

Recovery Triage



Determine Jurisdiction Responsibility

Who is in charge of recovery?

As the disaster and aftermath impacts are assessed, it's important to start framing up responsibility for recovery. If you work in local government or for an agency with some recovery responsibilities, consider how the answers to these questions may shape your role:

Q. How many jurisdictions were impacted and how are the impacts across jurisdictions the same/different?

- Was State and/or federal land damaged or destroyed?
- Were the areas impacted known to be economically disadvantaged and/or high on the social vulnerability index: <https://svi.cdc.gov/map/>
- Does the impacted area have a high degree of wildfire recurrence?
- Is the population largely experienced in response and recovery?
- Were the majority of homes dependent upon municipal services like water and wastewater, small community systems that are privately owned, or individual wells and septic?
 - Were any water or wastewater systems damaged or destroyed, and what is the funding availability and timeline for repair?
- What is the status of public and privately owned utilities?
 - Are the private utilities planning any upgrades during restoration like undergrounding or other hardening activities that may need additional time, permits, public messaging, and funds to complete?
- Were the majority of homes located on/around private roads the homeowners will be responsible for repairing, are the homes generally accessible for recovery and reconstruction vehicles and/or behind locked gates?
- Were any major roadways damaged or destroyed?



- Which communities will be most impacted by debris/tree removal truck traffic, depending on where the end use facility is located?
- Is there a known community gathering spot or are there key organizations serving the burn scar who are or will step up as community leaders?
- What are the immediate and lasting population changes within the burn scar and all surrounding communities?

Rural fires and urban fires require different approaches to recovery. Whereas a fire in a concentrated urban setting may direct recovery funding toward government infrastructure and services for repair and reconstruction, funding for rural fire recovery may be disparate and individualized as population density is low and municipal services are not available. Fires impacting denser populations may increase the value of economic losses which trigger State and/or federal funding; fires in rural areas where more land but fewer homes are damaged may not reach the economic value threshold.

These questions may help illuminate the availability of funding and immediacy of needed infrastructure repair, and the dependency of housing recovery on municipal infrastructure and services versus self-owned or private systems and roads. They may also help determine how prepared and responsive the community will be to recovery based upon prior fire experience. Initially, these questions may start to shine a light on temporary housing needs and conditions, and the volume of resources needed on the public and private side for the way responsibility is divided by land and infrastructure ownership.

Estimate Insurance Availability

Will insurance proceeds be enough for most survivors to rebuild?

To begin assessing available insurance resources for recovery which are the quickest funding path for reconstruction, consider:

Q. What percentage of the population was adequately insured?

- If households lacked insurance, is it because of affordability/availability, because their house was paid off and it's not required, or something else?
- What percentage of the population was on the FAIR plan?
- Did the fire occur in an area considered "vulnerable" by the California Department of Insurance?
- What percentage of the population received a notice of non-renewal within the last 24 months?
- What percentage were owner-occupants, renters, or second home owners?
- Who are the largest landowners, private and commercial, in the burn scar?
- Are new builds insurable in the burn scar?

Understanding insurability and type of ownership will begin to frame out the resources available for individual recovery: who has access to those resources, and what and where the funding gaps may be. Cal OES says the most significant indicator of quick individual recovery is insurability, and now we have the added pressure of insurance market changes in fire-prone and recovering areas in California. Consumer insurance advocacy groups like United Policyholders are an ongoing resource for this analysis.



Evaluate Economic Factors

Is the local economy sustainable during recovery?

To begin assessing the economic impacts of the fire on businesses, jobs, and workforce, estimate or survey:

Q. Business impacts

- How many businesses were lost compared to the total number of pre-existing businesses, and what % job loss does this represent to the total market?
- What percentage of impacted businesses were adequately insured?
- What percentage of jobs lost were local-serving and dependent upon the pre-fire population?
- What percentage of businesses are relocating nearby with plans to return?
- What is the temporary or permanent shift in industry groups, i.e., are most dentists relocating, are ancillary industries to the largest impacted employers relocating?
- What are the workforce impacts of population dispersal to nearby towns and to non-commutable distances?
- Are there commercial or industrial spaces functional for alternative recovery uses?
- Are commercial and industrial property owners amenable to removing debris and other hazards to prepare their land for temporary uses?

