National Principles for Disaster Recovery

Introduction

Recovery is a significant component within Australia’s comprehensive approach to emergency management (Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery). Applied at national, jurisdictional and local levels, a variety of recovery actions deliver significant positive results for those affected by disasters.

Background

Disaster recovery is:

“The coordinated process of supporting disaster affected communities in the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and the restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing”.

Considerations include “community, psycho-social, infrastructure, economic and environmental recovery.”

Planning for recovery is integral to preparing for emergencies, and is not simply a post-emergency consideration. Recovery commences with planning and responding to an emergency and continues until after the affected community is able to manage on its own.

Disaster recovery is applied in a non-discriminatory manner, based on respect. It acknowledges the existing environment and is centred on the impacted community which is broadly defined, and includes groups linked by location, industry, culture, impact, interest etc.

Principles that describe the application of recovery are an effective means for sharing goals in a field that involves many entities. These principles are reflected in a variety of manuals and plans to help support effective recovery outcomes.

The structure of the Principles

The new principles comprise a series of six key concepts, accompanied by a complementary phrase and a series of key considerations. The principles themselves are able to stand alone or with their complementary phrase.

The key considerations are not intended as an exhaustive list and are written as guidelines only. They represent a range of aspects that are considered central to successful recovery.
Applying the Recovery Principles

Disaster recovery involves a variety of organisations and individuals across government, non-government and the community. The principles are therefore intended to be adopted and used at national, state and territory and local levels.

The principles are written as guidelines of good practice and should underpin the planning and operations within local emergency management frameworks. They will be described within a variety of reference or training contexts.

The National Disaster Recovery Principles

Disaster recovery is part of emergency management, which includes the broader components of prevention, preparedness and response. Planning for recovery is integral to emergency preparation and mitigation actions may often be initiated as part of recovery.

Disaster recovery includes physical, environmental and economic elements, as well as psychosocial wellbeing. Recovery can provide an opportunity to improve these aspects beyond previous conditions, by enhancing social and natural environments, infrastructure and economies – contributing to a more resilient community.

Successful recovery relies on:

- understanding the context;
- recognising complexity;
- using community-led approaches;
- ensuring coordination of all activities;
- employing effective communication; and
- acknowledging and building capacity.

Figure 1: The national principles for disaster recovery
The relationship between the six principles is provided in Figure 1. Whilst all are equally part of ensuring effective recovery, the understanding of complexity and context are seen as foundation factors. The following paragraphs describe all six principles in more detail.

**Understanding the context**

Successful recovery is based on an understanding of the community context. Recovery should:

- appreciate the risks faced by communities;
- acknowledge existing strengths and capacity, including past experiences;
- be culturally sensitive and free from discrimination;
- recognise and respect differences; and
- support those who may be more vulnerable; such as people with disabilities, the elderly, children and those directly affected.

**Recognising complexity**

Successful recovery acknowledges the complex and dynamic nature of emergencies and communities. Recovery should recognise that:

- information on impacts is limited at first and changes over time;
- affected individuals and communities have diverse needs, wants and expectations, which are immediate and evolve rapidly;
- quick action to address immediate needs is both crucial and expected;
- disasters lead to a range of effects and impacts that require a variety of approaches; they can also leave long-term legacies;
- conflicting knowledge, values and priorities among individuals, communities and organisations may create tensions;
- emergencies create stressful environments where grief or blame may also affect those involved;
- the achievement of recovery is often long and challenging and
- existing community knowledge and values may challenge the assumptions of those outside the community.

**Using community-led approaches**

Successful recovery is responsive and flexible, engaging communities and empowering them to move forward. Recovery should:

- centre on the community, to enable those affected by a disaster to actively participate in their own recovery;
- seek to address the needs of all affected communities;
- allow individuals, families and communities to manage their own recovery;
- consider the values, culture and priorities of all affected communities;
- use and develop community knowledge, leadership and resilience;
- recognise that communities may choose different paths to recovery;
• ensure that the specific and changing needs of affected communities are met with flexible and adaptable policies, plans, and services; and
• build strong partnerships between communities and those involved in the recovery process.

Ensuring coordination of all activities

Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs. Recovery should:

• be guided by those with experience and expertise, using skilled and trusted leadership;
• reflect well-developed planning and information gathering;
• demonstrate an understanding of the roles, responsibilities and authority of other organisations and coordinate across agencies to ensure minimal service disruption;
• be part of an emergency management approach that integrates with response and contributes to future prevention and preparedness;
• be inclusive, using relationships created before and after the emergency;
• have clearly articulated and shared goals based on desired outcomes;
• have clear decision-making and reporting structures;
• be flexible, take into account changes in community needs or stakeholder expectations;
• incorporate the planned introduction to and transition from recovery-specific actions and services; and
• focus on all dimensions; seeking to collaborate and reconcile different interests and time frames.

Employing effective communication

Successful recovery is built on effective communication with affected communities and other stakeholders. Recovery should:

• ensure that all communication is relevant, timely, clear, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent;
• recognise that communication with a community should be two-way, and that input and feedback should be sought and considered over an extended time;
• ensure that information is accessible to audiences in diverse situations, addresses a variety of communication needs, and is provided through a range of media and channels;
• establish mechanisms for coordinated and consistent communication with all organisations and individuals; and
• repeat key recovery messages because information is more likely to reach community members when they are receptive.
Acknowledging and building capacity

Successful recovery recognises, supports and builds on community, individual and organisational capacity. Recovery should:

- assess gaps between existing and required capability and capacity;
- support the development of self-reliance;
- quickly identify and mobilise community skills and resources;
- acknowledge that existing resources will be stretched, and that additional resources may be required;
- recognise that resources can be provided by a range of stakeholders;
- understand that additional resources may only be available for a limited period, and that sustainability may need to be addressed;
- provide opportunities to share, transfer and develop knowledge, skills and training;
- understand when and how to disengage; and
- develop networks and partnerships to strengthen capacity.