POST-FIRE

RECOVERY READINESS GUIDE

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this recovery readiness guide is to provide foundational information, templates, and tools to help local jurisdictions and their partners prepare, plan and train to recover after wildfires. This guide is not meant to supersede in local recovery, emergency management or other plans any way. It is rather a guide for the whole community involved in recovery to explore and use to develop shared understanding, plans, and process that builds critical recovery readiness for wildfire.

LIMITATIONS

This document is specific to post-wildfire recovery readiness and does not cover all eventualities or nuances of local recovery. Each recovery process will be conducted according to the unique context of people, land, resources, and event severity.

Despite the unique nature of recovery, the lessons learned from previous disasters have shown that there are core similarities in each recovery, and that the more planning is done in advance, the more successful and effective recovery will be.

In order to deliver foundational recovery readiness and support the development of unique recovery plans, the Recovery Readiness Toolbox that accompanies this document contains a variety of tools and customizable checklists and templates to guide pre-fire recovery training and planning.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Local jurisdictions and tribes are responsible for recovery from local emergencies and disasters, including organizing and training local staff.
- This document serves as a guide to support county recovery efforts following fire events. It is intended to supplement, not replace, existing local disaster plans by providing additional guidance tailored to the unique challenges of fire recovery. This plan also ensures alignment with the Washington Restoration Framework (WRF) and other relevant state recovery guidance for coordinated approach to post-disaster recovery operations across local and state levels.
- Pre-fire recovery planning reduces the long-term impacts of fire on community health and soundness and increases public safety.
- Mitigation plays an essential role in the recovery process and provides an opportunity to help build community resilience.
- Recovery readiness involves the whole community and cannot be achieved by a single department or individual.
- Incidents are typically managed at the lowest possible geographic, organizational, and jurisdictional level. Local jurisdictions must use their own local plans as primary guide. State docs are supplemental to local plans.

Per the WRF "Washington's local jurisdictions and tribes are responsible for disaster response and recovery. The WRF functions as a foundational document to complement federal, state, local and tribal level recovery plans by consolidating recovery resources and clarifying roles. The state recognizes the primacy of local and tribal governments and supports local recovery efforts at their request, which may include the Governor exercising their emergency powers."

- While recovery is locally driven, communities differ significantly in their preparation to plan for or enact recovery operations. Local governments request disaster recovery assistance from the state when recovery needs exceed local government resource capabilities.
- Existing state and local laws and regulations will play a role in disaster recovery. Local jurisdictions (political subdivisions) will comply with the intent of Chapter 38.52 Revised Code of Washington (RCW) and Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 118.
- Federal assistance may not be available to local governments if the Stafford Act indicators are not met to receive a Presidential Emergency or Major Disaster Declaration (PDD), which will pose additional challenges and hardships on local communities and the state. Therefore, it is essential for recovery coordination structures and plans to address scenarios where a PDD request is approved and non-PDD scenarios.
- To achieve an efficient and effective recovery, all levels of government, non-government and the private sector must work together.
- Disaster recovery requires the coordination of multiple stakeholders working in closely related activities. Recovery is most successful when organizations involved have processes in place to share information, collaborate on projects and identify and fill gaps in services.
- Recovery planning should be flexible and scalable to different incident sizes, local contexts, partners, and processes and be able to integrate with local plans and coordinating bodies as needed.
- Just as fire does not stop at jurisdictional boundaries, effective, flexible, and scalable recovery planning should include consideration of regional partners and varied regulations and resources across the landscape.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

This document is structured into three parts. The first part covers basic operational needs and structure. The second part is structured more temporally, and offers an overview of critical functions during different planning phases – **Pre-Fire**, **Transitioning from Suppression to Recovery**, **Short-Term Recovery**, and **Long-Term Recovery**. The third part offers an overview of critical local recovery support functions (LRSF) that may need to be activated during recovery, and common lines of effort that fall within those LRSFs.

To complement the contents of this guide, the Recovery Readiness Toolbox at the end of this document provides further information, activities, customizable checklists and templates to develop foundational recovery readiness.

Recovery is a unique part of the fire cycle - one where we are constantly reminded how deep our connections are to the land and people around us. By planning for recovery before the flames, communities across Washington are strengthening those connections and building pathways to a more resilient future.
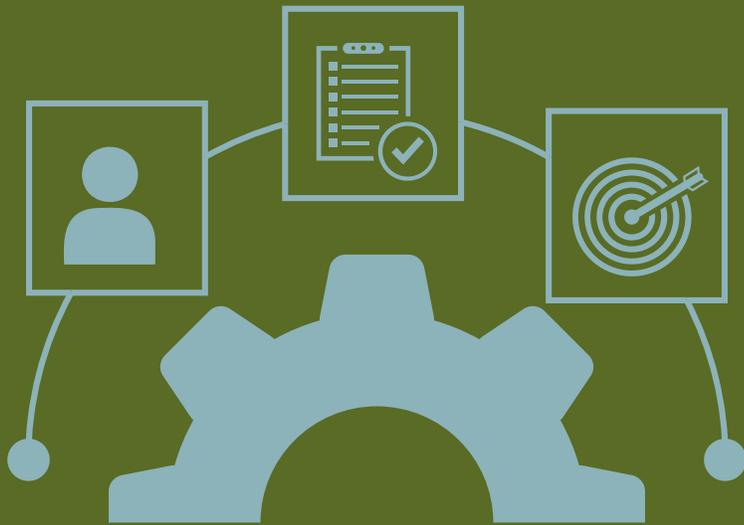
RECOVERY OPERATIONS & GOVERNANCE

RECOVERY PLANNING & READINESS MAINTENANCE

Pre-disaster recovery planning significantly improves a community's ability to recover. This is for many reasons, including the ability to pre-position local resources and expertise by aligning recovery plans with other community planning efforts; maximize the impact of mitigation efforts by cross-walking recovery and community wildfire protection plans; build critical relationships through shared exercises and process development; sharpen coordination with regional, state and federal partners; and anticipate the needs to scale resources and workforce to meet the recovery needs of the whole community.

This guide outlines critical functions that local jurisdictions may undertake during recovery, and provides tools to help with recovery planning and implementation at the local level. This includes describing critical points of coordination, data sharing, communication needs, as well as offering tools to track and adjust those components as recovery efforts and local context evolve.

Any local recovery plan will be most effective when it connects upwards to state and federal coordination, and aligns horizontally with other localized planning efforts. This includes identifying alignments with the state WRF, as well as other local plans such as a county comprehensive plan, housing plans, economic development and tourism plans, natural resource plans, etc. This will allow recovery planners to leverage the expertise of other existing local plan authors, and create pathways to accessing resources at a regional and state level when needed. For wildfire in particular, it is critical to also consider regional connections and develop plans and partnerships at an appropriate scale to achieve holistic recovery of landscape and communities.

