



State Disaster Recovery Communications and Engagement Guidelines

Purpose

This document refers to the communication and engagement arrangements, plan development and key channels to guide, coordinate and oversee communications, media and community engagement through disaster recovery.

Scope

All emergency management arrangements in South Australia are governed by the *Emergency Management Act 2004* (the Act). The Act establishes the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) and lists its functions and powers. Strategic activities and initiatives of SEMC are primarily directed by the *SEMC Strategic Framework and Plan 2017-2022*.

This guideline is part of the *SA Disaster Recovery Coordination Framework* under the *State Emergency Management Plan* (SEMP) and is prepared under section 9 (1)(b) of the Act.

This guideline is for recovery practitioners, decision-makers and those seeking additional guidance on the communications and engagement arrangements adopted in South Australia. This could include recovery workers across the public, private and non-government organisation (NGO) sectors.

Guideline detail

A key principle of recovery is that it should be community-led; this means that clear communication and engagement with the impacted community is critical to a successful recovery effort.

Communication plays a vital role in disaster recovery, ensuring impacted communities have the information they need to recover, and the tools and support to manage their own recovery.

Engagement is essential to ensure impacted communities' unique needs are understood, and thus gain clarity over where to target the recovery effort.

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Engagement is also crucial to guiding communications in recovery, so that appropriate channels are identified, and feedback loops established. This allows communications and engagement to be responsive and therefore, most effective.

In the preparedness phase, positive and consistent messaging establishes awareness and trust in information sources that will surge in active recovery.

In active recovery, timely, clear and relevant information means that people who need support after a disaster know where to get help. Communication can literally bring people together (e.g. through public meetings) and help affected individuals, or a community, get back on their feet more quickly.

A successful community-led recovery requires a strengths-based approach. To facilitate this, engagement must first build relationships, which in turn lead to an understanding of what skills and strengths already exist in the community.

Successful recovery is built on strong engagement and effective communication.

Transition from Public Information in Response to Communications and Engagement in Recovery

The lead recovery coordination agency will have representation in the public information working group to ensure key messages are understood prior to the conclusion of the response to an event.

As recovery coordination is activated to **stand up** (during the relief and early recovery phase), agencies responsible for recovery activities should activate their own channels to engage directly with their relevant community(ies) and stakeholders.

During this relief and early recovery phase, the **Recovery Communications and Media working group** – a whole-of-government working group focused on aligned recovery messages – is stood up. The scale and complexity of the event will dictate the frequency of the working group meetings. These meetings will be chaired by the recovery lead agency with updates provided by each member.

Communications operators are expected to:

- align communication requirements with the recovery operations affecting the local area
- identify, agree to and document opportunities for a collaborative approach with relevant stakeholders.

Communications planning

Any communications undertaken by Departments or agencies regarding recovery operations and activity should be developed through a communications plan that supports key messages across government. The recovery lead agency will develop a communications plan in the early stages of recovery and share that across the

communication and media working group to assist in consistent messaging. It can also be shared to all relevant stakeholders to assist with consistent messaging and activities.

See: *Recovery Communications Planning Procedure*

See: *Recovery communications plan template*

Consideration of communications channels

A range of communication tools and channels will be used to support the various phases of the recovery.

Communicating in recovery, more than in most other contexts, requires sensitive consideration of the audience's needs and capacity to receive information, both psychologically and practically.

In addition to any personal distress, impacts on electricity and telecommunications networks, and the loss of personal technology, such as computers and printers, all have a significant impact on how people receive, and can respond to, information.

Key communications channels are outlined below. The principles of communicating in recovery, and more detailed consideration of scheduling and channels, are covered in the *Recovery communications procedure*

Website

The website is the key location for impacted individuals and other stakeholders to obtain information. It serves as a hub for information dissemination. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is responsible for maintaining the recovery website which includes static year-round information and information relevant to events.

See: *Recovery website procedure*

Social Media

Social media is increasingly seen as a primary source of up-to-date information. Social media can provide timely and targeted recovery updates and reminders to stakeholders, with key information and direct links for further information. In addition to public social media e.g. Twitter, the use of closed groups, e.g. on Facebook, can facilitate targeted community recovery messaging for local communities, and create a 'safe space' for the community to share with each other.

See: *Recovery social media procedure*

Media

Media interest in disasters is high, and as recovery progresses it is important to ensure that spokespeople are prepared and accurate information is offered to media. The different phases that individuals and communities might experience post-disaster should also be considered. All agencies with recovery responsibilities are expected to maintain a positive narrative where possible, while acknowledging the impact of the disaster. This will assist in instilling confidence in both impacted communities and other stakeholders.

