and people are worried about food and supplies.

Need more ideas?

Have a look at the resources on the www.communitydisasterprep.com.au website.

Action Planning Sheet

We've included a couple of examples to get you started.

Action	Result	Who's doing it?	Deadline
Drinking water at the hall	*We can cater for an emergency gathering if electricity goes out*	*Dave to bring water cube until we get funding for new rainwater tanks*	*September*
Get costs for a new siren then apply for grants	*A working emergency siren in the middle of town*	*Emma to get costings* *Ravi to apply for grants*	*Costings by 30th June* *Apply for every relevant grant until we get funding*