If a majority of local businesses are not lost or interrupted by disaster, they could be a critical linchpin to keeping the economy going during recovery. These businesses may also choose to operate in service of response and recovery, adapting their products and services to changing demands.

If a majority of businesses are lost to disaster and are dependent upon population restoration, understanding the decisions of each business will help map out who will return, who will relocate



and where, or if the business will permanently close. If jobs are primarily local-serving to established households versus visitors, businesses may need to see housing recover before reinvesting.

Of course, some business owners and operators are drawn to the recovery and want to be part of community resurgence and so may choose to rebuild or reopen before the market is ready. While this is risky for the business, it also begins to rebuild trust and interest in the economy and other businesses may follow suit.

Expect a significant churn in the early years of recovery as businesses gamble on a recovering population and for reasons inside and outside of their control – like larger economic conditions – may not be in a position to sustain operations. Losing a business after disaster may trigger yet another community loss of something familiar and dependable. If a wildfire is catastrophic and results in a destroyed community, the economy may not stabilize for several years even with direct business assistance, and it's important to keep that in perspective as changes occur.

It is helpful to do an inventory of surviving and/or operational commercial spaces and lots for repurposing for recovery needs. Large destroyed lots, once cleaned, can operate as utility or corps yards for large-scale contractors moving in for recovery. Standing commercial buildings can be used as headquarters for contractors establishing a local presence.

Ultimately, the uses of these spaces are dependent upon demand, what is allowed by the local government, and what the property owners wishes to do with their property. Public-private agreements can be attractive temporary uses of land during the early stages of recovery, creating cash flow where there would otherwise be none.

Assess Reconstruction Viability

Are labor and materials
available and affordable?

Data essential for beginning the analysis of
community viability centers around housing
stock impacts:



Q. Housing stock & market:

- What was the number of damaged/destroyed housing units?
 - What percentage of the total housing supply does the loss represent?
 - What was the average age of the home destroyed?
 - What was the average price of the home destroyed?
 - What percentage was considered affordable?
 - What percentage was considered workforce housing?
 - What percentage of workforce housing supported trades now in higher demand?
- Is the disaster impacted area known to have a higher degree of title clearance issues, lots lacking in legal determination, lots not surveyed and/or recorded?
- What was the housing supply in the months prior to the disaster?
- Is the housing supply being tracked monthly in all impacted and surrounding jurisdictions?
- Does the cost of rebuilding exceed the value of new construction?
- What is the labor force supply in high demand trades?
 - Is the labor force supply local, transient, or imported?
- How has the cost of building materials varied since the disaster?
- Have building codes radically changed statewide or regionally since the disaster?

Understanding the housing stock pre-fire and post-fire is essential, and several data sources exist to support this. Regional Housing Needs Plans and General Plans provide statistics on what is available and what is needed prior to disaster; Cal Fire DINS reports or agency reports in other states that quantify damage and destruction to structures can aid in understanding the percentage of the impact on the overall housing supply.

I interviewed the Executive Director for Valley Contractors Exchange (VCE) for the fellowship and she emphasized the importance of understanding barriers to reconstruction early in recovery. VCE regularly gathers data to analyze where, how, and who is recovering by looking at the location of building permits, certificates of occupancy rates, and the percentage of stick builds to manufactured homes. Reconstruction is dependent upon available labor and materials so it's important to first look at the impact of housing loss on essential trades for recovery. In the case of the Camp Fire, studies show that 10% of the construction workforce housing was lost, leaving these workers without housing for a period of time. Without housing, even with employment, remaining in the area may not be an option.

If labor is available but materials are in short supply or prices have spiked, recovery may slow down and/or progress in a volatile way until pricing stabilizes. The impact of increasing lumber prices and building material supply chain issues on Camp Fire recovery during the pandemic was clear – projects slowed or halted. Fundamentally, reconstruction can be largely unaffordable as the cost of rebuilding a home constructed 40 years ago exceeds available insurance proceeds covering only the replacement cost. Any other pressures on the market including supply and demand affecting pricing can reduce the pace of recovery.

