Community Disaster Resilience Planning Guide Resources

Collecting Information

Overview – The Importance of Collecting Information

The CDRP resilience assessment process depends upon a full understanding of the community to be able to evaluate the challenges and the strengths it can draw upon to decrease risk and build greater resilience. To encourage widespread involvement in this process, communicate widely on local radio, television, media and Facebook.

This type of analysis requires the collection of a wide range of information from a variety of sources to be able to reasonably assess community resilience. It is important to involve as wide a cross-section of the population as possible and to use various means to get as much useful information as you can, e.g., from students, Elders, Sweatlodge Keepers, women, people with disabilities.

As important as getting information, is the need to summarize and organize the information. Using such tools as maps and templates can be an effective way of properly and effectively analyzing information. Being able to use all of the information is essential in assessing resilience and accurately relating to the hazard types your community might face.

The information collected as part of this resilience assessment process will support the development of an accurate profile of community resilience – the areas of strength and the areas that need some improvement. An accurate and comprehensive profile will help in the development of an effective plan for expanding the community's resilience by building on real areas of strength and reducing its most relevant risks. It is critical to understand what all provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictional authorities do and cover.

Collecting Information Required for Assessing Resilience

Standard approaches to collecting community-based information often include reviewing existing maps and statistics and conducting interviews. The nature of this work is conducive to people working alone or in a small group and the results can be productive. In addition, more unique or even generic approaches can also be useful for collecting information to assess community resilience.

Engaging Local Leaders, Other Partners and Stakeholders

A generic approach for information gathering that is common to many communities is the use of a community meeting or workshop for consulting on an issue and receiving feedback. Many rural communities are small and remote, and consultation sessions that are open to all residents are often a preferred approach. This is often an effective approach for engaging local formal and informal leaders, Elders, youth and other interested groups or individuals, as it can be organized without the need for a lot of resources or organization.

Conducting a Transect Walk/Drive and Photo Voice

There are also other ways communities can work together to collect information. Innovative community-based photography and physically traveling through areas of the community with a critical eye have also proven effective for communities assessing local assets and vulnerabilities. The results of these approaches are also quite different from standard approaches to community-based data collection. You may want to consider using both.

1. Conducting a Transect Walk or Drive

A transect walk or drive is simple way of identifying local capacities and vulnerabilities by walking or driving slowing through an area noting buildings, resources and geographic features. This technique is a great way to think through local capabilities and vulnerabilities that may impact your community's disaster resiliency. Reading reports and looking at maps is important, but physically walking or driving through an area can bring to light issues that might otherwise be overlooked. This could include locating natural water springs, sources for wood and food.

A number of community members can participate in this process making it easier and more effective to spot capacities and vulnerabilities. For example, four people might conduct a transect walk/drive together. Two might notice local vulnerabilities associated with seasonal river flooding, one might notice barrels of oil in a local stockyard as a potential fire hazard, and yet another might notice that the local elementary school is particularly resilient to earthquakes because it recently had renovations done on it for earthquake safety. Sometimes people also like to conduct two transect walks/drives, one with men and one with women. This can help identify gendered differences in understandings of local environments. Families may also have camps for hunting, traplines and other uses away from the community. These locations should be noted for future reference in locating people and resources.

How Do I Conduct a Transect Walk or Drive?

Step #1 Identify areas that are important to your community's disaster resilience. It's best to do this in consultation with other community members.

Step #2 Draw a map of the areas you are interested in (or note them directly on a map that you already have) and decide on routes for your transect walks/drives. A transect walk generally takes 2 – 3 hours depending on the area covered. A drive will likely be quicker. You might decide to conduct several transect walks/drives in a variety of important community areas.

Step #3 Identify a transect walk/drive facilitator, someone who has read this information, who knows the community well and can guide this process.

Step #4 Gather interested community members together to participate in the transect walk/drive. You may want to use more than one vehicle if you conduct a transect drive and a large group is interested in participating. Be sure to identify more than one facilitator (one for each vehicle) if you elect to do this.

Step #5 Begin the transect walk/drive and encourage everyone to:

- Observe;
- Ask-Explain to community members;
- Listen;
- Look;
- Identify different zones;
- Seek problems;
- Seek possible solutions to problems.

It is also important to take a notebook along in order to record the group's comments. Prior to the transect walk/drive you might want to find someone to serve as an official group recorder.

Step #6 After the transect walk(s)/drive(s) collect any maps and notes that you have and draw a final diagram or map indicating issues that the transect walk has brought to light. The notes and final map serve as a clear focal point to explore and discuss local disaster resilience. This exercise also brings together a variety of viewpoints and understandings to produce a clearer picture of community vulnerabilities and capacities. You may also want to consider using a process called Photo Voice to map local capabilities and vulnerabilities.

2. Photo Voice

Photo Voice is a creative way of using photography and community engagement to identify local capabilities and vulnerabilities. Photo Voice has been known to generate rich discussion regarding a variety of topics and allows diverse perspectives to shape community consultations, meetings and, in this case, disaster resilience and planning. Using Photo Voice participants can take photographs of their community's capabilities and vulnerabilities and bring them back to a group setting to explore ideas, observations, problems and solutions related to community disaster resilience.

