

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE HANDBOOK COLLECTION

Planning Evacuations with Indigenous Communities

Companion to *Evacuation Planning* (AIDR 2023)

This companion document should be read in conjunction with the *Evacuation Planning Handbook* (2023)
They are available as an online resource on the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub:
<https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-evacuation-planning>

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1. Introduction

Evacuation is a strategy used to reduce loss of life or lessen the effects of a hazard on a community, before or during a disaster. It involves the movement of people threatened by a hazard to a safer location and their safe and timely return. Evacuation planning is a collaborative process that draws on the extensive skills and knowledge of communities.

Evacuations are challenging for anyone who experiences them, however Indigenous people and communities have distinct needs and can face additional risks throughout these processes.

This guide should be considered alongside *Evacuation Planning* (AIDR 2023) when developing an evacuation plan and will support culturally safe and effective evacuations of Indigenous people at risk from natural and other hazards.

Use this guide when engaging in evacuation planning and implementation processes that involve discrete Indigenous communities and communities with high Indigenous populations in remote, rural, regional and urban settings.

2. Principles

The following principles have been developed to guide evacuation and should be considered and applied at each step in the evacuation planning and implementation process.

Know and respect peoples' rights

It is important that rights, including those recognised under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, are not neglected or dismissed in emergency situations.

Foreground connection with Country

Indigenous peoples and communities have deep connections to Country which should be respected and prioritised.

Work within existing community governing institutions

Knowing and working within community-controlled organisations and institutions respects existing arrangements and is critical for working with communities effectively.

Provide a safe and welcome environment for Elders

As community leaders and knowledge holders, Elders should be engaged early and respectfully, and feel safe and welcome throughout evacuation planning and implementation processes.

Acknowledge the sanctity of family

Family and kinship are essential to Indigenous peoples' cultural identity and it's important that this is acknowledged and respected.

Relieve anxiety, don't add to it

Emergencies are stressful for anyone involved, however, it's important that people are given information in a calm and respectful way so that they can make informed decisions.