Evaluate

Development Pace

Should the local government and community prepare for long-term recovery?

To evaluate the speed at which recovery can occur, and any efficiencies that can be achieved within the individual recovery process, evaluate the development landscape:



Q. Development considerations

- Are any impacted areas considered desirable for master planned developments?
- Are any areas desirable for contiguous spec building?
- Is the community on CSLB's radar for license stings?
- What are local attitudes about selling unimproved land to spec builders?
- Are local attorneys weighing in on the timing of residential land sales?
- Can certain impacted areas support high-density affordable housing with appropriate infrastructure and amenities?
- Is the State amendable to scattered site redevelopment?
- Were mobile home parks impacted and what percentage of park owners live locally?
 - Which parks provided services versus self-service?
 - Is the infrastructure intact for reconstruction?
 - Are State subsidies available for park reconstruction?
 - Can mobile home parks be used as RV parks during the immediate aftermath?

If damaged and destroyed lots are not contiguous, then any kind of reconstruction at scale which can be a more affordable, efficient approach is less feasible. Contractors describe the high cost of fuel driving between reconstruction projects in rural remote areas, and/or the challenge of moving equipment along private gravel roads maintained by property owners.

Multi-family housing construction requires adequate infrastructure to support density, and available local amenities to support financing. Understanding an area's capacity and regulatory framework for denser housing is key to readiness for grant funding and other subsidies necessary to developers. If a destroyed community was infrastructure-constrained prior to disaster, recovery might be the most effective time to increase and improve basic sanitary systems, as the Town of Paradise is doing with the Paradise Regional Sewer Connection Project.

The Paradise Sewer Project, it should be noted, had been studied for decades prior to the Camp Fire. The Town had gone to voters and nearby jurisdictions a number of times to determine amenability to a project of this magnitude. The Camp Fire was a catalyst for the project but certainly not the start of it. Understanding projects needed for a healthy vibrant economy in advance of disaster, through mitigation planning or long-range planning, can prepare for recovery toward greater resilience and sustainability.

If a disaster is found to be caused by a corporation and settlements are levied, the determinations and pay-outs do not come quickly. For this reason, settlement proceeds may not be reliably and immediately available to finance permanent housing recovery. Settlement claims may also be overseen by attorneys who may advise property owners on when and how to sell.

When I was Disaster Recovery Director in the Town of Paradise, a number of multi-family housing developers looking to purchase contiguous lots along main routes near downtown were turned down by property owners at the direction of their attorneys. The instruction was to hold on the sale of any property associated with their claim until it was settled. This stymied recovery for those who were not planning to rebuild on their lot but couldn't sell yet. It also stifled reconstruction for those looking to develop at scale. Ultimately, though settlement payments are necessary, they add a layer of timing to consider when evaluating resources available for recovery.

The Town of Paradise has seen a surge in manufactured housing installation over stick-built reconstruction, largely due to the affordability of the former over the latter. Communities used to a certain aesthetic may have strong opinions about the type of housing coming back. The availability of manufactured housing can be impacted by similar market forces as traditional construction, as supply can determine the timing of installation. It's not uncommon to see a manufactured house sitting on a trailer on a vacant lot for months while a property owner waits for the installation crew to be arrive.

In the months following the Camp Fire I was commuting along the same roads as the dump trucks removing debris from Paradise and the Upper Ridge. I'd see them lined up in batches of a dozen or more trucks waiting to cross the highway, removing the remains of the place I loved so much – homes, personal belongings, everything. On my way south in the morning I'd pass a number of manufactured homes heading north and know right where they were going. Modulares and trailers were also a regular sight. If you know what to look for, recovery is visible for hundreds of miles around a disaster site.

Understand Government Capacity

Does the local government have experience and capacity to lead recovery?

