WHEN DISASTER STRIKES:
A Guide for Community Foundations
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Community Foundations of Canada is the national network for Canada’s 191 community foundations. Together we are a philanthropic movement working across sectors to help Canadians invest in building strong and resilient communities.

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The impact of both human-made and natural disasters is on the rise, with natural disasters affecting over 170 million people around the world each year, an increase from 60 million just 30 years ago.\(^1\) In 2016 alone, the total cost of natural catastrophes worldwide was $175 billion USD.\(^2\) In Canada, storms, hurricanes, and floods will cost the federal disaster fund $902 million CDN a year over the next couple of years, which is more than double than the amounts spent just three to seven years ago.\(^3\)

Government and emergency relief organizations are often first to respond when a disaster hits. In most cases, the communities also rally together to help each other in clean-up efforts and with fundraising initiatives. What we are learning is that there is a unique and valuable role for philanthropy in disaster prevention, response and recovery. The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) based in Australia, is a leader in exploring philanthropy’s role and response to disasters. They have found that “the usual rules, conventions and processes in grant making do not necessarily apply in a disaster. This is true of government grants, business donations and the individual donor who puts a coin into an appeal tin. The way traumatized communities access and utilize grants is also different from the traditional approach to grant applications.”\(^4\)

Governments often respond for political reasons, corporations tend to give and move on, and response groups such as the Red Cross are there for emergency management. Community foundations, however, are able to respond with the long view in mind, develop deep and trusted partnerships, and have greater flexibility in what and how long they can fund.

This resource is an overview for community foundations and other community-minded organizations who are experiencing a disaster or want to be proactive should their community experience one. The first part outlines the unique role of a community foundation and the second section is a guide for community foundations in each phase preparing for and after experiencing a disaster.

“For every day of immediate relief, there are at least ten days required for mid-term recovery and at least 100 days for long-term recovery. Based on that estimate, people will be recovering from hurricane Harvey (in September 2017) for at least three years and probably longer.”\(^5\)
SECTION ONE:

A Community Foundation's Unique Role
A. The Long View

The long-term resilience of a community is built into the DNA of community foundations and offers a unique asset to communities affected by disasters. The FRRR’s experience taught them that while early engagement is important, starting to grant approximately 12 months after a disaster is philanthropy’s sweet spot. This gives enough time for emergency response and governments to raise and grant funds for immediate needs (response and recovery). In fact, the FRRR still provides grants nine years later to several initiatives that serve communities affected by the devastating 2009 Victorian bushfires in eastern Australia. This has given the communities time to think and plan strategically without political pressures or needing to spend raised money too quickly. With this long view in mind, community foundations don’t need to wait for a disaster to strike. Supporting preparedness strategies is also a key role for all community-minded organizations.

“At FRRR, we know long-term community recovery takes time — time to conduct adequate research and planning to ensure that social and physical infrastructure is appropriate, sustainable and meets the future needs of the community. For this reason, FRRR’s natural disaster recovery programs typically begin 12 months after an initial disaster and, depending on available funding, last for several years afterwards.”

B. Community-Led

A community foundation’s role after a disaster is not just about securing funding. One of the most important pieces for a community foundation is to work with other funders and organizations to be responsive and flexible to the community’s needs. Disaster can change a community and the way a community foundation may be used to operating. Flexibility and relevance are key to a community foundation’s response during and after recovery. This means allowing the time and space for the community to learn and express where they feel the greatest needs are, which usually evolve over time. In several cases, funders have created a clearing house mechanism where community organizations would only need to submit one application form rather than having them fill out different applications for each of the various funding organizations. The workload on community-serving organizations increases significantly during disaster recovery, so these types of collaborations between funders are key to helping organizations focus on what really matters. Not only that, supporting leadership in the community will help to avoid burnout, duplication and improve response skills. There are a few areas where a community foundation can support community leaders: hosting community conversations, training organizations in healing circles, supporting ‘who do we work with’ networks, supporting Indigenous leadership, exploring deeply the impacts to mental health and well-being, developing Vital Signs or data-supported research of the community to better understand gaps, and much more.
“Other mechanisms such as Regional Donation Accounts (allowing communities to collect and administer funds for their own programs), a clearing-house service (allowing grant seekers to submit only one grant application to one organization and feel confident that it would reach the most appropriate donor) and the leverage mechanism (attracting additional funding by applying a co-funding principle, ensuring that the impact of donations were maximized), were important to the success of the overall recovery efforts and should be replicated.”

