



Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Planning Guide Resources

Working Together Building a Community Team

Building a Community Team
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Building a Community Team

There are different approaches to building a Community Team that you can use to help the community move through the process of developing a Disaster Resilience Plan; some more formal than others.

Informal Approach

A more informal approach based on existing community/family networks and social/cultural dynamics may be a preferred strategy in small, remote Aboriginal communities. This approach could involve designating a resident to champion the community resilience project and engage influential individuals such as Elders and local formal/informal leaders, as well as stakeholder and partner organizations in discussing hazards, vulnerabilities, capacity and strengths in considering community resilience.

Formal Approach

If a more formal approach is adopted, then a local Advisory Committee, Sponsoring Association or Working Group can be established as a means of advancing community resilience planning. The following three options are suggested in this section for a more formal approach and additional detailed information is provided in the Appendices to support the particular option you may choose.

Using an Advisory Committee (Appendix “A”)

An Advisory Committee can be helpful in providing your community-based research team with advice, information and support. You should consider including local residents, elected officials, community government staff, and experts in the Advisory Committee to ensure its effectiveness.

Seeking a Sponsoring Association (Appendix “B”)

In smaller communities, a limited number of people are often available to assume a lot of community service and other volunteer activities, and this reality can be a barrier in forming an Advisory Committee. One option is to look at existing Associations in your community and invite one to assume a sponsorship role with the resilience project.

Forming a Working Group (Appendix “C”)

Another option is consider forming a small Working Group to provide advice and support to the community-based research team. Such a working group can focus on the tasks involved for the community-based research project; they can discuss what you intend to do and provide guidance based on their experience and understanding.

APPENDIX “A”

Building a Community Team

Using an Advisory Committee

Community members may be interested in becoming disaster resilient, and this may create a long list of potential members for the Advisory Committee. It will not be feasible to manage the activity of a very large Advisory Committee so decisions will have to be made on who should be invited to participate. It will be important to include leaders of key stakeholder organizations or Associations, and informed individuals with a particular interest in resilience work. It will also be important to include the Emergency Coordinator or Fire Chief and other key officials or staff whose job responsibilities would relate to disaster resilience work.

Answering the following questions will help determine who should be invited to participate in the Advisory Committee:

- When did the last major project or activity occur in your community? What was it?
- Who was responsible for getting the work on the project started?
- Who did most of the work?

Consider your responses when you review the possible membership for your committee (outlined below). Keep in mind that you need to have strong, credible, trustworthy members with the time to participate. Research has also shown that a larger committee is more effective in gaining community buy-in than a committee with fewer members. Generally, for the purposes of effectively building community disaster resilience, the maximum committee membership should be approximately 15 individuals. However, if you cannot enlist 15 members, an Advisory Committee can still be effective.

Potential Members

As the Advisory Committee considers hazards facing the community (e.g., forest fire, major transportation accident, or disease), it is important that the committee includes some people who are experienced in dealing with emergencies and disasters. It is also important to have planners, engineers and utility companies (e.g., electric power, water, sewerage, natural gas, telecommunication lines) as they are knowledgeable about community infrastructure and responsible for maintaining essential services. Also strive to include both men and women on the committee.

Leaders or a leader from the business community (e.g., president of the local Chamber of Commerce, representative from industry or a local business) and a local farmer and/or fisher/hunter/gatherer/trapper would serve the committee well as they are important to the community's economy and continuing survival. As it is necessary to consider the environment and the potential for industrial accidents, it is also important to invite local industries to participate on the committee.

Residents interested in the community's future and involved in local associations and who can involve others may be able to contribute positively to the committee's work. For example, an environmentalist would bring an environmental perspective to the committee. In the same way, a youth representative could bring forward the concerns of young people, while an Elder could bring considerations of culture.

Finally, it is important to be aware of the past when considering community disaster resilience. A member of the local museum or historical society, or a long-term resident or Elder may be ideal to provide information regarding the history of disasters that have occurred. In addition, a reporter from a local newspaper or newsletter will have access to information on past disasters and can also assist by informing the community on the Committee's activities.