The ability of government to provide sustained response to disaster and the long-term recovery process requires understanding preparedness and capacity:



Q. Government capacity:

- Has the jurisdiction most impacted dealt with disaster before?
- Has the jurisdiction managed FEMA PA funding/projects prior to the disaster?
- Has the jurisdiction managed CDBG prior?
- Has the jurisdiction been given administration authority over recovery funding?
 - Are the funds allocated or competitive?
- Did the jurisdiction have an approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan at the time of the disaster creating eligibility for cost-share reductions and grant funds?
- Is there local/charitable flexible funding available to increase staffing that is non-reimbursable through grants?
- What office/department will centralize oversight of recovery planning, projects, funding, and reporting?
- Is there a pre-fire recovery plan, or desire to create one post-disaster?
- What percentage of government responders were victims of the disaster?
- What are general attitudes about local government in the impacted areas?
- What sources of funds will be used for recovery, and do any of those sources duplicate federal or State assistance?

Familiarity with recovery funding is important but not necessary for local governments to administer disaster grants. Local governments must learn as they go if they are new to disaster

recovery. In many cases, I imagine, jurisdictions deal with small-scale disasters fairly regularly and have at least some framework of understanding for what it takes. I imagine a small storm surge or a fire impacting a block or two of a community. Large-scale disasters, however, those that are federally declared as they exceed local capacity and resources for response, do trigger the availability of funding not always present in small incidents.

It is important to consider that many first responders are also survivors. In the case of the Paradise Town Council, all five Council members lost their homes in the Camp Fire and had to jump into immediate action to make the emergency proclamations, establish urgency ordinances, and set up alternative facilities for Town governance. Responders who are survivors may have a higher degree of burnout as they are dealing with their personal trauma and the trauma of the people in their lives as well as responding to the needs of the community. Recognizing this from the outset and accommodating personal needs as well as professional needs is critically important. Having a trauma-informed approach with the workforce and volunteers, recognizing they are survivors, too, can create the safest possible space for recovery work to begin.

Evaluate Urgency Policies

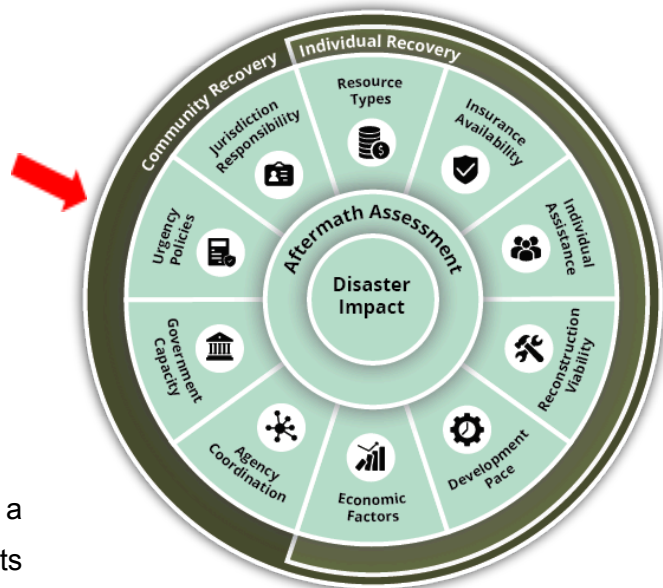
Are local policies sufficient to meet changing needs?

Over time, I've come to think of urgency ordinances as necessary safety nets for stabilization and recovery. Urgency ordinances are the only local policies that create structure and define the timeline for a series of sequential and co-occurring events needed for recovery to begin, like debris and tree removal, allowable locations for log decks, and temporary housing allowances. Understanding built-in levers within policy are essential to evaluating data that can illuminate their effectiveness and necessity over time.

Understanding the policy framework – the timing of allowances and limitations – and the roles assigned to compliance and enforcement, might include asking:

Q. Housing & infrastructure policy

- Does the jurisdiction have a template urgency ordinance already in use or previously used?
- Specifically, how do existing municipal codes and urgency ordinances differ?
- How do urgency ordinances accommodate survivor rights inside and outside the burn scar?
- Do State or federal emergency orders have to be layered in, i.e., drought, pandemic?
- What are existing housing policies in and around the disaster impacted area?
- What are the triggers for housing policy changes?
- What are the pre-disaster policies and permits available for dry camping, RVs, and other temporary housing allowances, and will those meet the needs of recovery and reconstruction?
- What elements of the General Plan will be affected by the disaster?
- Does the jurisdiction have a Capital Improvement Plan and Design Standards?



