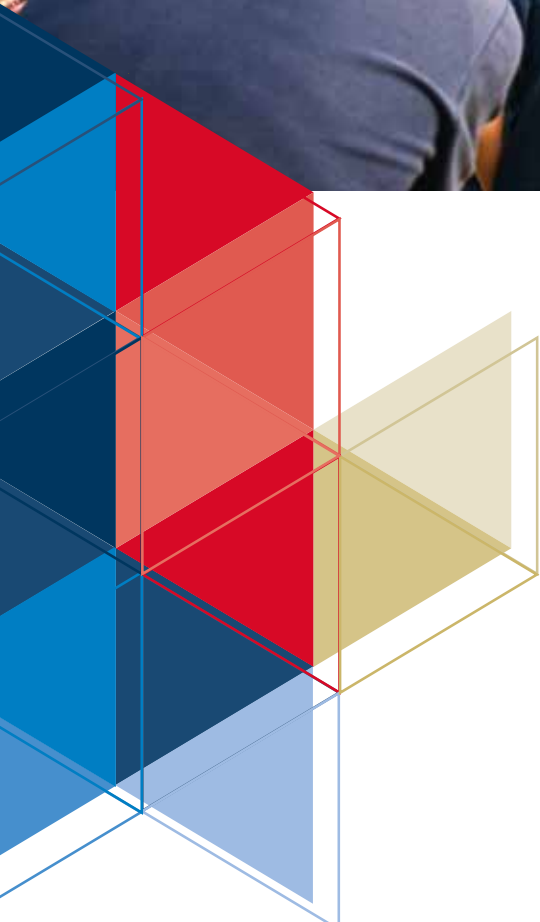


# Community Engagement Framework

Our approach to making  
interactions meaningful and  
creating community action





# Contents

Commissioner's foreword	3
Introduction	4
Engaging the community to build disaster resilience	5
What is disaster resilience?	5
DFES approach to engaging the community	6
What is community engagement?	6
The role of community engagement in changing attitudes and behaviours	6
DFES engagement objectives	8
A planned approach	8
A model for engagement planning and implementation	10
Community engagement model	11
Role of the Community Preparedness Directorate	12
How do we know if our engagement is effective?	14
Conclusion	15
References	15



This document can also be found at [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au)  
 Published by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (September 2016).  
**Head Office:** 20 Stockton Bend, Cockburn Central WA 6164  
**Tel:** 08 9395 9300 **Fax:** 08 9395 9384 **Email:** [dfes@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:dfes@dfes.wa.gov.au)

This publication is available in alternative formats on request



## Commissioner's foreword

With the increasing frequency and severity of disasters in Western Australia, coupled with the expansive size, variety of hazards and diverse climatic conditions across our state, now more than ever we need to work in partnership to build resilience within the community. Communities need to understand, accept and be capable of responding appropriately to the risks they live with in order to create a safer State.

As a leading emergency management organisation in Western Australia, DFES plays a critical role to work collaboratively with our network of volunteers and alongside individuals, businesses, non-government organisations, other government agencies and the community. Together, we must strengthen our shared responsibility to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Building disaster resilience within the community is fundamental to achieving this aim.

The community plays a key role in its own safety and building resilience requires a deeper level of engagement and active participation than simply providing one-way communication of safety information.

DFES must ensure the way we work with communities actively involves the expertise and local networks of our volunteers and staff on the ground. By doing so, we can more effectively engage people in developing the right knowledge and skills that lead to stronger self-reliance and resilience.

Across Western Australia, DFES must implement a locally-relevant style of engagement that empowers individuals and communities to understand their risks and to act on this understanding. Creating this behaviour change takes time and DFES has made the long-term commitment required to see sustained change.

DFES has recognised that effective community engagement is critical for maintaining supportive and professional arrangements with our stakeholders; being attuned to the values and needs of the community and environment; and encouraging communities to manage hazard risks. In order to achieve this, we must enhance our own organisational understanding and capacity around effective community engagement, and embed a culture of community-centred practice.