3. Evacuation process

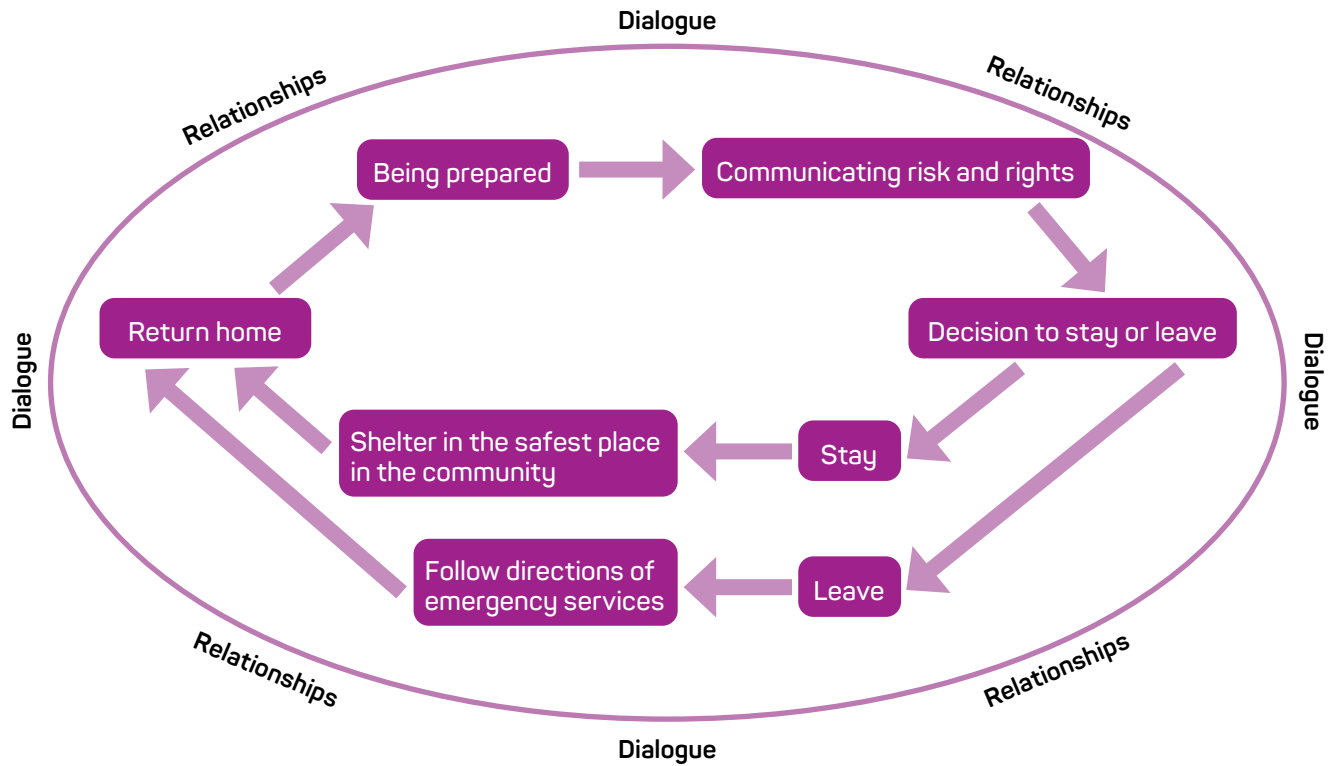


Fig. 1. Evacuation process that supports culturally safe and effective evacuations of Indigenous people at risk from natural and other hazards.

3.1. Relationships and dialogue

Invest in relationships before an emergency to enable greater collaboration and build trust during times of major events. These relationships will enable more timely, efficient and respectful evacuations.

Emergency management organisations and local councils will have information about hazards and threats.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other Indigenous community groups will know the local area and composition of their communities, including governance, Elders, avoidance relationships, and people who may be at greater risk in an emergency.

Regular and consistent dialogue between emergency management organisations, ACCOs, and Indigenous communities is critical throughout every stage of the evacuation process to ensure any updated information is shared and people know they have not been forgotten.

3.2. Being prepared

To mitigate and/or significantly reduce the impact of disasters, be aware of and prepare for hazards and risks to the community. Encourage community members to develop their own household preparedness plans. This will enable them to make better, efficient, respectful and calm decisions when hazards threaten.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Have you developed your household plan?
- Who will you include in it (including animals)?
- Do you know the safest place to shelter in the community? This might be different depending on the hazard (e.g. fire, flood, cyclone, heat, or others)
- What will you take with you, and what will you leave behind, if you need to evacuate quickly?
- Can you help others who might need some help to evacuate or stay?

Questions for emergency management organisations and personnel:

- Do you know and engage with the local community organisation/s (including ACCOs)?
- Do you know how many residents are located within a community?
- Are there any infrastructure or access challenges to effectively evacuate communities (such as unsealed or narrow roads, lack of road signs, mobile and communications coverage, shallow crossings, etc..)?
- What household preparedness activities are planned for or targeted at communities?
- Are they respectful and culturally appropriate?

3.3. Communicating Rights and risks

The decision to evacuate part or all of a community will be made based on a range of complex issues. During the planning process, decision-makers and Indigenous community members should discuss their rights and the risks that exist for both staying and evacuating.

While there are internationally recognised rights held by Indigenous peoples that should be considered and upheld, different Australian states and territories have different laws relating to evacuations. Check with your local authorities ahead of time about the particular laws for your jurisdiction or community.

See 4. Further information for link to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Are you regularly in touch with emergency management organisations or staff and volunteers so that you can understand the risks when events unfold?
- Is there any cultural heritage that will likely be threatened by the hazard and that may influence people's decision to stay or leave?
- What rights do community members have during an evacuation?
- What rights and responsibilities do emergency management personnel have during an evacuation?
- What are the risks with staying?