C. Collaboration and Partnerships

One of the community foundation’s greatest strengths, even before a disaster, is their ability to collaborate and build deep networks outside of philanthropy. Given that disasters often leave widespread and long-term social impacts, collaboration is essential in designing and implementing preparedness, response and recovery strategies. Working with government, disaster relief organizations, community groups, Indigenous communities, and the private sector are important to rebuilding a community. When communication is open and trust is built, response can be timely, opportunities are expanded, and mechanisms can be put in place to avoid duplication or missed information. Community foundations should look to expand their networks before and in response to a disaster in order to help mobilize their community for a successful response and recovery. Since community foundations are there for the long term, these relationships before and after disasters will build a strong interdependence for future work together.

“The FRRR program helped to build a greater level of collaboration between government and the philanthropic sector. As a partner with the Victorian Government through the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), FRRR was able to widen the government’s recovery funding scope, and demonstrate the benefits of partnering with philanthropy.”
CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY: Partnerships Mobilize Wood Buffalo Response
The wildfires in Fort McMurray and communities in the surrounding Wood Buffalo area in May 2016 captured the country’s attention. Approximately 88,000 people were evacuated, making it one of the largest and most successful evacuations in Albertan history. By the time the fire was under control, an estimated 2,400 structures had been destroyed. As first responders and frontline organizations addressed the immediate crisis in Fort McMurray, community foundations from across Alberta pooled their resources to create a Rebuilding Fort McMurray Fund. With over $1.4 million raised, the Edmonton Community Foundation joined 15 other organizations who created the Wood Buffalo Fire Recovery Funders Circle to form partnerships with groups such as Suncor Energy Foundation, the municipality, Red Cross and many more. This group met to share information and applications from projects coming forward from the community. During this time the Wood Buffalo Community Foundation formed and will be a key partner in the ongoing efforts to rebuild and reimagine a thriving community.

CASE STUDY: Floods Unite Southern Albertans
In June 2013, southern Alberta was hit with disastrous flooding that lasted over a week. The flood decimated communities from the Rocky Mountains to Medicine Hat and displaced over 100,000 citizens. First responders and frontline organizations assisted in immediate crisis support. The philanthropic solution from community foundations was the formation of response funds. The Calgary Foundation established the Flood Rebuilding Fund to support long-term community recovery efforts in some of the most affected areas. Over $9.1 million was used to support 131 grants for flood-related charitable initiatives. In addition to the Calgary Foundation’s efforts, the Banff-Canmore Community Foundation established the After the Flood Stewardship Fund. This fund was created to support groups to assist with habitat restoration and reconstruction activities of the Bow Valley’s public lands damaged by the flood. The community funds were able to support a broad range of services, including: housing, access to food, counselling, and rebuilding community gathering places such as parks, halls and play areas.

“After a disaster, it is possible for communities to reinvent themselves so that they not only survive, but thrive. They must look at themselves with new eyes, recognize the potential which lies within themselves, and build a resilient base which is sustainable in the long term.”
CASE STUDY:
Community Comes Together in Response to Hate – Peterborough & Quebec City

In November 2015 the only mosque in Peterborough, Masjid al-Salaam, was the target of a hate crime: arsonists smashed a window and used Molotov cocktails that caused over $80,000 worth of damage to the building. Although no one was physically harmed, the event triggered fear throughout the local Muslim community. Remarkably, the community united to support the members of Kawartha Muslim Religious Association (KMRA) in many ways, including a crowdfunding campaign that raised more than $110,000 in 30 hours. The Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough teamed up to manage the surplus donations and established a fund to support the YWCA Crossroads Shelter and Five Counties Children’s Centre in perpetuity.