This Community Engagement Framework provides a guide for all career and volunteer personnel to the approach we must take

when engaging and empowering communities. It aligns with our Strategic Directions 2016-2028 by outlining our approach to best meeting the diverse and changing needs of communities and addressing risk at the local level.

Community engagement is the cornerstone for identifying community values and needs, and helping community members to understand and act on their responsibilities.

Together, we can all contribute to building disaster resilient communities through ensuring that our everyday and planned interactions with the community are meaningful and encourage the community to understand and act on the risks it faces.

**Darren Klemm**  
**Commissioner**

Department of Fire and  
Emergency Services

# Introduction

The DFES vision is for resilient Western Australian communities that work together to build capability and capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

Western Australian communities are diverse, as are the hazards and risks they face. Our engagement activities need to recognise this diversity and our approaches must be tailored to address risks at the local level.

Overwhelming evidence shows that simply providing information to the community is an ineffective way of creating the behaviour change required to adequately understand and prepare for risks faced by a community.

Instead, engagement must occur in a manner that encourages and supports individuals and communities to actively participate in identifying risks, proposing solutions and deciding on management strategies in partnership with DFES. Good community engagement involves stakeholders working

together to build resilience through collaborative action and shared capacity building.

DFES personnel and our network of volunteers on the ground in each region are best placed to understand the local communities in which they work, identify hazards and risks applicable to the local area, and to establish strong and respectful relationships.

Working collaboratively with our volunteers to identify and build upon the existing strengths and networks within a community, we can enable the community to develop a greater understanding of the risks faced and their local actions required to withstand and recover from a disaster.

This Community Engagement Framework sets out the approach that DFES will take to plan for and deliver purposeful, practical, partnership-based and proven community safety programs and engagement activities that enable individuals, families and communities to be active participants in building their own disaster resilience.

This Framework incorporates the community engagement model for emergency management from the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, to which DFES was a key contributor in its development, and draws on the internationally recognised Public Participation Spectrum of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

---

*All of our interactions with the community are an opportunity for meaningful conversations that can help communities to understand its risks and to act on this understanding.*

---



“

**We need to be more hands-on at a local level to get good community buy in and action.”**

# Engaging the community to build disaster resilience

## What is disaster resilience?

Disaster resilience means that a community is able to draw on its own strengths and resources, and work in partnership with emergency services and local authorities, to withstand and recover from a disaster.

A disaster resilient community is one that works together to understand and manage the risks it confronts: it has the ability to use local networks and resources to support actions required during an emergency and to support recovery efforts.

## Why is resilience important?

Communities that are well connected, informed and actively involved in preparing for a disaster are more likely to respond appropriately and recover more quickly.

## A shared responsibility

Resources within the emergency management sector are finite and the extensive size of Western Australia means we need to establish strong partnerships with the community that encourage shared responsibility and foster self-reliance.