- What are the risks with leaving?
- Do you know who in the community may be at greater risk?

Questions for emergency management organisations and personnel:

- How do community members get their news? Local radio? In language? Face to face door knock?
- Are you regularly in touch with Indigenous community organisations and leaders to ensure they have up to date contact details of emergency management agencies and staff?
- Are you working with the local community organisations to share information?
- What cultural heritage rights do Indigenous communities have in at-risk areas?
- What rights do emergency service personnel have during an evacuation?
- What rights do community members have during an evacuation?
- Have you clearly communicated the risks of staying?
- Have you clearly communicated the support available (or lack of) for those evacuating or staying?

3.4. Decision to stay or leave

Based on consideration of their rights and risks, people will make an informed decision to stay in their community (either in their place of residence or elsewhere within their community) or to evacuate.

Understand factors that influence peoples' decisions e.g.:

- non-financial interests that Indigenous people have in Country
- distrust in government and non-Indigenous organisations
- prevalence of poverty in many Indigenous communities
- fear of robbery if they are not at home to protect their property

People should not feel threatened or coerced into making one decision or another. The decision should be made solely on the level of risk, feelings of safety, and available support.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Do you have all the information you need to make an informed decision?
- Do you have a list of all vulnerable people and their decision to stay or evacuate?
 - Are there people who need support to make this decision?
 - Are there people who are on bail who may need advice?
 - Are there any intervention orders in place in the community?
 - Are there people who may need the information translated in order to make an informed decision?
 - Are there people with disabilities, or elderly, that need extra help in understanding what is happening?
- Do you know where the safest place is to shelter in your community? This may be a different place depending on the hazard.
- Is there a way for you to find out when it is safe to return home?

Questions for emergency management organisations and personnel:

- Have you provided the right information to community members?
- Have you considered how much time people will need to make a considered decision? Have you given information at the earliest point so that they have as much time as possible?
- Are you working with the local community organisations (including ACCOs)?
- Is there an identified safe place in the community for those who choose to stay?
- If people evacuate, how will their property and belongings be protected?
- How can community members remain in contact with your organisation? Is there an individual who will be the point of contact?

3.5. Evacuate/Withdraw (follow directions of emergency management organisations)

Evacuation (also known as withdrawal) involves the organised movement of people from a dangerous or potentially dangerous area to one that is safer.

When planning the evacuation of Indigenous peoples and communities, consideration must be given to the community's location, infrastructure and access, additional transportation required for those without personal vehicles, the composition of families and whether they need to be evacuated together or separately, and any visitors who might be in the community.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Do you have access to transport to leave?
- Do you have the resources needed to support people to evacuate?
 - Are there enough vehicles and drivers?
 - Do you have enough petrol to make it to the evacuation location?
 - Do you have water and food for 3 days?
 - Have you packed any necessary medication?
- Are you aware of the compositions of families? Are there people who need to remain together during an evacuation? Are there people in avoidance relationships who should not be together during an evacuation?
- Will you want to take animals or pets with you?
- Do you know what you need to take with you?
- Do you know how many infants, young children, pregnant and postpartum people need to evacuate?
- Do you know how many elderly people and people with disabilities or restricted mobility need to evacuate?
- Are there any people with restricted mobility or people with disabilities who need specific transport or additional care?
- Are there people visiting the community who will need support evacuating?

Questions for emergency management organisations and personnel:

- Have you considered the composition of households in the community? Indigenous households are often multigenerational with high proportions of babies and young people.
- Have you provided information about what people should take?
- Have you communicated when people will need to leave?
- Are there any people with limited mobility or disabilities who need specific transport or additional care?
- Can community members take their animals or pets? What is the plan for animal care if they are not able to take these animals? If they can take their animals, what are the arrangements to support them?
- What support is provided to community members when they evacuate?
- Have you asked if there are family groups that need to remain together? Are there any avoidance relationships amongst the evacuees?
- Do you know how many infants, young children, pregnant and postpartum people need to evacuate?

