

# **GET READY NSW- FOSTERING ALL- HAZARDS RESILIENCE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Non-peer reviewed research proceedings from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards  
CRC & AFAC conference

Perth, 5 – 8 September 2018

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Version	Release history	Date
1.0	Initial release of document	05/09/2018



Australian Government  
Department of Industry,  
Innovation and Science

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**Publisher:**

Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

September 2018

Citation: Anderson, S. (2018). Get ready NSW- fostering all-hazards resilience in local communities. In J.Bates (Ed.), *Research Forum 2018: proceedings from the Research Forum at the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC & AFAC Conference*. Perth: Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

## INTRODUCTION

The NSW Government's *Get Ready NSW* program is designed to promote all-hazards preparedness and build capabilities for disaster resilience in local communities. The program delivers a suite of tools and resources and fosters community-led preparedness. The involvement of a broader range of organisations across multiple sectors is a key mechanism for building community-wide resilience (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2011). All communities face multiple hazards; and the 2017 *NSW State Level Emergency Risk Assessment* (SLERA) (NSW Government 2017) identified a need to develop consistency in all-hazards community preparedness activities at the local level.

Managed by the NSW Office of Emergency Management (NSW OEM), *Get Ready NSW* addresses these priorities. It is a coordinated program that includes a suite of tailored tools and resources designed for key sectors where all-hazards information is disseminated — local government, business and community service organisations. The program builds organisational capability to strengthen disaster preparedness in their communities. Importantly, these sectors are direct channels for reaching the people who often experience the greatest impacts from disasters. The program also incorporates communications products, under the *Get Ready* banner, which provides a consistent call-to-action to link and amplify messages across preparedness initiatives.

The program reflects NSW OEM's priority of improving resilience in local communities by building the capacity and capability of councils and local leadership organisations to be active participants in whole-of-community emergency management planning, preparedness and recovery. It includes a number of related projects such as the community resilience network initiative which provides a forum for local business and community organisations to contribute to emergency planning activities, including developing local recovery plans.

## METHOD

### ***Get Ready NSW program approach***

The program was developed in consultation with the NSW Community Engagement Stakeholder Group (which includes emergency service organisations (ESOs), government agencies, local government and community organisations). The program's products are developed collaboratively with government and community partners such as the Local Community Services Association of NSW (LCSA). They complement hazard-specific community engagement activities and information from the NSW ESOs and provide an additional gateway for people to connect with ESOs about individual hazards.

A theory of change has been developed for the *Get Ready NSW* program:

*Tailored all-hazards preparedness tools and messages delivered locally by trusted sources via familiar channels are effective in raising individuals' awareness of disaster risk and increasing their preparedness actions.*

This approach is informed by international and national disaster risk reduction strategies and is supported by preparedness and risk communications research.

### *All-hazards approach*

Every community is exposed to multiple hazards. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (United Nations 2015) promotes all-hazards disaster risk reduction; and the NSW SLERA (NSW Government 2017) recommends an all-hazards approach to community engagement. There are a number of common actions that people can take to prepare for any hazard. They are foundation-level activities that can be built upon with hazard-specific actions. A community that is prepared for all hazards will be better prepared for individual hazards (Perez-Fuentes et al 2016).

### *Localisation*

Get Ready tools and resources enable local leadership organisations, particularly councils, to localise preparedness activities for their community. The importance of tailored local-level risk reduction initiatives is promoted in the Sendai Framework (United Nations 2015). *The National Strategy for Disaster*

*Resilience* (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2011) highlights the importance of individuals having information about local hazards and risks. Every community is unique with specific hazard profiles as well as particular geographic, demographic, social and economic contexts, and given these differences, communities require communications that are tailored to their composition (Boon 2014; (Hicks et al 2017) and local geographic and hazard contexts (Fairbrother et al 2014; (McLennan et al 2015; Otto et al 2018).