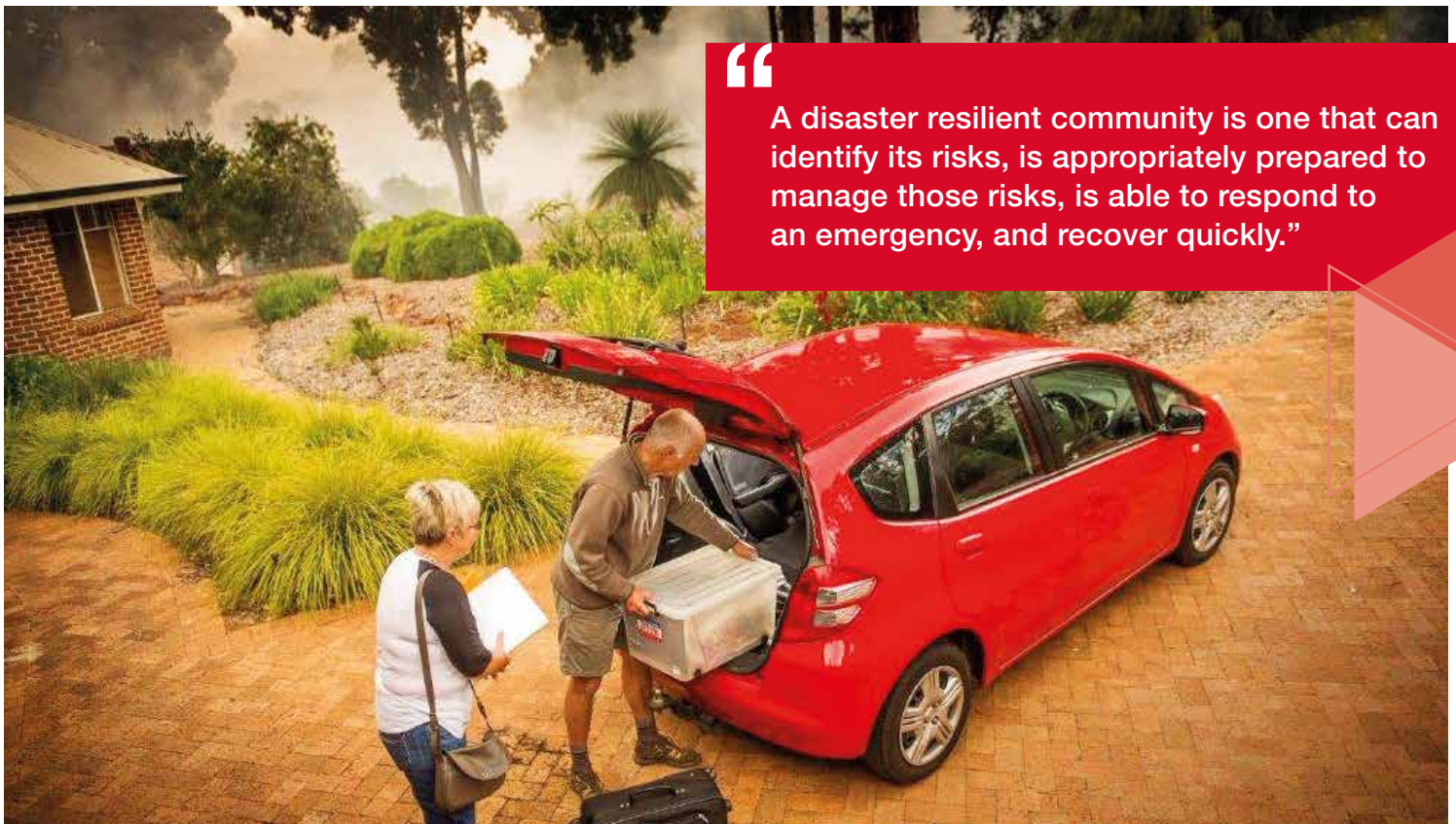
Building disaster resilience is the collective responsibility of all sectors within society, including all levels of government, businesses, the non-government sector and individuals. Working together with a shared focus and sense of responsibility can be far more effective in improving disaster resilience than individual efforts of any one sector (NSDR, 2011).

## How do we build resilience?

A long-term commitment and a pro-active approach to engaging people in meaningful interactions and creating community action is fundamental to building resilience.

Providing information and warnings about hazards is important, but educating people how to act on their knowledge is equally important. Our approach needs to ensure that people can learn about the risks they live with, and act on that understanding.

To do this, we need to work together with our volunteers and the community to build upon its existing strengths and resources. We will encourage active participation in hands-on activities to understand and accept risks, and support individual and community actions that build local capacity, self-reliance and disaster resilience.



“

A disaster resilient community is one that can identify its risks, is appropriately prepared to manage those risks, is able to respond to an emergency, and recover quickly.”

# DFES approach to engaging the community

*“Community engagement is the process of stakeholders working together to build resilience through collaborative action, shared capacity building and the development of strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect.”*  
(NSDR CEF, 2013)



## What is community engagement?

Involving communities in issues and decisions that impact them is a fundamental component of developing community capacity and creating a strong sense of ownership of the resulting actions and outcomes.