Hazard specific recovery plans are fine-tuned after each natural hazard event to adapt to the specific impacts of the incident, and all local planning updates are an opportunity to cross-walk recovery readiness plans with other topics such as regional housing plans, transportation plans, etc. This allows local jurisdictions and partners to maximize resource staging and provision for long-term recovery before an incident. These planning updates will also aid in identifying unmet needs before a disaster, as well as pathways and funding sources to address them. All of this work before a hazard event will greatly reduce recovery costs on local jurisdictions post disasters.

For more specific pre-fire activities, including a month by month calendar with recovery readiness activity suggestions, see the Planning Section of the toolbox.

AUTHORITY AND DECISION-MAKING

Local Emergency Management Offices are responsible for coordinating recovery planning, but these plans may range from a tight focus on continuity of government operations to large-scale coordination of long-term recovery. It is best to begin with existing Comprehensive Emergency Management Plans as a basis for building out detailed planning responsibility for the recovery timelines, operational coordination, and communications that are described below. In the Local Recovery Support Function (LRSF) sections below contains details on the types of tasks that may be needed to support recovery both before and after a disaster. These can be used to help identify the various organizations and decision-making structures that are best suited to existing local context. The Community Planning and Capacity Building support function in particular, can be a powerful tool to support the development and implementation of recovery plans, especially if the local Emergency Management Office is limited in scope or capacity.

To help ensure flexibility and scalability for creating the decision-making authorities and governance to allow recovery operations to proceed smoothly, it is recommended that local governments adopt a model recovery ordinance before a wildfire.

A model recovery ordinance is available from the American Planning Association as part of their Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery: Next Generation project (planning.org/research/postdisaster/)

There are many different types and scales of authorities that will come into play during recovery. While the incident command system allows response activities to be tightly managed, the evolution of needs and varied impacts post-fire mean that decision-making authorities for planning, coordination, and implementation are distributed, and may shift over time between organizations depending on the scale and type of destruction, resources available for rebuilding, and many other factors.

The more relationships are built across boundaries and jurisdictions, and the more collaborative planning takes place before an incident, the easier it becomes to adapt governance, authorities, and roles and responsibilities as needed to make recovery most robust and effective.

Whole Community Involvement

Recovery can never be achieved solely by one organization or individual. Though there will be leaders and decision-makers assigned to the recovery process, it is important that the whole community, including survivors, participate in pre-fire planning and recovery. As noted in the WRF, "Disasters tend to disproportionately affect people in communities with disabilities and other access and functional needs, children, older adults, people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or literacy barriers and historically marginalized groups. These individuals and families may need additional support to adequately recover from a disaster. Long-term recovery strategies must include equitable opportunities for the Whole Community to provide input and share their vision for how their community will rebuild in a socially just, healthy, resilient, sustainable and inclusive manner."

These efforts include pre-fire work such as developing relationships across organizations serving the whole community before a disaster; short-term recovery work such as deploying Zone Captains or Community Emergency Response Team members for inclusive needs assessments and door to door outreach; intermediate recovery work such as providing burned tree removal for mobility- or income-limited individuals; and long-term recovery work such as translation services for effective case management.

Planning for the whole community in a pre-fire setting is an opportunity to recognize not only needs, but also the unique strengths and partnerships that can be built and leveraged at the local and regional level. Everyone, from individuals to local businesses, nonprofits, and schools, will have a part to play during recovery. Recovery readiness is a chance to identify roles for all.

Post-Fire Lines of Effort

Wildfire has many impacts across public and private lands, and across social, economic and infrastructure systems. Recovery is complex, and will occur at many different scales, and require a wide range of expertise and resource injects. In order to support local jurisdictions in building recovery capacity, this guide offers a Lines of Effort framework meant to promote the engagement and collaboration of the whole community in recovery, while also addressing the nuances of local recovery needs. This framework first describes LRSFs which align and can be integrated with Washington State Recovery Support Functions as needed. Nested within those LRSFs are suggestions for specific Lines of Efforts (Agriculture, Watershed Health, etc.), which can be expanded and adapted as needed to specific local contexts and environment. The Lines of Effort suggested here are ones that have been found to be useful in a post-fire recovery setting. They may be used or discarded as makes most sense for the local jurisdiction.

The purpose of naming these Lines of Efforts, and common tasks which they may perform, is to help local jurisdictions build useful partnerships and increase surge capability during recovery; to promote collaboration before the fire; and to identify critical regional relationships to address major post-fire impacts such as forest restoration needs, post-fire flood risk, and displaced populations.

RECOVERY ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

There are a variety of recovery management structures that can be created based on local context as well as the size and complexity of the incident. This could include leadership from a recovery manager who coordinates across local recovery support functions and reports to an executive committee; it could involve a long-term recovery group or recovery committee that provides coordinated leadership; or recovery could be driven by an incident command structure or unified command that reaches across impacted jurisdictions. The structure by which recovery is managed and implemented should be developed to suit local context and community needs, ideally leveraging existing partnerships or structures to maximize resource impact and availability. Planning for what this structure will be ahead of time, and how it will scale will help determine what key roles should be staffed and budgeted for.

Examples of different recovery management structures are available in the Planning Section of the Recovery Readiness Toolbox. Below are descriptions of common roles and responsibilities during recovery.

Local Disaster Recovery Manager

The Local Disaster Recovery Manager (LDRM) is a role recommended by both the National Disaster Recovery Framework and WRF. This role is critical for coordinating information, process, and resources during recovery. Basic functions of this role include advocating for their community, coordinating with local resources to gather information and priorities, and sharing those priorities with other local, state, and federal officials. The scope of the LDRM can vary depending on the size of the incident and where the funding for the position comes from. If this is a local government funded position, the role may focus on maintaining and strengthening local government function. If positioned as the head of a long-term recovery group, the LDRM may play a more expanded role to head an executive committee, coordinate working group leads, and manage information and resource flows.

Whatever structure is best suited to local context and incident size, the LDRM position is well served by an individual who has strong local relationships and connections across sectors, is committed to community wellbeing, and can think strategically and work through conflict.

Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

Recovery will require new types of resources, new combinations of resources, and a rapid increase in some existing resources. Some of these needs will be met by Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) - organizations whose mission or programming involves deployment to areas impacted by disasters to serve in local communities. At the federal level, The American Red Cross, National Center for Missing and Endangered Children and National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster Network (NVOAD) are all designated as response support for natural hazard events. Additional groups will be available at the state and local level. Coordination with VOADs before, during, and after an incident is important, as VOADs have a variety of skills and capabilities, and operate as part of networks that deploy at the federal, state, and/or local levels. Different VOADs also deploy at different times during response and recovery, depending on organizational expertise and focus. In Washington, there is a state chapter of the National VOAD, Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (WAVOAD). Either the state or the local jurisdiction may request WAVOAD support by reaching out to network leadership.