#### *Using key sectors as channels*

The delivery of tailored Get Ready resources and messages via pertinent channels is central to the program's implementation. The community services and business sectors have been identified as channels to reach people who are often the most heavily impacted by disasters; and councils work cross many sectors. Improving disaster preparedness in communities requires a variety of engagement activities and communications (Paton 2013; Webber et al 2017), (NSW Rural Fire Service 2017). Research literature ascertains that using a relevant delivery channel is a crucial element in preparedness communications (Wood 2012; Romo-Murphy and Vos et al 2014; Levac et al 2012).

#### *Trusted local sources*

*Get Ready NSW* engages local actors (such a council staff or business advisors) to disseminate the tools and messages in their communities. Trust in the message and its deliverer is identified as a key factor in successful risk and preparedness communication (Paton 2008; Wachinger et al 2013; Longstaff and Yang 2008; Sharp 2013 et al; Tyler and Sadiq 2018). Trust determines how risk messages are perceived and interpreted as well as how they are acted upon (Eiser et al 2012). Local actors are more likely to be relied upon for disaster risk communications than external sources (Stewart and Rashid 2011; Steelman and McCaffrey 2013).

### **Implementation through partnerships**

Promoting disaster preparedness is a complex practice area. It sits at the intersection between emergency management, hazard mitigation, risk communications and community engagement. The impacts of disasters cross many sectors, and building resilience should be shared throughout those

sectors (COAG 2011). Partnerships with organisations such as the NSW Department of Industry (NSW DOI) are instrumental to identifying, developing and disseminating the Get Ready resources. This approach ensures tools are developed to meet the needs of the sectors and are promoted and distributed via the relevant channels to local organisations to implement at the local level. These partnerships ensure the program takes a whole-of-community, joined-up approach. NSW OEM has identified partner agencies that have shared objectives regarding community resilience. The partnerships afford opportunities to promote disaster preparedness and embed resilience capabilities within government agencies and peak bodies in key sectors, enabling them to address their organisational objectives.

*Get Ready NSW* is in the early stages of implementation and the program team are actively exploring opportunities to partner with other organisations. For example, the potential to work with NSW DOI to develop materials to support businesses in disaster recovery. Grant programs provide other avenues for partnerships where funded projects align with the *Get Ready NSW* program aims.

### **Key program elements**

There are three components of the program: tools and resources designed for specific sectors; an all-hazards communications package, and research pilot investigating community-lead approaches to local preparedness.

#### *Tailored resources and tools to build capacity in key sectors*

Get Ready resources are developed collaboratively with government and community partners to meet the specific needs of various sectors. For example, NSW OEM has partnered with NSW DOI to develop the *Get Ready Business* toolkit to raise awareness of disaster risk for business and to embed disaster preparedness for all hazards into business planning. Developed using behavioural economics, *Get Ready Business* encourages business owners to take action in the best interest of their business. The tool is delivered to small-medium businesses via NSW DOI's Business Connect Advisors — local advisors working with businesses in their local communities. It is also available for local council's economic development officers and business chambers to use in their areas. The toolkit is designed to raise awareness among these

trusted local actors of the importance of businesses preparing for disasters and to increase their capacity to assist businesses to prepare for disasters and improve their recovery after an event.

Ideally, by engaging with the tailored Get Ready tools, these key community members and organisations will become champions of disaster resilience in their local area.

Some of the tools are relevant to organisations in multiple sectors and can be combined by an organisation, such as a local council, to build a tailored preparedness program for their community. Current products include: Get Ready Business; Get Ready communications package for local councils; and an online resource for community service organisations.

#### Local communications package

Another component of the *Get Ready NSW* program is an all-hazards communications package that includes:

- five preparedness messages that apply across any emergency (which were developed in consultation with NSW ESOs and the NSW Behavioural Insights team, and were approved by Cabinet in 2014); and
- an umbrella brand – a logo with the call-to-action ('get ready for disasters').

The Get Ready messages and logo provide action- or decision-oriented advice (offering a 'call to action') which can positively influence preparedness decisions (Wood 2012; Árvai 2014; Nicholls 2012).

