

# Workshop Report



MACQUARIE  
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SYDNEY ~ AUSTRALIA

On April 15th 2014 Climate Futures ran a workshop on 'COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION and RESILIENCE' funded by the Faculty of Arts Themed Research Workshop grant scheme.

## OVERVIEW

Disaster Resilience is a term that people both love and hate, depending on the personal or organisational perspective from which it is approached. However one may feel about it, it is a prominent feature of the policy landscape, and one that appears to be gaining traction at multiple levels.

Work in this space often emphasises capacity building and generative coping mechanisms that involve communities in strategic planning. Participation of a broad range of stakeholders increases public confidence; helps to share responsibility for planning, prevention, response and recovery; it also reduces the reliance of communities on the emergency services and other government or non-government agencies. There is, however, no single model for 'good' community engagement, no single set of tools that will work in all situations and little evidence of an inter-disciplinary approach that can build collaboration through action research. There is also a dearth of evidence for best practice in collaborative and participatory projects that explore the communication blockages that may currently stymie efforts to build and enhance more sustainable models of self-reliance and shared responsibility in Australian communities.

### *Aims of the workshop*

This workshop sought to fill that knowledge gap, using our team as a catalyst for better communication, engagement and collaborative research design. We brought together delegates from key emergency management and disaster resilience organisations with leading researchers and consultants in communication, collaboration and resilience to generate new projects. The workshop aimed to generate new collaborative research

proposals from a shared interest in working together. By focusing on how we can collaborate we hoped to explore our common interests outside the restrictions of each organisation to maximise the impact of our work in the growing policy space of resilience thinking and practice. Our specific aims were as follows:

- To establish a communication and collaboration framework for community resilience projects;
- To share beneficial case studies of best practice from previous or future projects, developing mutually beneficial collaborations;
- Explore challenges of sharing experiences and documenting previous examples of collaborative community projects
- Develop a means to engage and improve communication between the required respondents in the community, emergency services, private sector and civil services;
- Identify and document current ways of working - especially where successful collaborations have come forth or where communication breakdowns have undermined the goals of resilience projects.

### *Communication, Collaboration and Resilience*

Now that's a pretty ambitious agenda for twelve people in one day. As such we never expected to comprehensively address all of these aims, but rather to build on our previous workshops<sup>1</sup> and agenda building in communication research for resilience<sup>2</sup> to start laying some groundwork for future projects.

<sup>1</sup> See for more details

<http://climatefutures.mq.edu.au/eventsandnews/events/workshops/>

<sup>2</sup> Burnside-Lawry, J., Akama, Y., & Rogers, P. (2013).

Communication research needs for building societal disaster resilience. *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 28(4), 29.

The workshop was structured in two sessions. A morning session styled as a 'five minute forum' to establish a common framework amongst the delegates, and an afternoon session for situational and institutional needs mapping to generate new project proposals.

### *A Common Framework for Research Needs*

The morning session focused on the current work of each organisation, allowing the delegates to share experiences and concerns about the trajectory of resilience thinking and practice. It also allowed us to begin establishing a common framework, understanding the personal background, personal interests and approaches and skills each offered by the individual, and the team, for future collaborations.

The conversation was wide ranging and it's hard to summarise the depth of feeling and complexity of such a changing landscape; however, several key concerns and needs did emerge:

- 1. Need to explore what will successfully motivate and sustain behaviour change, both in the community AND in key organisations;*
- 2. Tools for resilience building need to be used by non-experts (i.e. the public) but work in ways that experts can measure and manage;*
- 3. Need for ways to re-skill current teams or recruit new contributors to meet the changing needs of resilience thinking and practice;*
- 4. Need for research and evidence to show that the internal culture of 'response-centric' organisations can/must change;*
- 5. Lack of a means to acknowledge and measure local knowledge in a language understood by funding agencies (i.e. treasury);*
- 6. Lack of a cost/benefit project evaluation tools or performance indicators for resilience projects;*
- 7. Lack of understanding of the value and depth to be gained by combining qualitative evaluations and quantitative measures.*

### *Combining 'needs' and 'wants'*

In the discussion of a common framework we began to develop greater comfort with the realms of expertise offered and the value of collaborative approaches to problem-solving that could be brought forth through both formal partnerships, but also through informal collaborative arrangements in which we share our

common understanding of the challenges ahead. With this in mind the afternoon session sought to combine a greater understanding of common institutional and organisational needs in a framework for enquiry. Before arriving at the workshop delegates were asked to consider a number of 'dream' projects they would like to undertake. In the afternoon project development exercises these were combined with our morning discussion to draw out some key questions for future research. This set up a framework for some common research questions. Again this is not all inclusive but gives focus to the common framework of needs established above:

**RQ1.** *What motivates people to engage early?*

**RQ2.** *How do we improve communication between Individuals and organisations?*

**RQ3.** *How do we provide indicators in terms of cost/benefit (i.e. change and improvement) from community engagement? (as resilience building)*

### *Building Collaborative Resilience*

This workshop was a participatory action research exercise in collaboration and communication. The aims of the workshop were broad but the outcomes and outputs were specific. The outcome was to establish better connections and a will to collaborate amongst the delegates, thus through future working we can provide a stronger evidence base for both resilience thinking and practice. From this common framework a preliminary mapping of key institutional and organisational needs was established, mutually agreed upon research questions were developed and now we are seeking future funding and grant awards to undertake research. This agenda for collaborative participatory action research will improve communication on all fronts and drive an improved resilience for all involved.

*"Unity is Strength... Where there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved"*

*Mattie Stepanek*

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