Community Organizations Active in Disaster

Those organizations that deploy at the local level are usually referred to as Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COADs).They are locally driven coalitions of organizations composed of representatives from public, private, and nonprofit agencies in a community or region. In addition to describing specific groups, the COAD acronym may also refer to a local network of community organizations, school board representatives, food banks, medical volunteers, faith-based groups, and other service providers that will provide support during response and/or recovery. Activities may include ash out and debris clean up; tree removal and mitigation; volunteer and donations management; or even house repair and rebuilding.

Both VOAD and COAD networks coordinate, cooperate, and communicate across their networks in an effort to maximize resources and provide timely assistance to survivors, but it is important to plan how they will coordinate with non-VOAD and COAD organizations and local government as well. During short- and long-term recovery, VOADs and COADs may play a larger or smaller role depending on size of the incident and local need. How they deploy to perform these activities can vary widely. Some go through a Voluntary Agency Liaison (VAL) at the state or local level. Other methods of dispatch include going directly to impacted neighborhoods, taking part in a disaster assistance center/ disaster recovery center, or forming and participating in a long-term recovery group (LTRG).
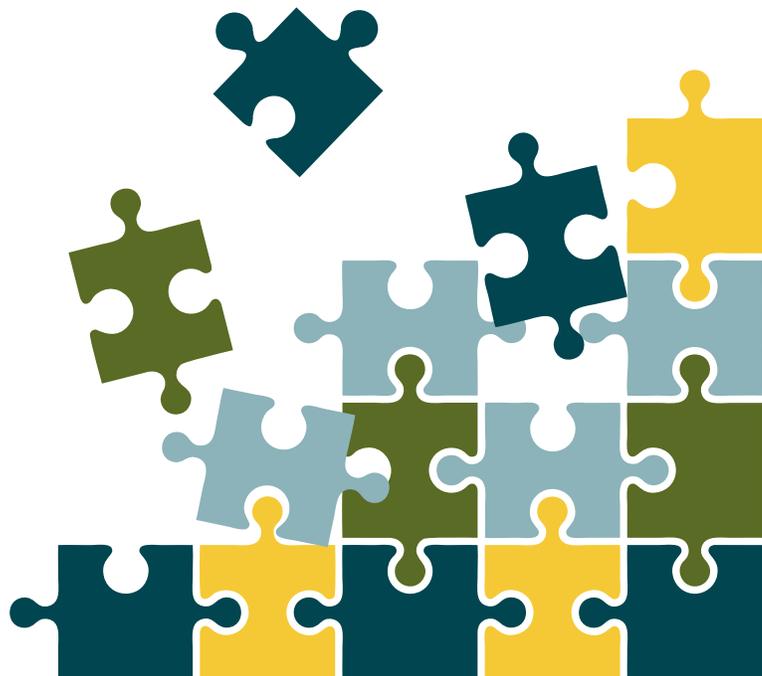
Long-Term Recovery Groups

The WRF describes Long-Term Recovery Groups as "an organized body typically composed of representatives from faith-based, nonprofit, government, private and other organizations working collaboratively to support the long-term recovery of individuals and families in a geographically-specific, disaster-impacted community. While VOADs and COADs provide significant initial case work to survivors, LTRGs are often needed to provide ongoing disaster case management and address unmet needs of individuals and families impacted by the disaster."

These groups are incredibly important as a mechanism for building collaborative recovery goals; prioritizing community needs and local resources; and providing long-term case management to ensure that unmet needs are successfully met. Depending on the scale of the disaster, LTRGs can also be a method for collectively tracking disaster costs and needs that will help local jurisdictions budget for future incidents and close gaps in services before another incident occurs.

At the local level, these groups can be made more effective by planning out a pathway to LTRG creation before a fire, or identifying an existing collaborative or partnership that has the community relationships and financial capacity to rapidly transition into an LTRG after a disaster happens. Relying on assumptions about who starts this group up, and how it forms will result in delays providing resources to survivors, loss of critical communication windows, and high potential for duplication of benefits in services to survivors.

Examples of different Long-Term Recovery Group structures are available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox, along with a discussion guide for creating your own group structure and process.

Unmet Needs Roundtable

It is inevitable that there will be unmet needs in the aftermath of a hazard event. It is impossible to predict and plan for everything. However, the impact of unmet needs within a community can be reduced by pre-fire data collection and mitigation efforts led by local recovery support functions; through financial planning; and by effective case management efforts.

Unmet needs are those that remain after individuals have used personal assets, insurance, and existing disaster recovery assistance. To meet these needs, it is important to develop an Unmet Needs Roundtable (UNR). Information on unmet needs will usually come from LRSFs and from case managers. This roundtable can help coordinate and analyze this information, find resources, and fund or recommend funding sources for meetings these needs. Members of the roundtable may also help connect case managers to other assistance programs, develop funding proposals for remaining needs, or advocate for new policies to be developed if a common, widespread need emerges that is not addressed by existing programs.

As defined by the WRF, "the UNR is the funding mechanism used to address the unique, specific and unmet needs for individuals and families affected by the disaster. The funds (or occasionally in-kind donations) are established and allocated specific to the disaster by the members of the UNR. These resources are not part of other pre-existing local, state, federal or other assistance programs... Members of the UNR are vetted and independent, meaning their presence does not result in a conflict of interest for the cases they consider."

Common members of unmet needs roundtables include local philanthropic organizations, faith-based groups, and non-profits that have funds or resources to donate to survivors. This group may include members of the Long-Term Recovery Group, but often remains separate and independent to maintain objectivity.

For more on anticipating unmet needs in pre-fire planning, consult the Building Capacity section of the Recovery Readiness Toolbox

Case Management Services

Just as recovery is complex for local jurisdictions, it can be equally complex at the individual level, as survivors navigate different systems of aid in addition to personal and family resources. Disaster case management can be a crucial tool to help individuals achieve a full recovery and access the full suite of resources available to them. As defined by the Federal Emergency Management Association, disaster case management is "time-limited collaboration between a trained case manager and a disaster survivor involving the development of a disaster recovery plan and a mutual effort to meet those disaster-caused unmet needs described in the plan."

Disaster case management programs can be run through existing local government services if there is capacity; provided in the short or long-term by cooperating VOAD groups; implemented by newly hired local government staff; or run by an LTRG as part of a case management team. If need is great enough, additional funding for case management staff may be sought through a Disaster Case Management grant from the federal government through a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance or through philanthropic awards. Although there are different options for implementing disaster case management, pre-planning is critical in order to be able to effectively scale up capacity as needed. If left until after a disaster, there can be long gaps in delivering assistance to individuals as the program tries to get started. This leads to increased stress and mental health burdens for both staff and survivors.