### Types of communities

Communities come in all shapes and sizes: they are not simply geographic areas. There are communities that are bound by a common interest, lifestyle, culture, circumstances, age and/or degree of isolation or remoteness. Communities are not static – they change constantly. Our engagement activities need to be cognisant of the characteristics of the communities we are trying to reach and must be planned and implemented accordingly.

## The role of community engagement in changing attitudes and behaviours

### Community perceptions of risk

One of the biggest challenges we face in improving community safety and disaster resilience is the complacency or lack of awareness by communities when it comes to understanding the risks they face. The perception of risk is often based on a person's own experiences of disasters, and this can impact on how receptive they are to receiving and acting on risk information.

At DFES, we must ensure that all our interactions with the community are used as an opportunity to engage people in meaningful conversations about local risks and the personal actions required to address those risks.

Communities experiencing more frequent disasters, or that have recently experienced a serious incident, are more likely to engage in hazard identification and preparation.

**It is much more challenging to engage with people who have limited or no personal experience of disasters. People must be receptive to learning and acting on information in order to change their attitudes and behaviours.**

### Motivating communities to engage and act

Formal and informal community leaders, and existing community groups can influence and encourage local participation. We need this on-ground support to connect DFES with local communities and to create relationships based on trust. Working with on-ground volunteers and DFES staff will enable us to work alongside residents to help them identify and accept the risks they live with, and change their attitudes and behaviours about these risks.

Effective engagement will encourage and support changes in individual and community attitudes and behaviours about risk, and in turn build disaster resilience, as outlined in the following table.

Characteristics of a resilient community	Role of community engagement activities in achieving individual and community level behaviour change
<b>Ability to function well under stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with volunteers and communities to improve understanding and to actively plan and prepare for disasters.</li> <li>• Develop and/or expand the focus on disaster resilience within local networks and organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Successfully adapt to local / current circumstances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a localised and adaptable approach relevant to each community.</li> <li>• Recognise and value existing local knowledge.</li> <li>• Access community members by linking with existing, local, trusted organisations and networks.</li> <li>• Value the local relationships and knowledge of all volunteers and staff on the ground.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-reliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and work closely with formal and informal community leaders.</li> <li>• Support and strengthen local relationships and networks</li> <li>• Empower communities to understand the critical role of their own decisions and actions in reducing their exposure to risk from natural disaster.</li> </ul>
<b>Social capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build social norms – people are more likely to change when they see others like them making changes.</li> <li>• Work with local organisations and service providers to improve their understanding and capacity to work with their local community to understand and address the risks they face.</li> <li>• Build relationships based on trust and shared responsibility.</li> </ul>



## DFES engagement objectives

Active community participation is fundamental to building disaster resilience.

In order to ensure that finite DFES resources are used in the most efficient and effective manner, we all have a role to play in engaging the community and encouraging active participation. The objectives of our community engagement activities are:

### 1. Increase understanding of risk and support action.

To work collaboratively with the community and volunteers to raise awareness and understanding of risks, and encourage and support individual and community action to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

### 2. Build on existing local strengths, skills and networks.

To build upon existing strengths, capacity, resources and skills in the community to create stronger networks, knowledge and support systems that enable communities to be more self-reliant when faced with a disaster.

### 3. Work together with others in emergency management.

To work in partnership with volunteers and other organisations involved in emergency management to implement a coordinated approach to enhancing community preparedness and building disaster resilience, across agreed areas of community engagement focus.

## A planned approach

To effectively engage with the community to create the desired change in behaviour and attitude, we must embed within DFES a common thinking and clear approach to our engagement activities. By working together to design and plan for our engagement activities, DFES will maximise the use of internal resources and deliver a coordinated suite of programs and education.