On January 29, 2017, the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City experienced a tragic mass shooting that killed six people, seriously injured several others, and spread fear throughout the local Muslim community. Local leaders and community members showed great strength in rallying together to support one another. The Fondation Québec Philanthrope created a fund to support the local Muslim community and encouraged everyone to collaborate during the difficult time. The funds of the Philanthropic Fund for a Society Toward Social Tolerance first went to organizations that could help support the community, and in the long term will be used to support initiatives that promote a socially tolerant society.

CASE STUDY:
San Francisco’s Proactive Approach

When hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, it was the communities of colour and low-income neighbourhoods of New Orleans that were the hardest-hit. Meanwhile, on the West Coast, The San Francisco Foundation (TSFF) recognized the vulnerability of its own city to a natural disaster, and decided to be proactive in protecting its most marginalized and under-resourced communities. To that end, TSFF secured grant money to establish a readiness fund and then teamed up with community-based organizations who served vulnerable residents. In 2007, TSFF began an externally-facing program, this time going right to potentially affected community members to educate and raise awareness of risks and what to do in the event of a disaster. Over the course of nine years, the program has been gradually expanded to become a robust and comprehensive initiative that has created their six elements of disaster resilience (see Figure 1). Read more about their strategy here.

Figure 1: Disaster Philanthropy Playbook, Impact Stories

![Disaster Philanthropy Playbook, Impact Stories](image)
SECTION TWO:
Disaster Readiness and Response

What can your foundation do?
Community foundations have different roles to play before, during and after a disaster. We outline four phases: Risk Reduction, Response, Recovery, and Rebuild, and provide suggestions for the role of a community foundation in each phase.
SECTION TWO: DISASTER READINESS AND RESPONSE

PHASE ONE:
Risk Reduction and Disaster Ready (Ongoing)

DESCRIPTION

• This phase is focused on preparedness and resilience in advance of a disaster.
• Research shows that being prepared is crucial to the success of a community’s response. This includes provisioning significant funds for disaster preparedness and developing strategies to build community resilience that lessen the overall impact of a natural disaster on individuals, businesses, governments and communities.13
• Estimates from organized philanthropy in the United States determined that for every $1 spent on disaster preparedness, at least $7 is saved in casualties, property damage, and the like.13

ROLE OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

• The role of a community foundation in this phase is to be involved in a community disaster task force or start one. You don’t need to wait for a disaster to occur to begin the conversation. Begin partnering with those who affect change, such as your regional government, on their disaster relief preparations and seek to build collaboration amongst other funders, community organizations and individuals. Together, you can create disaster response protocols so everyone is clear about ‘who does what when’.14
• Given the long-standing use and knowledge of ecosystems of Indigenous peoples, engage Indigenous communities in disaster preparation and response plans.
• Develop an internal preparedness plan (that is how your staff, board, volunteers, policies, etc. will operate during a disaster). Also create an external plan that will guide how you will assist in the time of disaster.14

GRANTS FOCUS

• Provide grants for community conversations that educate and create disaster readiness strategies.
• Support organizations working to put in place disaster readiness and resilience strategies.
• Consider funding projects or research that addresses the root causes of disaster (environmental, security, etc.).
• Develop and communicate your preparedness plan for your organization with grantees and partners.
• Work with key grantees to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) so you can work together when a disaster strikes.15
• Support and engage Indigenous communities in disaster resilience planning.16

PARTNERSHIP/COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE FOCUS

• Build relationships with other funders, not-for-profits, emergency management agencies, businesses, Indigenous communities, and governments to develop a philosophy of shared responsibility that is connected to community. This can be done through:
  • Regular task force meetings, hosting community conversations, and setting up an application clearing house that is ready to be implemented when a disaster strikes.
  • Practice co-funding community initiatives so that trust and funding mechanisms can be tested prior to a disaster.
  • Consider partnering with other local or provincial community foundations to increase support and networks.

FUNDRAISING FOCUS

• Consider starting a disaster relief fund at your foundation so that when a disaster strikes, you are able to respond quickly and strategically.
• Click here for more information about setting up a disaster relief fund.17
• Work with donors and board members to raise their awareness about the effects of disaster on communities and the benefits of being prepared and connected.