For more on planning and building out a case management program, consult the Building Capacity section of the Recovery Readiness Toolbox

Neighborhood Leaders, Individuals, and Volunteers

To reduce the likelihood of spontaneous volunteers and to create better information flow about recovery resources and needs, many communities working on recovery have found it helpful to develop neighborhood leadership programs. These are called by a variety of names, including Zone Captains, Block Captains, Neighborhood Ambassadors, etc. The programs can be geographically tailored to whatever scale is most locally effective, and can be aligned with different organizations and training models. For example, a neighborhood leader program could be tied to Community Emergency Response Teams that are activated for recovery, deployed through an Office of Emergency Management, and focused on assessing communications and data collection. If deployed through a nonprofit, the neighborhood leader program could be focused on door-to-door outreach about resources available for people impacted by fire, post-fire mitigation options, and collection of unmet needs.

Creating and implementing a neighborhood leader program in advance of a fire means that there are trusted messengers to spread the word about recovery resources available. It also helps local governments by providing better data about unmet needs within their jurisdictions, and making it easier to track recovery progress. This allows for flexible recovery response, supports individuals in taking part in and leading community recovery in an effective way, and enhances the capacities of local governments and recovery partners.

Even if a neighborhood leader program is not developed, volunteers are likely to play some role in recovery if there is a large fire. They provide critical workforce for VOADs and COADs, and emergent groups may appear if specific areas or groups have ongoing unmet needs. To work with instead of against these groups, many Long-Term Recovery Groups will maintain a volunteer management committee or may even invite the leaders of emergent groups into the LTRG or to participate in specific Lines of Effort if they are delivering needed services.

FINANCING RECOVERY

It is difficult and complex to find funding for all recovery needs post-fire. Per the WRF, local jurisdictions should assume that any resources requested will be paid for by local funding. The need for resources can at least in part be reduced by investing in mitigation and repairs; working to reduce unmet needs before a disaster; creating rainy day funds; and building strong local philanthropy partners, but it is more than likely that recovery costs will outstrip the resources of any one funding source. Municipalities can prepare for these costs by using historical expenditure data from previous disasters; working with regional partners to attach numbers to adjacent recoveries; or looking for similar examples nationally to help describe how local costs might accumulate during recovery of various events. Once a budget target is established from this research, local jurisdictions can better determine how they might layer funds from various sources to address different scales of need, spanning from individuals seeking aid to large investments needed for infrastructure or other capital projects.

The table below offers examples of different funding sources that a local government may draw from, establish, or combine to fund various parts of recovery. Not all of these options will be suitable in every place, but it is critical to take advantage of a range of private and public funding types available at the municipal level to help move communities and local jurisdictions towards more diversified pathways for financing repair and recovery.

More descriptive information about these funding sources is available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox

Type of Fund	Structure	Recovery Use	Benefits	Drawbacks
Municipal Bonds	Bond	Infrastructure repair	Effective way to attract investors and supplement general funds	Some bonds need voter approval
Special Districts	Independent, special purpose government units	Watershed repair, infrastructure repair, social services, etc.	Authority to issue bonds and levy special taxes	Require continual funding; subject to voter approval laws
Tax Incremental Districts and Financing	Designated area established by local government	Road repair, utility repair, building development	Provides support for long-term recovery needs and changes	Could lead to gentrification if not well planned; dependent on anticipated increases in value
Business Improvement Districts	Specific geographic area adopted by ordinance	Hazard mitigation or repair	Mechanism to pool local resources	Limited reach, requires local buy-in and effort
Community Financial Development Institutions	Mission driven financial institution	Low-cost loans, small business support, support for unbanked individuals	Financial services for low- and middle-income individuals	Limited in funding capacity
Community Development Corporations	Nonprofit	Affordable housing, community services	Tax-exempt, structure and purpose tailored to need	Limited in funding capacity
Community Land Trust	Shared equity ownership	Affordable housing	Long-term affordability	Requires intensive resource input to develop
Publicly Owned Utilities	Nonprofit	Utility repair or installation	Access to tax-free bonds; public forum for rate setting	Heavy administrative input and knowledge required

FOUNDATIONS FOR RECOVERY FINANCE

Establishing a robust local disaster management and recovery budget and financial plan is a foundational readiness step for wildfire recovery. The next stage of financial planning is to also ready the local jurisdiction for managing federal funds in the event of a presidentially declared disaster (PDD). The key strategy here is to align local documentation and procurement standards with federal requirements as a day-to-day practice before disaster hits. This will result in increased staff capacity and knowledge that can be utilized during disaster; a local contractor pool that is accustomed to the documentation required by federal programs; and local partners that are able to provide sufficient and necessary documentation to support all reimbursements and prevent costly audits.

Documentation and Data Collection

Detailed financial management, particularly documentation, is critical to ensure reimbursements from state and federal programs. From the WRF, "Records will be kept in such a manner to separately identify incident related expenditures and obligations from general programs and activities of state agencies and local jurisdictions or organizations. Complete and accurate records are necessary to document requests for assistance, for reimbursement under approved applications pertaining to declared emergencies or major disasters and for audit reports." This is true whether or not there is a presidentially declared disaster (PDD), so the local jurisdiction can coordinate with regional and state partners more effectively, and maximize the impact of all recovery assistance and donations.

In addition to record keeping, other helpful documentation steps include identifying coordinators for key data collection roles such as damage assessments, debris management, economic impacts, trainings on the process for documenting and submitting data, clarity on the form the data should be in, and backup processes in case electronic systems are compromised or damaged.

Other keys for financing local disaster recovery include coordinated data collection - it is more difficult to handle reimbursements and identify funding gaps if everyone is collecting and reporting data to funders separately. This also increases the possibility of duplication of benefits for things like volunteer hours if that is being used as a match for funds.

In addition to documentation needed for coordinating with the state, local governments will also need to make other recovery groups aware of documentation needed for compliance with state and federal requirements. If this is not done, counties and cities face potential for financial loss and legal liability. This includes actions such as requiring homeowners to report if they have insurance coverage for debris removal, and alerting contractors to state and federal compliance needs when they are doing work on properties that span jurisdictions.

More information on common financial pitfalls and tips for financial documentation are available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox.

COMMUNICATION & DATA SHARING

Communication is a critical and complex component of recovery that should be carefully planned for. Internal communication between departments, Local Recovery Support Functions, and public and private partners can easily become strained during recovery. It is important to identify resilient communication channels, designate clear communication leads, and coordinate well across organizational and team boundaries. External communication from local recovery groups to state and federal partners will also need to take place consistently and accurately, in order to meet all financial requirements and ensure that resources are able to flow effectively. This may require data sharing agreements or identifying a place to house information that is accessible to all partners for long term recovery. In addition to data coordinators, it is helpful to discuss process and security needs for sharing critical information such as damage assessments, housing needs, etc. Designating specific contacts for communications and data management on each LRSF can help recovery progress more smoothly and reduce stress across partnerships. Utilizing a joint information center or a communications committee on the LTRG can also be effective in helping manage data and information sharing between groups.