- What is the role of the Planning Commission in recovery policy?
- What authorities does the zone administrator have?
- Is there an adopted Climate Action Plan?
- Does the jurisdiction have the resources to hire and embed a rebuild advocate in planning?
- What was the role of code enforcement in the area pre-fire, and what does their case load look like post-fire?

Disaster planning – and/or, recovery planning – should include the identification of template policies that can be enacted in an emergency. Having urgency ordinances drafted to address immediate public needs like housing, debris and tree removal, can speed up the initial stabilization process post-disaster and clarify rights and abilities for the public. Knowing what elements of each Board-directed and/or regulatory plan can aid in recovery, is a good way to develop a hub and spoke model for plans to operate together.

Plans are often created during blue sky conditions. Working with consultants to ensure disaster response and recovery are contemplated as plans are developed and updated is one way to socialize the process of recovery, if not prepare for it directly. Many plans, like Housing Elements within General Plans, are mandated by the State in California. Those Housing Elements must meet certain criteria and standards, and outline required growth in various categories of housing stock.

When I arrived in the Town it was right on the eve of the Housing Element update which was a fraught but necessary time to relook at how to recover the loss of 89% of the housing stock. Reimagining what's possible given infrastructure improvements planned during recovery can be contained within Housing Element updates. These planning processes which recur on a regular basis can be the most efficient way to build toward recovery preparation prior to disaster.

At any given time, the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, the General Plan, the Housing Element, the Climate Action Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, the Capital Improvement Plan, the Emergency Operations Plan – any of these planning processes can be ongoing. Recognizing these cycles of fine-tuning community planning as opportunities for disaster preparedness and recovery could be the key to including these essential functions in day-to-day work. Granted, many of these plans are led by different departments so interdepartmental coordination is the key to situational awareness and cross-linking outcomes and actions within the plans.

Understand Resource Types

How flexible are the funds for recovery and when are they available?

For federally declared disasters, the field of disaster recovery is established by the time and locations in which disasters occur. A jurisdiction might be set up to compete for disaster recovery funding with a wildly different jurisdiction solely because disaster occurred in both at the same time. On the non-government side (NGOs), it may be helpful to scan local organizations for capacity and expertise to take on recovery roles, keeping in mind they may be tapped for response and recovery simply by the nature of the services they provide.

Speaking with disaster recovery professionals in Oregon following their major firestorms in the years after the Camp Fire, they experienced a crowded and overlapping group of local NGOs trying to establish their post-fire roles and responsibilities. This confusion led to hardship for well-meaning individuals attempting to find their lanes and gain traction with support and resources. In my opinion, avoiding this is likely impossible, but anticipating it with pre-planning might loosely assign roles that give everyone a place to start.

Framing out the availability of recovery resources could start with these questions:

Q. Disaster recovery resources

- What other communities across the state were federally declared at the same time?
- Will there be financial settlements for victims and/or responding agencies?
 - If so, what is the size of the Trust and number of claims?
 - Do the settlements carry tax implications?
- What other local sources are available to rebuild, i.e., community foundations, charitable organizations?



- Which organizations have the experience and capacity to scale quickly for response and recovery?
- Are local organizations prepared to apply for and manage State and federal recovery grants?
- What is the timing of Federal/State assistance?
 - Who is coordinating debris removal?
 - Which agencies are contracting tree removal?
 - Are the debris and tree removal programs consolidated?
 - What are the duplication of benefits expectations of subsidized debris and tree removal for public and privately owned lands?
 - Who collects insurance proceeds for debris removal reimbursement?
 - Is there a match or cost-share requirement?
 - Is any settlement considered taxable and/or duplication of benefits?