Our engagement focus is across both internal and external audiences, and clearly targeted at building organisational capacity and creating a change in the community's behaviour and attitudes about risks and disasters. To this end, community engagement is guided by the following four approaches as outlined in the following diagram.



### Purposeful

Our work is clear, targeted and designed with specific aims to increase disaster resilience in the community.



### Practical

Tools, resources, information materials, mentoring and support is available to career and volunteer personnel and other delivery partners to guide our work with communities.



### Partnership-based

Working collaboratively with other divisions, organisations, individuals and communities will achieve more than working alone.







### Proven

Robust evaluation and analysis of community safety and engagement programs will guide the ongoing delivery and ensure effective use of resources.



**Internal focus**

**External focus**

 <p><b>Purposeful</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging with the community is valued by DFES as a legitimate risk treatment option.</li> <li>Coordinate community engagement with other risk mitigation planning and activity.</li> <li>Areas for community engagement focus (ACEFs) are identified each year in collaboration with internal stakeholders and based on communities at high risk.</li> <li>Develop regional engagement strategies in ACEFs in collaboration with DFES personnel, our network of volunteers and stakeholders.</li> <li>DFES approach to engagement aligns with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be clear on engagement and community participation purpose and what needs to be achieved from.</li> <li>Take time to understand and recognise the complexity of each community. Engagement methods are tailored and flexible to suit.</li> <li>Assess risk and levels of community awareness and preparedness.</li> <li>Deliberately aim to work closely with those who can effect change in local communities.</li> <li>Include, respect, and build upon, existing community knowledge, capability, resources and skills.</li> <li>Recognise that engagement is an ongoing process as communities change over time.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Practical</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement tools, resources and materials are developed and updated to guide and enhance engagement activities.</li> <li>Training, mentoring and support is provided to up skill personnel and enhance organisational capacity in community engagement.</li> <li>Appropriate and tailored risk communications and community safety publications are developed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use on-ground hands-on programs to encourage active community participation.</li> <li>Deploy engagement activities that are accessible and considerate of community diversity.</li> <li>Create a community engagement volunteer role to guide on-ground engagement activities.</li> <li>Community safety information for all hazards is widely available including online resources.</li> <li>Appropriate and emerging technology is used to engage the community including hard to reach audiences.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Partnership-based</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement collaborative arrangements across DFES Commands to ensure efficient use of resources and a co-ordinated approach to engagement activities.</li> <li>Draw upon strengths, skills and experience of Commands and individuals within DFES to collectively design and plan for effective community safety programs and engagement activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect and value relationships that career and volunteer personnel have with local communities.</li> <li>Foster relationships with formal and informal community leaders.</li> <li>Identify, recognise and collaborate with existing community networks and groups.</li> <li>Actively involve communities and individuals in identifying risks and planning community-led actions to address them.</li> <li>Collaborate with other government agencies, local governments and service providers to ensure integrated and coordinated approach to engagement and capacity building.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Proven</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design community engagement programs with reference to best practice and national research findings.</li> <li>Evaluate community engagement programs to support continuous program improvement and determine future program needs.</li> <li>Demonstrate achievement of community engagement and DFES strategic objectives to support recognition of community engagement as an effective risk treatment option.</li> <li>Participate in national and international research that explores the role of community engagement in creating behaviour change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve stakeholders, volunteers and community members in program design, pilot programs and evaluation to ensure community engagement activities meet their needs.</li> <li>Share evaluation results with stakeholders and community members to enable uptake of lessons learned and celebration of success.</li> <li>Use evaluation and research outcomes to inform identification of ACEFs, programs and approaches used to engage the community that result in positive changes to community behaviour.</li> <li>Ensure DFES public risk communications align with community engagement approaches.</li> </ul>

# A model for engagement planning and implementation

All communities are different and the DFES approach to engagement is therefore flexible and adaptable.

It is imperative to be clear about the purpose of any engagement activity including what we are aiming to achieve, the community behaviours and actions we want to support, and how the community's local knowledge and skills can contribute to local solutions.