Public Outreach and Engagement

Public facing information and community outreach and engagement is a vital part of recovery as well. People are unable to access resources for recovery if they are not aware they exist. Public outreach needs careful planning and follow through as well. It is not effective to share information on social media or a press release and assume that it will reach everyone. It is critical to identify the different audiences that need to be reached, and to plan out which tools, trusted partners, and messaging design will be most effective in reaching those audiences.

More information and resources are available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox.

Misinformation

Misinformation and disinformation are an inescapable part of disaster recovery. This can look like everything from sharing false information about which homes are damaged during a fire, to broadcasting incorrect assistance information or rumors about land grabs and looting during recovery. The best way to combat false information is to establish communication channels and trusted sources well in advance of a disaster. In a pre-fire setting, these channels can be used to create consistent messaging about mitigation, preparedness and recovery that makes audiences feel comfortable and aware of where to go to get information on all things related to fire. This will support their pathways to get accurate information when they are in recovery.

Since so much information spreads online, it is helpful if possible to designate an online monitor who can work to identify any hotspots of misinformation and either correct them or try to convert those authors over to be messengers of vetted information instead.

PHASES OF RECOVERY

PRE-FIRE RECOVERY

The best time to begin recovery is before a fire or other hazard event occurs. This is a critical time to build relationships across sectors, determine roles and responsibilities, and create resilient communication pathways between partners and with the public.

Relationship Building

Even if nothing else is done towards preparing for recovery, identifying key partners and having a discussion with them about readiness and recovery will go a long way after the event. The more you can do to prevent meeting someone for the first time during a fire, the better.

The WRF encourages jurisdictions to develop COADs pre-disaster to identify social service providers, including public, private and nonprofit organizations and establish lines of communication among community members. Local emergency management departments can play an important role of spearheading an effort to form a local or regional COAD in their jurisdiction. Between incidents, emergency management can keep the COAD active with quarterly or annual check-ins. During an incident, emergency management might play an advisory or supporting role to the COAD.

The LRSF documentation in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox and other materials on After the Fire WA (afterthefirewa.org) such as the CWPP Post-Fire Recovery Planning Tools, offer resources to identify key partners, what role they might play, and get their contact information before an event takes place. It is helpful to define an update schedule for those contacts to make sure relationships remain fresh over time as people transition in and out of jobs.

It is also helpful to discuss with partners whether they have any existing programs or outreach tools that might become useful during recovery. Review the task checklists in the LRSF section of the workbook to help brainstorm the types of programs and outreach tools that might be helpful during recovery.

Another way to surface the relationships, roles, and responsibilities that will be helpful is to hold a tabletop exercise or other recovery related training with partners. The more work that is done with relationship building before a hazard event, the more effectively resources will be used, and the less stress will be passed on to those impacted by the event. A sample tabletop exercise is included in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox.

If you are working with or building a new group and network of collaborators for recovery, consider using the collaboration spectrum quiz and Network Mapping activities in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox, in addition to the tabletop exercise.

Capacity Building and Financial Planning

Recovery can easily feel overwhelming, as complexities mount and new system breakages appear. Preexisting plans such as Community Wildfire Protection Plans, PODs planning, county comprehensive plans, regional housing plans, etc. can be a critical starting point. Getting to know these plans before a hazard event takes place will increase capacity, help break down silos, and allow LRSFs to better refine plans and stage resources. These plans provide clear data sources to help understand impact; they provide goals and objectives that can be used to help create specific recovery targets and timelines; and the authors can be called upon as subject matter experts during the recovery process.

As the recovery process progresses, it can also be a time to update these plans - such as creating new housing goals or identifying new mitigation projects for a CWPP. This helps create a built-in learning environment to maximize resources for the future and make sure recovery lessons are taken advantage of.

Identifying leads for LRSFs and other key authorities before a hazard event will help reduce friction during short term recovery and help recovery progress more smoothly overall. These leads can work to help other members of the LRSF groups become familiar with relevant plans, understand how these plans fit into recovery, and how to refine and coordinate recovery plans to support a process that effectively wraps around the full fire cycle

Communication and Data Collection

Developing communication channels and plans before a disaster offers the chance to test messaging, develop trust, and build good behaviors before your audiences and partners are trapped in a stressful environment where they are less able to take in information.

This could include deploying a preparedness campaign pre-fire, sharing information on mitigation activities and programs, identifying key partners that have large audiences and distribution methods, and mapping your audiences and outreach tools to ensure that all populations are reachable, including vulnerable populations and hard to reach areas.

In addition to public outreach, communication between organizations and partners will be important during recovery. The more LRSFs train together before an incident and plan out roles and responsibilities, the easier communication and coordination will be during recovery. In addition to communication, it may be important to develop data sharing agreements, identify where shared data will be housed, and who back up contacts are for each role and organization.

TRANSITIONING FROM SUPPRESSION TO RECOVERY

Recovery planning starts concurrently with response activities in a disaster. The transition period from fire suppression to short term recovery can be both more chaotic and more structured than the rest of the recovery process. Local emergency management will be closely coordinating with incident management teams and state partners. As outlined in the National Response Framework, ESFs deliver core capabilities to stabilize community lifelines for an effective response. As the incident stabilizes, the RSFs build on many of the measures taken by ESFs to effectively support the community and move beyond life-saving and property preservation activities.

County emergency management offices can incorporate this transition into their planning by establishing the position of ESF-14 Long-Term Community Recovery & Mitigation. ESF-14 will then be activated during the response phase to coordinate recovery and restoration activities for local and volunteer agencies. ESF-14 can lead initial damage assessments operations and information sharing, which are critical in understanding the scope of the incident and identifying recovery needs and resources.

Coordination

If the event is a large, damaging fire, the incident management team will be able to support coordination between response and recovery teams. This could include data transfer on suppression repair impacts, identification of repair actions, and funding sources for that repair.
Communications to the public should be clear and consistent during this phase; even if there is not new information to report, be consistent about sharing what is currently and accurately known, when the next update will be, and whom the public can follow up with questions. If no communications are provided, this increases the likelihood of misinformation spreading to fill the silence.

Other critical steps during this transition phase include completing life safety activities begun during response; beginning the recovery process by identifying a Local Disaster Recovery Manager (LDRM); and continuing critical support and repair for mass care needs, infrastructure, and debris management.

As information is acquired and shared during this transition phase, it should be used to support disaster declarations, and also to conduct a complexity analysis of the incident and determine an initial overview of long-term recovery needs, and therefore, what parts of the recovery system should be activated. There are many options for how recovery systems are structured and activated, and this should be adapted for what will work best for local context, partnerships, organizational capacity, and existing resources.

Examples of different recovery system structures are available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox. If there are a great deal of unmet needs, or the severity of the incident indicate it will be a complex recovery, a long-term recovery group may need to be developed if there is not already one in existence.