How Do I Use Photo Voice?

There are two key groups with distinct roles in the Photo Voice process:

- Photo Voice photographers;
- Individuals involved in reviewing a selection of photos in a community engagement process.

Both groups play an important role.

Photo Voice photographers must be trained in informed consent and the ethics of photography. Those who have used Photo Voice in the past emphasize that a group of 7 – 10 photographers works best. Participants should be selected to represent a diverse cross-section of your community.

Community engagement partners should also be selected from a diverse cross-section of community interests.

Step #1 Gather together 7-10 participants to take on the role of Photo Voice photographers. Clarify protocol for camera distribution.

Step #2 Get a local photographer to provide a workshop on the basics of photography, including issues such as how to operate a camera (lighting, balance, balance; contrast; perspective).

Step #3 Instruct Photo Voice photographers to take photos! Give Photo Voice photographers a week minimum to photograph local capacities and vulnerabilities that shape disaster resilience. There is no right or wrong way of going about this and the purpose is to capture a diversity of perspectives regarding community disaster resilience. These photos will be later used to elicit deeper conversations at the community-level.

Step #4 As a group, select a cross section of the best photos that represent local issues. For each photo have the photographer include a brief write-up regarding the content of the photo and what it means to them. These brief write-ups should be used as captions when the photos are displayed during community engagement processes.

Step #5 Advertise your Photo Voice community consultation process and invite diverse participants and partners.

Step #6 During the community consultation encourage everyone to:

- Observe
- Ask
- Listen
- Look
- Seek problems
- Seek possible solutions to problems
- It is also important to identify a note-taker to record the group's comments.

Following the consultation it can also be useful to collect notes from Photo Voice photographers about their experiences taking photos and their understandings of the subject matter.

The photographer's notes and the notes from the community consultation process serve as a clear focal point to explore local disaster resilience. This exercise also brings together a variety of viewpoints and understandings to produce a clearer picture of community vulnerabilities and capacities.

See this site for more information about Photo Voice.

Organizing the Information You Have Collected

As you move through processes to complete and implement your community's Disaster Resilience Plan, you may want to consider how to organize the community-based information you have collected. There are a number of innovative techniques you may consider for collecting community-based information that have worked well for others.

The amount of information on your community that has been collected for the benefit of creating a Disaster Resilience Plan may be overwhelming. Thinking through how best to organize the information you have will help save time and allow you to move more quickly into building a Disaster Resilience Plan.

Categorize the Information

You have been asked to collect a wide range of data regarding your community's capacities, vulnerabilities and characteristics drawing from a range of methods. The next step is to organize the information so that it is easy to use. As you organize the data think about breaking down the information you have according to topic, keeping individual files in the following areas to make your work easier:

- Community history;
- Characteristics of the population;
- Businesses and services available locally;
- Government services available locally;
- Community geography and land use;
- Local vegetation and wildlife;
- Local climate patterns;
- Community infrastructure;
- Community-based organizations and events;
- Your community's capacities;
- Local governance;
- Your community's disaster emergency management services;
- Your community's hazard information;
- Information on recent changes in the community.

You may even want to make file/box labels using the text in bold above as a guide.

Standard ways of collecting information regarding your community's hazards, assets and vulnerabilities are presented in the Community Disaster Resilience tools and resources, including such approaches as:

- Holding focus groups;
- Conducting community-based interviews;
- Conducting community surveys.

After you have collected data using the methods provided, the critical question is how to use the information wisely.

Working with Interview Data

If you conducted community interviews, you'll be working with the detailed notes you have collected regarding participant responses. The Community Disaster Resilience tools and resources focus on several key areas:

- Demography;
- Geography;
- Social Fabric;
- Community Resources;
- Disaster and Emergency Planning;
- First Response Capacity;
- Governance;
- Economy.

Community hazards, assets, and vulnerabilities are also explicitly addressed.

Taking your notes, the next step is to carefully think through how your findings 'fit' into different sections of the Community Profile. Again, these sections include: history, population, business and government services, geography and land use, vegetation and wildlife, climate patterns, infrastructure, organizations and events, capacities, governance, disaster emergency management services, hazard information, and recent local changes.

The notes provide a manner of organization in this regard, but you can also use creative ways to categorize the interview findings in order to populate your Community Profile. Some people photocopy their interview notes and cut out sections of the photocopied text in order to organize quotes into various categories. These can be filed away into various folders addressing sections of the Community Profile.

Working with Focus Group Data

Another option is to conduct a Focus Group with 3-6 people. Detailed information regarding how to go about this is provided in the resource Working Together. In this instance, your primary method of recording is likely to be on flip chart paper, in addition to any personal notes an elected recorder has written on the process and respondent comments. Like the interview findings, it can be useful to either type up the flip chart notes and arrange text according to different sections covered in the Community Profile or directly cut up and rearrange the flip chart paper itself. A similar method can be adopted in terms of any notes taken by the recorder.

Working with Community Survey Data

Once distributed to community members, a survey provides a discrete and topically organized way of gathering information for the Community Profile. In this case much of the information collected will already be organized and ready for incorporation into the Community Profile. However, written qualitative responses addressing resilience domains may have to be further organized depending on the nature of the responses and how closely they reflect domain related questions.