Pros and Cons

There are pros and cons to having an Advisory Committee. For instance, a large and active Advisory Committee will need significant administrative and planning support to ensure its work remains organized. Other citizens may resent that they were not asked to join the Committee and thus they may not be supportive of its work.

But an Advisory Committee can be an effective means of involving a wide variety of citizens and ensuring that various voices in the community are heard as the process unfolds. It is critical that the committee does not just include one group such as the business community but includes a wide-variety of people from different backgrounds and interests.

Action

Review your proposed membership list for the committee.

- Who is included?
- Who is left out?
- Who needs to be added to the list?

Review the potential members and consider the pros and cons of having an Advisory Committee.

If it is decided to form an Advisory Committee, then a decision is required on who should be invited to join the Advisory Committee. Formally invite them or arrange to meet with each potential member to discuss participation on the committee.

APPENDIX “B”

Building a Community Team

Seeking a Sponsoring Association

An organization requested to serve as a sponsoring association could agree to have one or more members act as a liaison and provide advice to community-based researchers or volunteers working on the Disaster Resilience Plan.

Associations can also:

- Provide meeting space and administrative support
- Report on the progress of the community-based research
- Encourage their membership to respond to surveys, participate in interviews and provide information to the research team
- Use their membership to promote the project and let others know what is taking place.

What type of organization can become a Sponsoring Association?

There are many different groups or associations that could serve this role. Think of your community and the types of associations that exist which may be appropriate to consider. Organizations or associations that work with people who need some sort of community support (e.g., substance abuse, people with disabilities, or Elders), charities, cultural groups, business associations, education or environmental advocates, animal care volunteers, youth groups, social groups, civic event groups, and recreation or sports groups.

Pros and Cons

The main advantage of having a sponsoring organization is that you are dealing with an established group of people who have a common purpose. If they see the value of supporting the resilience initiative and agree to act as sponsor, their support will undoubtedly make the task easier. Having a sponsor also adds credibility to the project.

On the other hand, being sponsored by a specific organization may mean some residents do not agree with its philosophy or past actions and therefore may not be receptive to the resilience project. Another issue to consider is that people join an association because they think in a similar way and have similar interests. Thus, you will only be reaching one group of people and not those who have different ideas and experiences. Ensuring that others in the community are kept aware of your project may require additional work.

Action

Review your list:

- Who is included?
- Who is left out?
- Who needs to be added to the list?

Review your list of possible sponsors and consider the pros and cons of having a sponsoring organization. If it is decided to proceed with a sponsoring organization, then a formal invitation should be offered or a meeting can be arranged with the president or spokesperson for the organization to discuss the invitation.

APPENDIX “C”

Building a Community Team

Choosing a Working Group

A Working Group should consist of four or five people who have an interest in the project, who can provide support and guidance and promote the project as a worthwhile initiative. Potential members for the Working Group can be those who would be considered for an Advisory Committee discussed in previous sections, but Working Group members would be selected for their skills and knowledge rather than their community involvement.

Pros and Cons

The main advantage of a small Working Group is that the community-based research team would not be working in isolation and could receive guidance and support from community members. As well, the Working Group could inform the community that the project is important and the work of the research team should be supported. As the Working Group is task oriented, you may also be able to advance the project more quickly.

However, you may miss the benefit of community buy-in and participation because of a small group size. Sometimes small groups are also seen as narrowly focused and there is concern that members are not really aware of what's going on more broadly in the community. If that's the case, the project may lose some support and willingness to participate by community residents. Ensure others in the community are aware that the project may be more time-consuming.

Action

Review your list:

- Who is included?
- Who is left out?
- Who needs to be added to the list?

Review who is listed as possible members of a Working Group and consider the pros and cons. If you decide to use a Working Group, identify who will be invited to become a member. Invite them formally or arrange to meet with them to discuss the invitation.

References

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