Once the recovery system that appears best fit is activated, the LDRM can work to establish expectations of meeting cadence, information and internal reporting, and short-term recovery goals and objectives should be established by each component of the recovery system.

Damage Assessments and Data Collection

Damage assessments will be conducted throughout this transitional period and continue into short-term recovery. Specific components and timelines of the damage assessment process are detailed by the WRF and federal partners. At the local level, it is critical to identify a Damage Assessment Coordinator to receive the data being brought in by different damage assessment teams; to collect data accurately and in a format that can be transferred to state partners; to support the preliminary damage assessment process; and to provide public outreach and communications to alert both individuals and the public at large as to the level of damage and any estimated timelines on return or other critical information for the public.

Initial damage assessments performed by the county may include damage done to homes, businesses, infrastructure, natural areas, agricultural areas, timber supplies, and other commodities. This data should be relayed not only to state partners to determine whether a joint preliminary damage assessment is necessary, but also to the relevant Local Recovery Support Functions to assist in the development of recovery goals and monitoring and evaluation of success.

Suppression Repair

In addition to the damage assessment process conducted locally, any incident management team will also track and coordinate on suppression repair activities. Suppression Damage Repair are planned actions taken to repair the damages to resources, lands, and facilities resulting from wildfire suppression actions. Damages may come from line construction, safety zones, fire camps, etc. This parallels the "break fence, fix fence" concept in "routine" suppression repair.

Suppression damage repair activities are planned and performed by the suppression incident management team as soon as possible prior to demobilization. However, some actions may need to be conducted by the local unit following incident management team demobilization. The incident management team must document the fire suppression activity repair actions and those still needed to ensure that all planned actions are completed during transition back to the local unit.

Damage assessments may be important at a regional level as well. Large scale disasters can cause widespread population displacement that impacts the housing availability, economies, workforce, etc. of nearby communities. The more coordination and support that can be done regionally can help prevent one disaster triggering large ripple effects throughout the surrounding areas.

Landscape Assessments

In addition to suppression repair activities, there may be additional assessments needed for post-fire hazards, such as landslide potential, and potential damage to critical infrastructure. These assessments usually fall under the purview of the Natural Resources LRSF, but may be part of a BAER team evaluation if federal lands are involved. The exact process for determining landscape damage will depend on the agencies and jurisdictions involved. In order to complete this productively, it is important to have a robust team of partners involved so they can most effectively determine which landscapes need repair, prioritize actions, and assign available resources as appropriate.
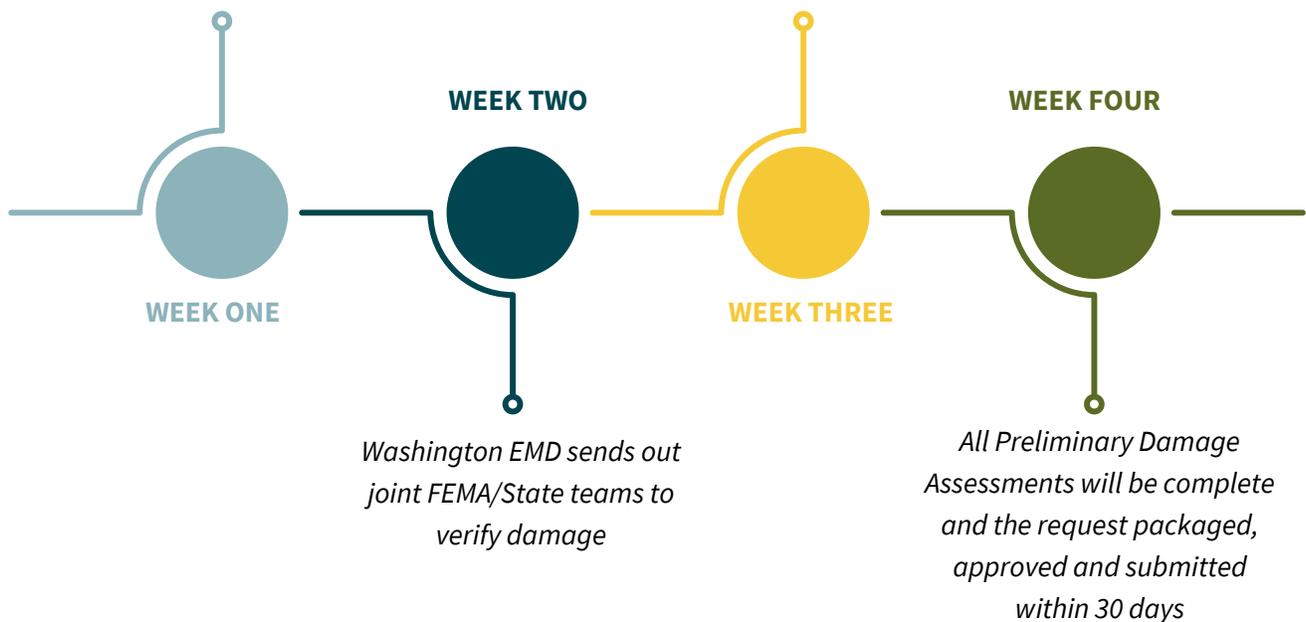
In Washington state, the Department of Natural Resources also has assessment capability from geologists on the Wildfire-Associated Landslide Emergency Response Team (WALERT). This team visits areas that have been severely impacted by wildfire, and locations downstream of these areas, where conditions may pose a life/safety hazard. They are focused on identifying risks to critical infrastructure and other values from landslides and related hazards. The dashboard for reviewing their assessments can be found on the DNR website at dnr.wa.gov. More state resources for recovery can be leveraged through the Washington Emergency Management Division and Department of Natural Resources.

These assessments may be important data to share regionally as well, so partners in nearby jurisdictions are aware both of impacts and restoration plans and can assist with applicable lessons learned, resources, or other support.

Damage Assessment Timeline for Public Disaster Assistance

Each jurisdiction completes their damage assessment forms and submits to their County Emergency Manager; county submits information to Washington EMD

EMD collates all data, prepares request for disaster declaration, submits to governor for approval, and forwards approved request package to FEMA

WEEK TWO

WEEK FOUR

WEEK ONE

WEEK THREE

Washington EMD sends out joint FEMA/State teams to verify damage

All Preliminary Damage Assessments will be complete and the request packaged, approved and submitted within 30 days

Debris Management

Debris cleanup after fires is particularly difficult and complex. Fires in urban areas result in highly toxic debris from cars, homes, infrastructure, and all the component parts of those systems. Cleanup of different types of debris requires coordinating a variety of state and federal partners or VOADs, obtaining access to private land, finding places to dispose of the debris, contracting with reputable disposal companies, and determining whether or not property owners had insurance coverage for debris removal in order to reimburse local government.