Funding available for recovery comes in different timelines tied to specific uses. Understanding the differences between first-in money and last-in money will allow jurisdictions – and individuals – to avoid mistakes in spending that impact recovery down the road. Charitable funds can and should be considered the most flexible and may be specifically tied to gap funding where local matches are required for State and federal grants and/or to needs that are ineligible for other disaster recovery funding, like staffing.

After disaster, impacted individuals are in a heightened state of trauma and may not remember the flood of information coming their way. I say this because I observed my parents going through the process and felt their acute information overload. Misunderstandings about how to use funds in early recovery can be detrimental if not downright catastrophic to an individual or household as recovery progresses. Local public messaging can help fire survivors avoid financial mistakes if information from State and federal sources is available early enough.

That said, given the fact that fire destroys homes, it makes perfect sense that displaced survivors might utilize their first available resources to secure temporary housing. This decision can prove challenging later when in securing a government reconstruction loan they must “pay back” the insurance proceeds they already spent to qualify for the loan.

Before giving charitably on any scale, it is important to understand what documentation survivors must provide to qualify for government assistance which, in many cases, represents the bulk of the funding available for recovery. Charitable giving is well intended, but if the timing

and mechanism of relief decrease an individual's ability to secure critical funding for reconstruction or long-term housing, those charitable funds may – counterintuitively – work against recovery.

Managing funding for recovery is a highly specific art of weaving together many different kinds of funding types. Avoiding duplication of benefits is probably the most critical pathway to maximizing resources for recovery. We are still dealing with this five years after the Camp Fire. Grant funding available for mitigation must not duplicate the good works done for free on private properties by vegetation management non-profits. The grants must be contemplated for entirely separate processes, and must not replicate funding for the same purpose that has already been spent on other needs.

Understand Individual Assistance

What percentage of survivors will need outside assistance and resources?

Focusing on individual recovery is paramount to understanding the availability and limitations of resources to rebuild or relocate, and some organizations are geared to do this specifically. Local government plugs in with Cal OES and FEMA in a federally declared disaster to provide access to personal information necessary for individuals to apply for aid, particularly if hard-copy information was lost to fire. If the disaster does not meet the federal declaration threshold, State assistance may still be available, or perhaps there is no funding available for recovery. These are critical pathways to explore and understand immediately after disaster as they have the broadest implications for how quickly and how completely communities and individuals can recover.

Supporting the individual starts with understanding:

Q. Individual assistance

- Does the disaster qualify for FEMA Individual Assistance (IA)?
 - If yes:
 - How many IA claims were submitted by survivors versus funded?
 - Where is the Local Assistance Center or FEMA IA assistance center proximate to the impacted area? Is additional transportation needed to facilitate access?
 - What is the placement of emergency government housing in relation to the impacted area? Are FEMA trailers placed in impacted private properties or well outside the burn scar?
- Are local organizations providing case management?



- Is there an unmet needs roundtable attended/organized locally?
- What is the timing of owner-occupied reconstruction programs?
- Does the State plan for any rental assistance/subsidies?
- What is the space count and capacity of RV parks within 100 miles?

Digging into the process of securing individual funding is essential for a government to identify barriers that can be removed. What will FEMA Individual Assistance not cover? Can that then be covered by charitable funds or grant programs? When are government loans and grants available for reconstruction and what strain will any delays place on displaced households? Because there is no centralized system of recovery where funding decisions are choreographed for perfect disbursement and seamless use, understanding the ins and outs of recovery funding for individuals may help reveal any gaps in resources.

In basic terms, a community impacted by fire that is underinsured will need a higher level of government assistance to recover. The likelihood that the deployment of government assistance is complicated by duplication of benefits is higher the more vulnerable and under-resourced a community is.

Assess Agency

Coordination

Are the right agencies working cooperatively?

Agencies, governments, non-profits, elected officials, membership associations, and the many other organizations involved in recovery all have different roles and responsibilities. The ability of these groups to pursue complimentary goals for the overall benefit of the recovering community depends on clear, transparent communication and coordination, and an understanding of public and private sector differences.