The communications package was designed to be adopted by local councils and other leadership organisations for them to adapt to their area. The logo can be localised for individual communities, e.g., Get Ready Maitland.

A specific communications package developed for local councils offers a 'starter kit' for building preparedness communications which, when combined with other tools (e.g. *Get Ready Business*), can create momentum within a community.



*Figure 1: Get Ready NSW logo, including the call-to-action and an example of a localised version of the Logo*

The Get Ready call-to-action provides an umbrella to link and amplify messages across preparedness initiatives — from locally developed projects to communications from NSW government agencies. Get Ready has been adopted as the communication banner for broad public awareness activities by Infrastructure NSW and NSW SES as part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Risk Management Strategy. Consistency of communications across these activities and channels will further reinforce and strengthen those messages.

#### *Get Ready Community-led preparedness research pilot*

To effectively support communities to build their capability and capacity to develop local preparedness activities, it is important to know more about the processes involved in building and sustaining communities' resilience capabilities and adaptive capacity; how they work together to build preparedness; and how and why community energy is built or blocked.

The NSW Community Engagement Stakeholder group recognised the need to investigate community-led approaches to resilience building in NSW via a rigorous research approach to build a solid evidence base about the types of community-led preparedness initiatives that are effective in increasing risk awareness and preparedness capability of NSW communities.

NSW OEM has partnered with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) to trial an all-hazards, co-designed, community-led, place-based approach to disaster preparedness. FRRR is a non-profit organisation focused on building economic and social strengths in rural communities. FRRR, through their Disaster Resilient Future Ready program, has shared objectives with those identified by the stakeholder group. A research team from the University of Sydney and Newcastle University has been engaged to evaluate the pilot using an action research methodology.

Three communities have been selected as pilot locations: Ocean Shores (coastal), Wee Waa (rural) and North Richmond (peri-urban). They face a range of hazards, have different experiences of disasters and diverse community profiles. The pilot has three phases:

1. engaging with each community to develop community maps;
2. co-designing with communities plans for preparedness; and
3. supporting communities to develop their actions and initiatives.

Phase one is currently underway and the pilot is scheduled for completion in June 2019.

## DISCUSSION

NSW OEM provides connections to emergency services and emergency management agencies, as well as links with other projects. FRRR is undertaking community engagement activities in the pilot sites using a community development approach. The research team works alongside FRRR to evaluate the methods, tools and approaches used in project. The researchers are embedded in the communities and act as a resource for them, providing feedback across the duration of the project.

The involvement of local emergency services and local councils is vital to providing local emergency management context and to building and strengthening linkages between community groups and emergency management organisations.

The pilot will provide intelligence to improve the design of community engagement programs and preparedness initiatives to enable community-led activities. The findings will inform future developments in the *Get Ready NSW* program; and will have relevance for emergency services, local councils and community organisations. It goes beyond preparedness and will have application for emergency planning and disaster recovery operations.

## CONCLUSION

*Get Ready NSW* provides organisations in key sectors with all-hazards preparedness tools, resources and messages that they can localise and adapt for their communities. The Get Ready call-to-action provides a banner to link and amplify messages across preparedness initiatives. Through these mechanisms, *Get Ready NSW* should raise awareness of disaster risk and increase capabilities in local organisations and communities to create preparedness activities. Ideally, it will foster community-led approaches to resilience building.

The program's approach is supported by research evidence and aligns with key actions identified in the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* (COAG 2011) — partnering with those who affect change; empowering individuals and communities to exercise choice and take responsibility; and supporting capabilities for disaster resilience within communities. The research pilot will provide rigorous research regarding bottom-up preparedness-building methods to inform the development of the *Get Ready NSW* program. The current resources and partnerships are a foundation for future development of the program; and new initiatives and partnership opportunities are being investigated. NSW OEM recognises the importance of involving local community groups, such as sporting clubs or school associations, in the program. These groups are integral to the Get Ready research pilot, and findings from the pilot will inform the strategy for including them in the program. *Get Ready NSW* reflects NSW OEM's priority for building capacity for disaster resilience in local communities.

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