Resources for community foundations:
The Prince’s Trust Australia and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) believe that risk reduction is a critical issue that needs national leadership and a coordinated, collaborative approach. Together in 2017, they have created “Disaster Resilient: Future Ready”18 to work with communities, researchers, and experts to co-design methods and tools for helping communities to be ready for natural disasters and adapt to new or changed social, economic and environmental conditions.
Center for Disaster Philanthropy’s approach to preparedness: watch here.
Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Planning Guide: read here.
PHASE TWO:

Response (Time of disaster to 1 month after*) *Timelines are approximate

DESCRIPTION

• This phase occurs when your community is in a state of emergency. Urgent needs must be met in a timely manner to preserve life and ensure major and essential services such as food, shelter, communication, roads, etc. are available for the community.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

• In this phase, your foundation can seek to mobilize and coordinate communication amongst community organizations and funders. Work in collaboration with emergency response teams to ensure the provisions of basic services for displaced populations are in place and help to mobilize volunteers through your networks.
• Support the work of assessing damages and critical needs.
• Assist with connecting case managers and pro-bono legal services to the community.19
• Reach out to Community Foundations of Canada in order for us to support and help mobilize your efforts.
• Support or lead community conversations that inform your community on topics such as: disaster relief processes, legal rights of disaster victims, navigating applications and basic services, and consideration for Indigenous communities.19

GRANTS FOCUS

• It is advised that community foundations limit the amount of funding in the initial months during and after a disaster in order to support the long-term needs of your community (see below). However, if there are gaps in funding or the abilities of the emergency response organizations, your foundation can respond accordingly.
• Consider funding town halls, community conversations or talking circles that bring people together to create coordinated approaches for response.
• Create clear communication and information sharing with your grantees.

PARTNERSHIP/COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE FOCUS

• Support the work of the emergency response organizations such as the Red Cross and government strategies.
• Create or support a funders table.
• Mobilize volunteers.
• Approach local or provincial organizations that are interested in partnership.
• Help enable communication between response teams and community.
• Help support improvements in the efficiency of logistics systems.
• Consider working with other community foundations who are also affected by the disaster to share ideas, resources, fundraising efforts, communications, etc.

FUNDRAISING FOCUS

• Mobilize your communication channels quickly to let your community and donors know about your support and response.
• Deliver a strategy that supports the immediate fundraising needs of your community and create mechanisms that invest in the community for the long term. For example, this could be working with donors to create endowments or working to create disaster relief funds (see above).
• Seek partnerships to pool philanthropic funds for greater impact.

Resource for community foundations:
The FRRR’s Natural Disaster Response Framework is an excellent resource for community foundations. Their experience and insight provide a multi-level collaborative philanthropic response that supports the medium- to long-term recovery of rural and regional communities affected by natural disasters. Their resource can be found here.19
SECTION TWO: DISASTER READINESS AND RESPONSE

PHASE THREE:
Recovery (Approximately 1 to 12 months after a disaster)

DESCRIPTION
• In this phase, the emergency needs of the community have been met and the focus is now on finding ways for the community to recover from the disaster.
• In this phase, displaced people are returning home and people are focused on the steps they need to take to rebuild their lives. This includes assessing and repairing community and individual infrastructure, starting and reevaluating community programming and institutions (like schools, community services, etc.) and healing from physical injuries.
• A lot of attention and resources must go towards supporting the mental health of community members as they return and cope with the trauma that they and their community have experienced.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
• During this phase, community foundations are an active and well-networked partner and are able to mobilize in response to the community needs. During this time, corporate donors, emergency response organizations and governments may no longer have the means to accept donations or respond to community needs.
• Continued collaboration with partners to support community-led solutions are key in this phase.

GRANT FOCUS
• While continuing to focus on the long-term needs of the community (see below), you can begin by creating a simple and accessible grants programs in this phase.
• Have grant criteria decided by local organizations and be adaptable to the community’s changing needs.
• In this phase, focus on psychological recovery, volunteer fatigue, and support for emerging leaders. 21
• Work with Indigenous leaders to support the unique needs of their community.
• Consider funding staffing needs of local organizations who feel the extra workload as they support their community during this phase.

