



principles of communicating in recovery

public information, not public relations

Broadly speaking, the aim of public relations (PR) is to promote an organisation; the aim of public information is to channel information to the relevant audiences. The aim of all recovery communications should be to assist the community, not to promote an organisation.

the right to know

Put the community at the same status as your manager or funding source. They have a right to know about the recovery process, your services and other organisations' programs.

respect people

When people are displaced or affected by an emergency, it is easy to only see their vulnerability. Communications should be respectful at all times. It is imperative that all communications recognise that affected people are rational beings able to make decisions for themselves. Materials that forget this principle can be viewed by the community as paternalistic and patronising.

build on local assets

asset-based community development (ABCD)

ABCD refers to the practice of utilising and building upon existing local networks and strengths in the community. ABCD can also influence communications practices. Simply put, don't reinvent the wheel. If a community already has a functioning and well respected community radio network, utilise it to inform the community rather than developing new, and potentially ineffective, communication channels.

Following ABCD principles means you are working with the community rather than merely working alongside them. ABCD empowers the community to participate in their own recovery.

ask the community how they want to receive information

Consulting with the community and actually asking them how they want to receive information will increase the effectiveness of your communications and increase community participation in the recovery.



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repeat information

After an emergency people often have trouble remembering information. People will be looking for information to assist their specific needs at that specific time, and ignoring everything else. What may be irrelevant to someone at week three may be the exact information they require at week five.

Information must be repeated and re-communicated periodically throughout the recovery process. An effective system of receiving and recording feedback from the community will help you know when to repeat your information.

remember the 'unaffected'

Be careful not to focus solely on those directly affected in an emergency (for example, people whose properties were burned or those relocated due to a flood). Those not directly affected can often experience significant trauma and stress following an emergency. Care should be taken not to alienate or differentiate between the 'affected' and 'unaffected' in an emergency.

acknowledge the impact

People affected by an emergency have potentially experienced a life shaping event. They have a need to have their story told, to acknowledge and validate their experience.

no spin

People recovering from an emergency have specific requirements and want information solely to address their needs. Communications containing rhetoric or brand leveraging information is counterproductive, as it will damage your reputation and just add to the communications 'noise' in the community.