It is critical to plan for how debris from fires will be removed, disposed of, and paid for; to keep documentation for all activities in order to obtain reimbursements; and to communicate closely with the public in order to obtain right of entry and to ensure that homeowners are not duplicating benefits by being reimbursed by their insurance companies and not passing that on to local government. Documenting activities and costs for debris removal is also required if seeking reimbursement from state or federal assistance, if available.

Communication

It's important to assess communication channels and pathways to ensure that information is traveling between teams and partners within the whole community. This is also a critical time for community outreach, including delivering information about disaster impacts, recovery plans, where to report damages, and how to obtain recovery assistance. Ideally these messages will be shared jointly by partners and across channels established before the fire and trusted by the public. It can be especially impactful to use trusted partners to share information with hard to reach and underserved groups.

Disaster Recovery Centers

A disaster recovery center (DRC) is an important way to share resources with those impacted by the disaster. The exact structure of the center may vary based on local context, fire severity, and resources available – it could be a small-scale resource tabling event at an evacuation site, or it could be a large scale operation supported by state and federal partners. However it looks should be most accessible to the community it is serving, the focus should be on effectively providing accurate information about recovery resources to affected individuals. This includes consideration for local context and cultures in that place from everything from how outreach is done to the information provided within the DRC.

For large scale disasters, a DRC can be a place to offer everything from support for animal recovery and livestock, to mental health services for those impacted.

When assessing the incident, consider which partners or LRSF representatives should have a presence at a DRC; how donations and volunteers will be handled or managed at the site; and how survivors will be informed about the DRC and its offerings.

More information on a Disaster Recovery Center, and how to work from planning to stand down, is available in the Recovery Readiness Toolbox.

SHORT- & LONG-TERM RECOVERY

Short-term recovery will include continued restoration of services as well as more specific goal setting and refinement of recovery plans. This includes working with active LRSFs to inform goals and timelines for each of their specific lines of effort, as well as holding ongoing public meetings and community engagement activities to ensure that local needs are met and the whole community is involved in recovery planning and implementation.

Financial Management and Restoration of Services

Continued restoration of services and infrastructure is critical after a fire to enable community members to return and economies to begin recovery. This will often require coordination and information sharing between LRSFs and their various Lines of Effort to help ensure that work is proceeding effectively.
In addition to coordination, financial management is critical during this period. That includes proper documentation and procurement practices as well as making sure that contractors are also following correct documentation practices.

Goal Setting

Set goals for landscape, community, and individual recovery by coordinating Local Recovery Support Functions and Lines of Effort. These goals may be developed by working groups and compiled by the Local Disaster Recovery Manager, or workshopped and supplemented by community input. Ideally, they will identify ways to incorporate mitigation into recovery projects and align closely with the goals of existing local plans (comprehensive plan, housing plan, etc.). Consider future needs, funding sources and federal grants when setting goals, to help transition into long-term recovery.

Adaptation

Local Disaster Recovery Manager, LTRG and Lines of Effort structures should be adapted as needed for any emergent needs or additional complexity that is appearing. This includes continuing to gather and assess unmet needs to match with existing support networks or develop new resource pathways.

Long-Term Recovery

Long-term recovery involves continuation of the themes above, as well as continued resource acquisition, mental health support, and movement towards long term sustainability and resilience for landscape and community. In addition to good financial management and collaboration, this is a good time to update county level plans as needed, including the recovery plan, to allow for better coordination, implementation and adaptive management in the future

LOCAL RECOVERY
SUPPORT
FUNCTIONS &
LINES OF EFFORT

HOUSING

Critical Tasks

- Assess preliminary housing impacts and needs, identify currently available options for temporary housing and plan for permanent housing.
- Ensure community housing recovery plans continue to address interim housing needs, assess options for permanent housing and define a timeline for achieving a resilient, accessible and sustainable housing market
- Establish a resilient and sustainable housing market that meets the needs of the community, including the need for accessible housing within the specified timeframe in the recovery plan

Members

The Housing LRSF draws on a variety of local government, nonprofit, and human services agencies to deliver both short and long-term housing planning. Local subject matter experts would ideally be drawn from the authors of the local housing plan in order to cross-walk goals and create adaptive housing goals for the future.

Communication and Data Sharing

Members of this LRSF may already have recovery functions in their day-to-day operations, such as public outreach, data collection and tracking, contractor information, regional collaborations, etc. These capacities can be better leveraged during recovery by clarifying the capacities, resources, and work timelines of LRSF member organizations and creating a draft communications plan. Pre-fire work could include consulting with the Economic LRSF on data collection priorities for community restoration and with the Infrastructure LRSF on planning for maintaining supply chains, etc.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- Affordable Housing Plan

Lines of Effort

- Short-term Housing
- Long-term Housing
- Mobile Homes and Rentals
- Codes & Permitting

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

In the case of a large fire, regional collaboration is critical for the LRSF, both to prevent the community receiving displaced populations from becoming overwhelmed, and to prevent the impacted jurisdiction from losing contact with families that have been displaced. It can be helpful to work on scenario planning with regional partners to determine how best to use and distribute housing resources in the event of a fire.

ECONOMY

Critical Tasks

- Conduct a preliminary assessment of economic issues and identify potential inhibitors to fostering stabilization of the affected communities
- Return affected area's economy within the specified timeframe in the recovery plan
- Ensure the community recovery and mitigation plan(s) incorporates economic revitalization and removes governmental inhibitors to post-disaster economic sustainability, while maintaining the civil rights of citizens

Members

Members of this LRSF will be a mix of local business owners and advocates, universities, government, state and nonprofit representatives. In order to make this LRSF most effective, it is beneficial to engage experts involved in writing local economic strategic plans in order to maximize investments and planning pre-fire.

Communication and Data Sharing

This LRSF will be responsible for a large amount of data collection and analysis to understand impacts to local businesses and workforce. It will also need to lead on outreach to local businesses both to gather information, and provide updates on the availability of resources.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- Economic Development Plan

Lines of Effort

- Business Support
- Workforce Support
- Business Recovery Centers

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

This LRSF will benefit from regional collaboration, especially if there is large-scale displacement due to fire. This will help enhance capacity and resources, and help prevent large negative impacts to the community hosting those displaced by the fire.

CULTURAL & HISTORIC RESOURCES

Critical Tasks

- Implement measures to protect and stabilize records and culturally significant documents, objects and structures.
- Mitigate the impacts to and stabilize cultural resources and conduct a preliminary assessment of the impacts that identifies protections that need to be in place during stabilization through recovery. Complete an assessment of affected cultural resources and develop a timeline for addressing these impacts in a sustainable and resilient manner.
- Preserve cultural resources as part of an overall community recovery that is achieved through the coordinated efforts of cultural resource experts and the recovery team in accordance with the specified timeline in the recovery plan.