3.6. Stay (shelter in the safest place in community)

While many people will agree to evacuate, some may choose to stay in the community. This could be to protect property, cultural heritage or animals, they feel safer on-Country and other reasons. Often people who stay will leave their homes and stay at a communal location (for example, a school hall, citizens or youth club or health centre) with backup power generators, landline telephones and access to water. These facilities will often be places that comply with fire, flood and / or cyclone codes.

Clearly explain what support will or will not be provided to those who stay so it is understood by the community.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Do you have enough food, water and resources to endure different types of hazards?
- Does the proposed safe shelter have appropriate cooling and/or heating?
- Is there emergency bedding including pillows and blankets?

- Do you have enough medicines (prescriptions etc.) and medical equipment?
- How will those who choose to stay maintain contact with family or emergency management organisations?
- Once people make the decision to stay, can they change their mind? If they do, how can they do this?

Questions for emergency management organisations and personnel:

- Have you communicated the extent of support (if any) that can be provided to those who stay?
- Can people change their mind? If so, when do they need to do this by and how do they let others know?
- Why do some people not want to leave? Asking this question will help to understand any constraints that can be addressed.

3.7. Evacuation points and shelter

For Indigenous peoples who evacuate their communities, there are things that need to be considered to ensure adequate, culturally appropriate evacuation points. Some things that will assist in creating a culturally safe experience include:

- public acknowledgement of the local Traditional Owners on whose land the evacuation centre is located
- a separate, safe, and comfortable space for Elders
- adequate facilities for families with children and babies
- inviting the local Indigenous organisation to be present at evacuation centres and ensuring they are highly visible
- provide evacuation centre staff and volunteers with cultural safety and anti-discrimination training.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Where will you evacuate to? Do you have friends or family who can help you? Do you need access to an evacuation centre?
- Which families have young children and need to stay together?
- Are Elders safe and comfortable at their accommodation?

Questions for emergency management agencies and personnel

- Are there measures in place to ensure evacuation centres are culturally safe places? Have evacuation centre staff participated in cultural safety and anti-discrimination training?
- Have you planned for families and those with young children who need to stay together?
- Is there a plan for the specific needs of families, young people and children?
- Is there appropriate accommodation for Elders?
- Have you discussed and accounted for any cultural and/or gender requirements?
- Will animals be accommodated? If so, where?
- What health services will be required?

3.8. Return home

Indigenous peoples and communities may be particularly concerned and eager to return home as they may be concerned for Country, in addition to concern for their homes. Maintain effective communication in sheltering locations so people are aware they can return home as soon as it is safe to do so. If community members know they will be supported to return as soon as it is safe to do so, it may assist in the event of future evacuations of that community as people know they will be supported to go home.

In the context of major events such as bushfires, cyclones or floods, returning home may not be the end of the experience. In times of major hazards, a community may be evacuated twice, or more. It is important to understand and communicate that going home does not mean the event is over and relationships and dialogue should continue in case another evacuation is required.

Questions for Indigenous community organisations and members:

- Are there community members who need additional support to return?
- Have you been told what to expect when you return?
- Are there local and/or cultural support networks or services that community members can use in the event that returning is challenging or causes trauma?
- Is there an Indigenous-led recovery plan that you should let emergency services know about?

Questions for emergency management agencies and personnel

- Have you provided as much information as possible to prepare evacuees for returning? Including what they should expect to see, feel, any impacts to services etc..
- Have you arranged travel for those returning?
- Have you reached out to any local and/or cultural support services that you can connect people with?
- Is there an Indigenous-led recovery plan?

4. Further information

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- Evacuation Planning (AIDR 2023) <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-evacuation-planning>

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