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To ensure the release of appropriate, reliable and consistent information:

- any media events should be held jointly where appropriate
- media conferences and announcements should be coordinated to avoid conflicts between state or local statements
- all relevant agencies should carefully check statistics before release
- each agency is only to comment on its own areas of responsibility
- any joint announcements with the Commonwealth to support Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements eligibility must be adhered to.

See: *Recovery media management procedure*

Paid Media

To ensure information is cutting through, paid media (advertising) may sometimes be required. Advertising provides guaranteed placement of messages without distortion, and in digital channels can be effectively targeted and measured. The recovery coordination lead agency may employ paid media to assist messaging, ensuring that it is functional and without spin in order to maintain an uncomplicated relationship and build trust with the community.

See: [Paid media procedure](#)

Engagement Planning

Community engagement ensures strong connection and relevance to the impacted community of any recovery activities and plans. During state government-coordinated recovery, the Community Recovery Officer or the Community Development Officer will build community engagement plans in consultation with a breadth of stakeholders ensuring relevant recovery programs. Regional representatives of state government departments and agencies, local government, local community groups and NGOs are all part of this engagement to ensure a holistic community view.

By hearing a wide range of stories and perspectives, this intelligence can be distilled into the local recovery plan, and also shared with relevant agencies and other stakeholders to flag recovery issues and needs.

State government follows the IAP2 principles of engagement as outlined in [A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery](#), and with reference to the [Better Together Planning Tools](#).

Key engagement methods are outlined below, with a more detailed consideration of processes and methods to be found in the *Engagement procedure*.

Going to community meetings, organised community groups, meeting one-to-one with impacted individuals, or attending community events and functions, allows for relationship-building across the diversity of the community, and ensures a range of voices are heard, including those not already engaged.

Establishing processes and structures such as community meetings and the more formalised structures of a Recovery Community Reference Groups or Local Recovery Committee will support a collaborative approach to the recovery process, with local intelligence informing the recovery programs.

Managing Key Relationships and Stakeholders

Many stakeholders and partners collaborate to provide recovery services, policy and advice. The principle of shared responsibility is primary and provides the strongest outcomes for impacted communities.

Different state government agencies will have their own channels as well as strong relationships with their own stakeholder networks, such as industry. These relationships can both inform recovery communications and engagement planning and assist with sharing information.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for all aspects of emergency management, including disaster recovery, is shared between governments, individuals, industry, NGOs and communities. While the responsibilities may not be equal, they all have a responsibility to work collaboratively with the impacted community to provide a range of recovery activities, programs and services.

Table 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Name of unit/team	Listed responsibilities
Recovery Communications and Media Manager (Lead agency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage and implement recovery communications.• Activate and manage the recovery communications committee.
Social Media and Content Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement state government recovery communications.
State government agency communications units	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nominate a representative to represent their agency on the recovery communications committee.• Ensure their recovery communications are coordinated with the broader state government recovery communications function.
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participate in emergency management committees and recovery operations as per SEMP Part 2 – Arrangements.
Community Recovery Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work alongside the affected community to identify, assess and plan to meet the needs of the community in early stages of recovery.

- Assist the community to develop a community recovery plan.

Community Development Officer

- Work alongside the affected community to help build capacity, coordinate programs and activities, and monitor their effectiveness.
 - Support the local recovery committee and reference groups to achieve the outcomes of the community recovery plan.
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Related procedures

- Recovery communications planning procedure
- Recovery engagement planning procedure
- Recovery media procedure
- Recovery social media procedure
- Recovery website procedure
- Recovery paid media procedure

Related documents

- Communications and Media Manager Role Description
- Social Media and content officer Role Description
- Community Recovery Officer Role Description
- Community Development Officer Role Description
- [Community Recovery Handbook 2018](#)
- [Communicating in Recovery](#) (2011)
- [A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery](#) (2015)
- [Better Together Planning Tools](#)
- [Emergency Management Act 2004](#)
- [State Emergency Management Plan \(2019\)](#)
- State Disaster Recovery Framework (parent document)
- National Recovery Framework
- [National Principles for Disaster Recovery](#)

Definitions

Term	Definition
Recovery	Recovery is the restoration or improvement of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities of a disaster-affected community or society, aligning with the principles of sustainable development and 'build back better' to avoid or reduce future disaster risk.



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Acronyms

Acronym	Words
NGO	non-government organisation
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan

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