Members

The Cultural and Historic Resources LRSF draws on a variety of local public resources, private companies, nonprofits, and local collectives. This may include tribal representatives, local museums and historic property managers, parks and recreation representatives, and local arts councils. Depending on local context and the lines of effort embedded within this LRSF (tourism and recreation may be placed within the Economic LRSF, for example), representatives from other recreation companies or programs, or the tourism board, chamber of commerce, etc. may also be included.

Communication and Data Sharing

As this LRSF in particular may involve discussions of tribal resources and protected information, it may be helpful to review or adhere to agreements about data sovereignty and FAIR and CARE principles.

This LRSF may also have unique channels or programs for doing outreach and involving the whole community in recovery that can be leveraged for their work or for other LRSFs as needed.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- County Comprehensive Plan

Lines of Effort

- Tourism
- Parks and Recreation
- Historic Preservation
- Community Arts

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Depending on how this LRSF is structured, it may be helpful to work regionally on recreation and tourism planning to maintain as much functionality as possible, and avoid overloading certain recreation areas due to fire impacts.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Critical Tasks

- Mitigate the impacts to and stabilize the natural resources and conduct a preliminary assessment of the impacts that identifies protections that need to be in place during stabilization through recovery. Complete an assessment of affected natural resources and develop a timeline for addressing these impacts in a sustainable and resilient manner.
- Preserve natural resources as part of an overall community recovery that is achieved through the coordinated efforts of natural resource experts and the recovery team in accordance with the specified timeline in the recovery plan.

Members

The Natural Resources Local Recovery Support Function is usually composed of representatives from local government (environmental health, public health, public works or flood plain management, etc.), conservation districts, universities, parks and recreation, agriculture.

Communication and Data Sharing

Many natural resource agencies already have some elements of recovery functionality in their day to day work, including public outreach methods, volunteer management, equipment, land restoration capabilities, livestock fencing, etc. These strengths can be better leveraged during recovery by planning for continuity of operations at these local organizations, planning for how members of a NR LRSF would prepare and broadcast joint messaging, and practicing how these partners would plan and execute recovery tasks together. A critical component of this is thinking about how to share data across organizational boundaries as well as across local, state, and federal agencies.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- Conservation District Plan
- County Comprehensive Plan
- Water Management Plan

Lines of Effort

- Agriculture
- Forest Health
- Watershed Health and Floodplain Management

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Regional collaboration is of particular importance for this LRSF as fire often crosses boundaries and jurisdictions. This includes consideration for post-fire flooding, landslides, and mudslides, which may also create impacts across jurisdictions. Exactly what the size and scope of the regional collaboration looks like will vary across landscapes.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Critical Tasks

- Restore and sustain essential services (public and private) to maintain community functionality
- Develop a plan with a specified timeline for redeveloping community infrastructures to contribute to resiliency, accessibility and sustainability
- Provide systems that meet the community needs while minimizing service disruption during restoration within the specified timeline in the recovery plan

Members

The members of the Infrastructure LRSF draw on a variety of public and private resources, including utility, transportation, and communication companies, as well as local government departments. This LRSF coordinates closely with local emergency management in order to restore critical services to communities in the impacted areas, and with other LRSFs to share information and achieve cross-cutting goals.

Communication and Data Sharing

Many infrastructure-related companies and departments already have core elements of recovery functionality in their day to day work, including public outreach methods, repair equipment and materials, contracting mechanisms and contacts, etc. These strengths can be better leveraged during recovery by developing communication channels, planning for collaborative work, identifying how members of this LRSF would prepare and broadcast joint messaging, and practicing how these partners would plan and execute recovery tasks together. A critical component of this is thinking about how to share data across organizational boundaries as well as across local, state, and federal agencies.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- County Comprehensive Plan
- County Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Transportation Plan
- Capital Improvement Plan

Lines of Effort

- Damage Assessment
- Debris Management
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Public Facility Repair

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Regional collaboration is of particular importance for this LRSF as fire often crosses boundaries and jurisdictions. This includes consideration for disruptions to transportation, utilities, and communications, which may also create impacts across jurisdictions. Exactly what the size and scope of the regional collaboration looks like will vary across landscapes.

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Critical Tasks

- Identify affected populations, groups and key partners in short term, intermediate and long-term recovery
- Complete an assessment of community health and social service needs; prioritize these needs, including accessibility requirements, based on the whole community's input and participation in the recovery planning process; and develop a comprehensive recovery timeline
- Restore health care (including behavioral health), public health and social services functions. Restore and improve the resilience and sustainability of the health care system and social service capabilities and networks to promote the independence and well-being of community members in accordance with the specified recovery timeline

Members

This LRSF leverages a wide variety of voluntary organizations active in disaster (VOAD) members, local nonprofits, government agencies, and local offices of federal programs. Given the complex needs of individuals during recovery, it is important to do as much pre-fire work as possible to identify local resource providers and capacities, and ensure they have continuity of operations plans to continue working and adapting to recovery needs.

Communication and Data Sharing

Members of this LRSF are likely to have robust community outreach channels already in place. It is important to work together to develop messaging and set expectations so that communications to the public do not contradict or undermine each other. This LRSF will need to share unmet needs data with other LRSFs in order to deliver good case management services, but will also need to aggregate data from its members in order to provide ongoing updates for developing and tracking recovery goals, perform grant applications, etc.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- Developmental Disabilities Plan
- Public Health EOP
- Hazard Mitigation Plan

Lines of Effort

- Disaster Case Management
- Unmet Needs
- Mental Health

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

If local resources are not sufficient, this LRSF may benefit from working regionally to enhance capacity. If the fire is big enough that large numbers of people are displaced, it may also be important to offer case management services within the community that is hosting those displaced from their homes so they don't have to expend resources on commuting.

COMMUNITY PLANNING & CAPACITY BUILDING

Critical Tasks

- Convene the core of an inclusive planning team (identified pre-disaster), which will oversee disaster recovery planning.
- Complete an initial recovery plan that provides an overall strategy and timeline, addresses all core capabilities and integrates socioeconomic, demographic, accessibility, technology and risk assessment considerations (including projected climate change impacts), which will be implemented in accordance with the timeline contained in the plan.

Members

Members of this LRSF should be reflective of the whole community - including representatives for vulnerable populations, key LRSF representatives to promote collaboration across working groups, and any key state or federal stakeholders.

Communication and Data Sharing

This LRSF is most effective when consistently communicating across boundaries, and supporting public outreach on recovery. It will be helpful for this LRSF to develop expertise in financial documentation and data collection in order to support other LRSFs in delivering needed information at the right cadence for effective recovery.

Related Plans and Policies

- Washington Restoration Framework
- Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan

Lines of Effort

- Finance and Procurement
- Training
- Planning and Capacity Building

Regional and Multi-Jurisdictional Collaboration

This LRSF works across all local, state, tribal, federal boundaries to develop a locally effective recovery strategy, and identify and deliver ongoing trainings that will enhance local recovery capacity.