Communities need to be engaged before, during and after an emergency – and different types of engagement are needed at different times. Understanding the community context and determining the appropriate type and method/s of engagement to use are important planning considerations that will ensure our interactions are meaningful and we create important conversations about individual and community action.

Every engagement activity we undertake should include a positive 'call to action' – clear and tangible advice on action/s the community should take to address the local risks they face.

Three principles for effective community engagement inform the DFES approach and should be considered in determining appropriate engagement activities (adapted from NSDR CEF, 2013).

## **Understand the community**

Communities know themselves and how they function better than any other external party. Taking the time to understand the community and how it works is vital to creating respectful and trusting relationships. Consider the community's strengths, resources, networks and capability, as well as the local risks it faces.

**Communities that have a say in identifying their risks and developing and implementing locally appropriate solutions, are more likely to empower local action.**

## **Recognise the complexity of each community**

Every community is different and invariably complex given the diversity of gender, age, culture, ability, and challenges such as geographic isolation, inadequate services or infrastructure, transient populations, accessibility issues and entrenched disadvantage. These factors impact a community's willingness and ability to participate in community safety programs and to understand and accept the risks they face.

**Engagement must be an ongoing process, maintained over time and as communities change – not just when an emergency happens, but before, during and after an event.**

## **Partner with the community to build on local networks and resources**

Working in partnership with volunteers and communities is the most effective way to understand and build upon the existing links and relationships and is imperative for meaningful interactions that create conversations about change.

**Activities where people share knowledge, learn together and practice new skills with others in their area and are much more likely to lead to behaviour change than one-way information provision.**



# Community engagement model

The model below outlines five types of engagement, none of which is necessarily better than any other – different engagement approaches or a combination of approaches should be used depending on the purpose and context of a particular situation.

