



Australian Government
Attorney-General's Department

Australian Emergency
Management Institute

AEMI MASTER CLASS REPORT

Facilitating community-led recovery

Community resilience is about building local level capacity and empowerment. After a disaster there are some crucial supports that government, non-government, corporate and private business and philanthropic organisations can offer to communities. Linking these supports to the needs and processes that a community determines will create sustainably resilient communities. The following is a report on the master class that explored the practice of community-led recovery and the facilitation of this. The ideas in this report are gleaned from the discussion at the Master Class with acknowledgement to the participants. A group of 25 recovery practitioners and community members who had experienced the provision of recovery services, gathered at the Australian Emergency Management Institute to participate in the Master Class Facilitating community-led recovery on 20 May 2011. The aim of this master class was to facilitate exploration of the challenges and successes in community-led recovery. The process used modelled a community-led approach by facilitating the group to input into the day, uncovering the issues they wanted to explore and listening to each other's experience and knowledge.

Stephani Roy McCallum from Dialogue Partners, a consultancy based in Canada, co-facilitated the Master Class. She provided some key insights from her practice of working with diverse communities experiencing conflict, high emotion or outrage. The following topics and questions were discussed and the collective wisdom of those attending the master class has been captured below.

What is community-led recovery?

Community-led recovery will mean different things to different communities. It is essential that the processes and intentions of recovery for a community are clear at the outset. Community-led recovery may:

- involve supporting and facilitating a community to lead
- be inclusive, enabling equitable participation and building the capacity of individuals in the community to contribute and lead
- revolve around networks and connections
- resolve and embrace the "hard" issues while being emotionally supportive
- by its very nature need to be flexible in order to give possibility
- connect with both the past and future.

Table 1. Considerations for a community-led process.

Needs, goals, expectations	
Identifying	What are our community needs, our collective intentions of recovery and what do we want and expect to achieve?
Adaptation in recovery	How can we allow for our community needs, goals and expectations to change along the way if it needs to?
Working together	Can we work together to envision and prioritise a future for our community?
Connecting before and after	How will we connect what was being developed in our community prior to the disaster with our future plans?

What does community-led achieve?

A community-led approach to recovery enables a community to come to an understanding of their own needs, what they want to achieve and how they will go about it. It is an opportunity for connectedness and builds capacity for a community to do what they want to do, which in turn, builds resilience. It should leave a community “much improved”, enable them to live a life that they value and have reason for, and vision and prioritise a future. A community-led approach achieves more sustainable and better outcomes at lower cost.

A community-led approach is also a journey, of which the following is all a part: tiredness, uncertainty, a focus on wellbeing and emotional needs, a struggle to continue, educating and training, involvement of emergent groups and capacity building. The involvement of children and youth as leaders is a key element.

What are some of the challenges of community-led processes?

The challenges of community-led processes in the recovery environment include:

- ensuring that community-led processes are directed and sustainable, allowing for change along the way
- the questions of who from the community leads, when this will be the right time for leadership for those people, and what happens as a result, who is community, how do we ensure inclusion and representation. Linked to this are challenges such as: what a community advisory groups might be formed, what is their purpose, and what is the community’s intention and expectation?
- determining the approach. Ideally it is about what the people who are recovering decide will be the approach and finding a way to bring all the people together to hear many voices and envision and prioritise a future
- working to ensure that community needs are the drivers in the systems, timeframes and structures that are in place. There is often a tension between constrained environments and organisations and the community needs and supports

Inclusion and conflict	Enablers
<p>How is our community ensuring that participation is by as many people as possible from this community? How can we hear the many voices in this community? How can this community ensure that we are inclusive of everyone in the process?</p> <p>Equitable participation might mean using different means to engage with those who don't or are not able to access the "usual" means in order to participate.</p>	<p>What systems, timeframes and structures might we need to put in place to link our community needs to the recovery framework that is currently in place? How will a community advisory or decision making group work for our community- what would it be there for?</p>
<p>How will our community know what is currently happening at any point in time in long terms of the recovery process? How will change in this process be managed?</p>	<p>How can we ensure flexibility throughout the long term of the recovery process?</p>
<p>How do we view conflict? There is often an associated fear of conflict. Can it be harnessed as an indication that something needs to change, and viewed as a positive? The importance of enabling individuals who are meeting together to express answer to-why are you here and how have you been impacted, before getting on to exploring some of the more factual and rational decision making that needs to occur.</p>	<p>How will we create sufficient time and space for our community processes in order to identify our priorities?</p>
<p>How will our community embrace and resolve the hard issues which may be ones that have existed previously and often come down to strongly held values that are different for different people?</p>	<p>What supports do we need in order to lead our own recovery? (Information might need to be provided to enable communities to answer this question-about what supports have helped individuals in other communities in recovery such as emotional supports, building leadership education, practical supports so that individuals can attend meetings or simply talk to people and still keep their life and household functioning).</p>

- maintaining a balance between individual needs and the collective needs in a community
- keeping the focus on people, when the interest and momentum for rebuilding and infrastructure projects might be short lived.

Facilitating community-led recovery

Working to achieve a process with communities that will enable them to recover after disaster requires not only the communication, education and information that we know is essential to the process, it also requires experienced facilitators who are able to employ techniques which empower the community. While many themes were identified, facilitators of community-led recovery will assist with the exploration of a range of questions.

Tips for recovery workers facilitating and aiming to enable a community-led approach included:

- take the time to establish good relationships
- remind yourself to keep listening. It is sometimes painful (for all of us) and it takes time to do something different like listening to stories or allowing for emotional outpourings so people can heal
- give people time to tell their stories. This is an important part of being able to move forward
- stay neutral—be open to hearing all voices; not just the most organised, loudest or squeakiest wheel. Sometimes the squeaky wheel takes up an inordinate amount of resources—remember you are working for the whole community, not just a few individuals. Use neutral facilitators when there is conflict or you need to build trust
- get the right people on the ground to communicate and share information. They need to be trusted people, but not necessarily community “leaders” in the traditional sense
- identify different needs in the community and respond to these in different ways. One size does not fit all
- focus on proactive activities that build trust and support community members, rather than reactive processes
- focus on the goal—what you are trying to achieve in the long run
- integrate the physical recovery of place with the social and emotional recovery of people
- pay attention to the intentions—of people and process

- be careful about how to form groups or committees in communities -they must be inclusive and also really be representative of community needs and interests. Are committees actually community-led? Need to consider how to access and involve *different* people
- take the time to make the right decisions instead of rushing to action. Need to start the conversation with what people value not necessarily what to do now
- train community members and organisations so they become owners and advocates of the process, and implement practical supports to enable their participation.

Participants also expressed the imperative to look at government policy which supports the resilience of community recovery and the herculean task of providing evaluation measures to assist with this.

This master class raised many questions as well as answers, and the exploration of the ideas from this workshop will be ongoing in the recovery community of practice. In addition, like any community process, the relationship building enabled will continue to assist in the evolution of practice in this area.

About the author

The convenor of the Masterclass, and author of this report is **Ms. Louise Mitchell**, Education Manager, Australian Emergency Management Institute.