An issue I observed in early Camp Fire recovery was a blurring of boundaries between organizations. If organizations are collaborating to achieve the same mission, their messaging should coordinate. If organizations are attempting to achieve similar outcomes without communication, public messaging can be confusing for those seeking services or relief. As organizations find themselves in helping roles, while they learn their new duties and responsibilities, it is important to consider messaging and expectation-setting for larger audiences, including governmental agencies to ensure duplication and/or conflict does not occur.

It seems natural that individuals and organizations adjacent to a disaster-impacted community will want to respond. Here, it is critical to consider that ownership and leadership over recovery should lie with the impacted community, not represented by proxy. Determining ways to support individuals, governments, and organizations that have been directly impacted is better for community morale than standing in and/or replacing those services over the long term. Even the locations where meetings are held can be triggering for fire survivors. The closer the epicenter of recovery can be to the epicenter of disaster, the more likely it is that support and resources will be accepted and utilized toward recovery goals and objectives.

Evaluating and getting to know organizations and individuals who might find themselves responding to disaster or aiding in recovery could speed up and potentially bypass the initial “storming and norming” process of early recovery. These could include:

Q. Building trusting relationships with:

- Federal and State tribes
- Adjacent government officials
- Federal and State elected officials
- Federal and State lobbyists
- Board of education and school districts
- Utility companies
- Property Owners Associations
- Chambers of Commerce
- Downtown Business Associations
- Realtor Associations
- United Policyholders / Department of Insurance
- Special Districts – water, wastewater, parks/recreation, tourism
- Statewide county and city associations
- Land stewards, i.e., Associated Governments, Resource/Conservation Districts, Fire Safe Councils

Recovery is not conducted in a bubble or, rather, it shouldn't be. A big chunk of time in recovery is spent on advocacy which relies heavily on the support of elected officials at State and federal levels. There are constraints on individual recovery and constraints on community recovery; understanding those constraints and being able to articulate them up the chain is critical. Personally, I believe that if we can't change our recovery for the better, perhaps by making the barriers known, we can change the future of recovery for another community.

To the extent local governments, districts, and agencies can collaborate on emergency planning, mitigation planning, evacuation planning, and other critical efforts that can be documented and table-topped, the better. Even though jurisdictions are largely forced to manage recovery on their own given the ways in which funding is allocated, information sharing should be a central value to guide regional recovery. Specific to the Camp Fire, nothing pains me more in long-term recovery than discovering the Town is suffering through something the County can aid in, and vice versa.

Survivors can be difficult to reach after disaster for a variety of reasons. Relying on community organizations to message out critical programs and services is helpful, with a caveat to make sure information shared on behalf of a government agency is vetted and approved.

Organizations that function to advise professionals, like industry associations and chambers of commerce, can be helpful while standing up recovery efforts, but again, messaging needs to be tightly controlled.

We're now several years into recovering from the Camp Fire and we still rely on trusted community organizations to aid in planning and programming. A barrier the State regularly faces during recovery is a lack of trust among the public, therefore, local community groups can be the facilitators for information sharing. An important caveat here is to avoid making promises and setting expectations on behalf of any other agency, organization, or government.

I learned early in my time as Disaster Recovery Director that the messenger will be vilified if information is false or guarantees are not met. I was the trusted voice of recovery and regularly presented updates to the Town Council on behalf of Cal OES and CalRecycle related to the Hazard Tree Removal Program. I'd receive updates on daily or weekly calls and I would present those updates as fact only to find out later major shifts were occurring in the programs unbeknownst to the Town.

As the voice, I would then have to navigate the questions and, in some cases, understandable fury. I remember being shouted at while delivering a presentation, then taking a break in the hallway only to be threatened by a member of the public. This frustration and anger at the delays and inconsistencies were fair, but as the person appointed to absorb it all, I found it very challenging. Thankfully our staff and elected officials were largely supportive and the weight was shifted and shared amongst staff during particularly heated topics and moments.

Emergency response systems like SEMS and NIMS have very specific protocol for communications. To the extent disaster recovery professionals can avail themselves of those emergency management practices, the more controlled public messaging can be. During the "storming" and "norming" phase of response and early recovery, it is very challenging to know which way is up with public communications, but reliance upon professionals who know how to control messaging is key.