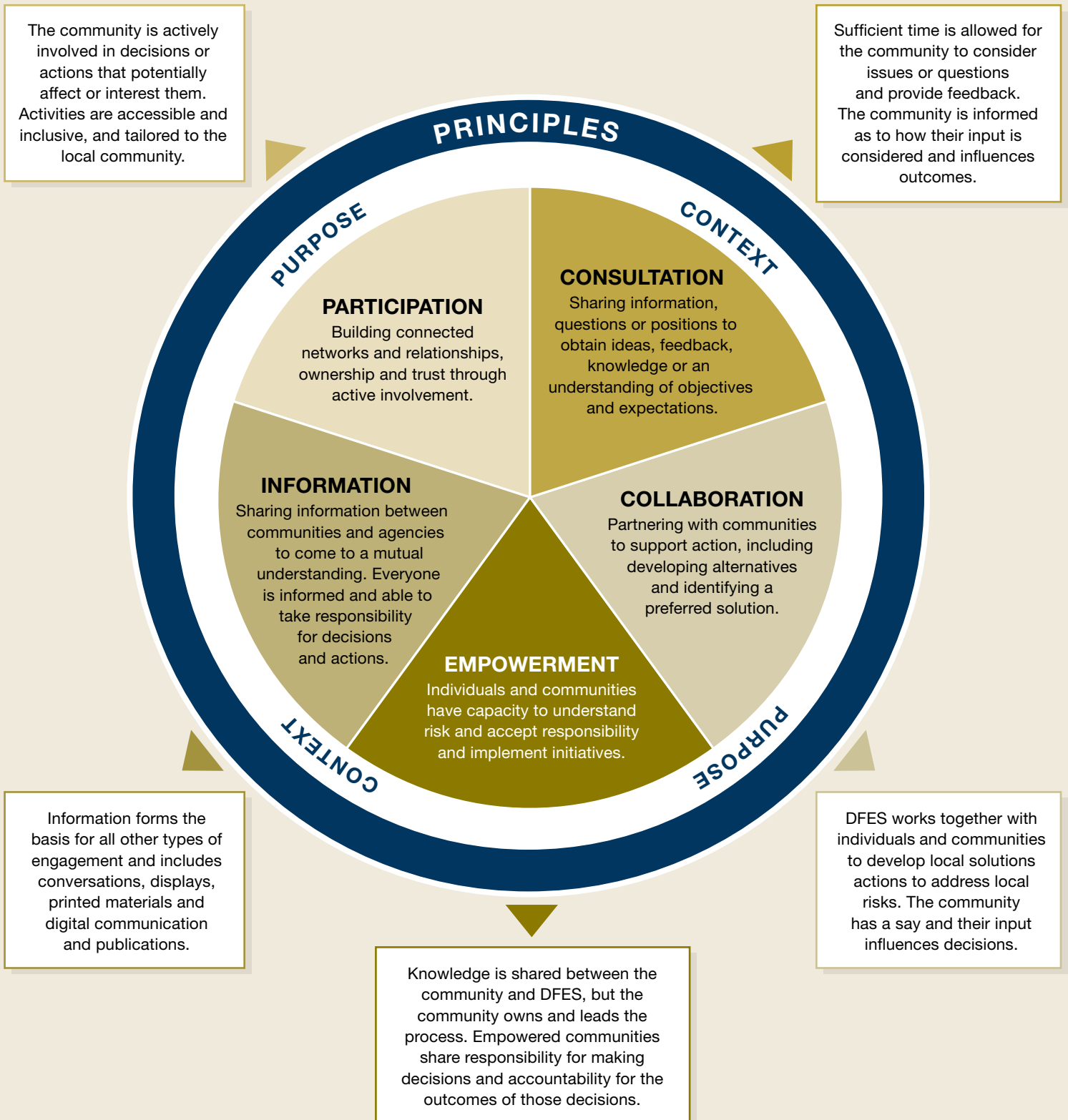


Figure: Community Engagement model adapted from NSDR CEF 2013



# Role of the Community Preparedness Directorate

The Community Preparedness Directorate (CPD) within DFES is a small team of specialist practitioners and program managers that guides the strategic direction of engagement activities, community safety programs, and training and support to build organisational capacity in effective community engagement.

The CPD works collaboratively with DFES regions and personnel, and other emergency service volunteers to:

- Identify and build relationships with community leaders, local organisations and existing community networks.
- Build their capacity to work with their community to improve disaster resilience through providing training, resources and support.
- Undertake activities in partnership with local groups where community members are involved in risk identification and planning and preparing for disaster.

The CPD has an internal advisory role and an external engagement and coordination role as outlined to the right.

## Internal role

### **Best practice advisory and support**

- Lead best practice community engagement and provide engagement advice to DFES. Through mentoring, guidance and support for personnel on the ground, and developing engagement tools, resources and online materials, CPD aims to equip career and volunteer personnel with the knowledge and skills needed to confidently and effectively engage their local communities in meaningful interactions and conversations about action.

### **Collaboration and planning**

- Collaborate with DFES Commands to ensure coordination of external engagement activities and holistic stakeholder relationship management.

### **Program design and development**

- Work with other teams within DFES, use evidence-based approaches and be informed by current research in emergency management and public participation, to design and develop targeted community safety programs for identified high priority, at-risk communities.

### **Evaluation and research**

- Evaluate engagement approaches and community safety programs to ensure DFES progresses what works and revises or ceases ineffective programs.

### **Risk communication**

- Works closely with Media and Communications to ensure community safety messaging is appropriate and consistent with on-ground engagement activities.

## External role

### **On-ground engagement and program delivery**

- Community Preparedness Advisors (CPAs) are based within, and target engagement efforts and programs at, key regions of WA deemed to have the highest hazard risks and community vulnerability.
- Work closely with regional and district offices DFES personnel and other emergency service volunteers to understand and connect with local communities; create partnerships with stakeholders; and provide intensive delivery of community safety programs.

### **Community safety programs**

- Develop and maintain online resources, publications, signage and display materials for use with community initiatives including:
  - Bushfire Ready program
  - School Aged Education
  - At-Risk Communities program
  - Juvenile and Family Fire Awareness program (JAFFA)
  - Cyclone and Flood information
  - Get Ready

### **Stakeholder collaboration**

- Work closely with priority stakeholders and other organisations involved in emergency management to establish collaborative arrangements and open communication vital to coordinated engagement efforts and efficient use of resources.

### **Communication and education**

- Provide general information, education materials and publications in response to public enquiries regarding home fire safety, smoke alarms and storms.
- The CPD manages the DFES Education and Heritage Centre located in the original Perth Central Fire Station in the city centre.



“

Those who live and work in the community, know it the best – they have the most insight into how the community works and how to connect with local people.”



*“By knowing how well our programs are working, we can continually refine them to ensure maximum participation and the best community outcomes.”*

## How do we know if our engagement is effective?

When communities are actively engaged and invested in building their own disaster resilience, we will see positive changes in behaviour and the level of self-reliance in a community.

The desired outcomes sought from effective community engagement include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1. Individuals and households** have an increased understanding of risk, and undertake effective actions to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster. These include:
  - Understanding and accepting risk.
  - Minimising risk in the case of disaster through having an effective action plan.
  - Mitigating the risk posed by a potential disaster through prior preparation.
- 2. Community leaders, networks and organisations** have an increased understanding of risk, increased capacity to work with their communities towards disaster resilience and improved self-reliance. This is characterised by:
  - Information being quickly shared in local networks during a disaster.
  - Community members having improved awareness of local networks and regional offices from which they can draw support and information to prepare for and respond to disasters.
  - Community members working together with one another and local organisations to share knowledge and prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
- 3. Organisations and volunteers involved in emergency management** demonstrate increased collaboration and coordination in enhancing community preparedness and disaster resilience.

Evaluation of our community safety programs and engagement activities provides DFES with critical insight into their effectiveness, and identifies opportunities to revise or cease programs and approaches. An evaluation framework guides the measurement and analysis of our work.



The community plays a key role in its own safety.”



## Conclusion

The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters in Western Australia and the ever present potential for catastrophic events means DFES needs to remain focussed on working closely with volunteers and the community to build disaster resilience.

The community plays a key role in its own safety. By enhancing the knowledge and capacity of communities to understand and act on the risks they live with we can create a safer State.

The most effective way to increase community awareness and action is through active participation in local community safety programs. By using the relationships and experience of our local personnel and emergency service volunteers to tap into community resources, strengths and skills, we will be better placed to effectively engage people in meaningful interactions and conversations about action.

With a long-term commitment to engaging the community and building our own organisational capacity and confidence in on-ground engagement approaches, DFES will continue to work closely with communities to develop a shared responsibility to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

This framework is a guide that outlines the approach DFES will take to ensuring a consistent and coordinated effort is sustained through our endeavours to build disaster resilience in partnership with the community.

## References

- NSDR CEF, 2013. Australian Attorney-General's Department 2013. *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Community Engagement Framework, Handbook 6*. Australian Emergency Management Handbook and Manuals Series, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.
- NSDR, 2011. Council of Australian Governments 2011. *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*. Council of Australian Governments, Canberra.
- DFES, 2016. Department of Fire & Emergency Services Western Australia 2016. *2016-2028 Strategic Plan*. DFES, Perth.

## Other sources utilised

- Australian Attorney-General's Department 2010. *Guidelines for the Development of Community Education, Awareness & Engagement Programs, Manual 45, Australian Emergency Management Handbook and Manuals Series*. Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.
- Department of Fire & Emergency Services Western Australia 2011. *Community Engagement Framework*. DFES, Perth.
- International Association for Public Participation 2004. *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*. International Association for Public Participation, Denver.



**Department of Fire & Emergency Services**

**Head Office:** 20 Stockton Bend, Cockburn Central WA 6164

**Tel:** 08 9395 9300 **Fax:** 08 9395 9384

**Email:** [dfes@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:dfes@dfes.wa.gov.au) **Web:** [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au)