PARTNERSHIP/COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE
• Work to create a clearing-house service that is used for liaising with other funders in order to refer and accept applications. This will allow grant seekers to apply to many funders by submitting only one application. 22
• Consider funding community engagement coordinators to develop a plan for project funding to assist in different regions for rebuilding. 23
• Collaborate with key funders to avoid duplication in all aspects of granting, funding, creating community knowledge platforms, etc.
• Work with media to continue to share information about the disaster within and outside of the community.
• Continue meeting with partners and supporting community conversations to assess needs and the direction of the recovery process.

FUNDRAISING FOCUS
• Work with government and other funders that offer matching donations. (Side note: In recent experiences, current donor-advised funds held at community foundations are not eligible for government matching programs. For example, in Fort McMurray only new donations to the Red Cross were eligible for a government match.)
• Look for leverage and take a proactive role to expand the sum of funds (offer to partner with government, businesses, individuals and organizations). 22
• Continue to work with donors that have a long-term view in mind (see below). Find ways to connect with groups, such as the Red Cross, to see if they would be willing to partner on long-term funding needs.
• Communicate your unique role in supporting the long-term needs of the community (beyond emergency relief).
• Use your expertise to assist the community in fundraising efforts.
PHASE FOUR:  
Rebuild (12 months to 10+ years after a disaster)

DESCRIPTION
- In this phase, the community is stabilizing and shifts from immediate relief needs to long-term recovery. When a community experiences a disaster, it can take many years for them to rebuild community infrastructure, renew their natural environment, and have people return and heal from physical and emotional afflictions.
- While some communities will want to return themselves to their previous state, many take the opportunity to reimagine the community with a focus on resilience and equity.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS
- This is where your community foundation shines! You’ve kept an eye on the long-term recovery and rebuild of the community and your role now is to continue that vision forward. You will want to maintain crucial relationships with a focus on key groups that will carry the work forward now that emergency response is gone.
- Sharing your experiences with your community as well as with Community Foundations of Canada is important so that we can improve our support to foundations across Canada.
- Continue to determine the needs of your community knowing that some needs are hidden and may surface long after the disaster. Staying flexible and responsive are key in this phase.

GRANT FOCUS
- Build off the work of the previous phases. You may also want to create regular community needs assessments or a Vital Signs that guide your granting so that the biggest needs are met.
- Continue to fund conversations that help community organizations in their recovery efforts or that offer services to community members such as the financial resources available for rebuilding.
- Consider offering small or flexible grants that can be transformative in this phase.
- Look to fund specific areas such as housing, mental health, Indigenous communities, education, arts and culture, communication networks, animal protection, etc.

PARTNERSHIPS/COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE FOCUS
- Continue the work from the recovery phase.
- Partnerships should continue in this phase including regular funders table meetings and community conversations. Hopefully these relationships will translate into long-term ways of working beyond the disaster relief efforts.
- Stay connected to Indigenous leaders who can inform you on how best to support their rebuild efforts.

FUNDRAISING FOCUS
- Media attention often tapers off during this phase so be sure to stay connected to your local media outlets to continue to tell the story of your community’s recovery.
- Continue to work with donors and other funders on building out long-term strategies that support the recovery fund for years after the disaster.

Resources for community foundations:
- Calgary: www.calgaryfoundation.org/initiatives/flood-rebuilding-fund
- http://disasterphilanthropy.org/resources-2/basic-tips-for-disaster-giving/
When a community experiences a disaster, they often see major issues surface that may require a long-term response from government. For example, issues of racial inequality surfaced during and in the response efforts to hurricane Katrina. Your community foundation may find yourself needing to shift into an advocacy role in order to support policy changes or different response strategies during or after a disaster.

Here are a few ideas for your community foundation to pay attention to:

• Be involved in making sure your community is getting maximum federal, provincial and regional recovery dollars.
• Have a voice in making sure the distribution of funds is a fair, equitable and transparent process.
• Share information with governments, emergency response, Indigenous communities, and community organizations and be sure that all needs are being discussed and met.
• Create a safe space to have difficult conversations over the long term (for example, issues of racial inequality can surface during and after disaster response).
• Ask for increased mental health services and other programs that keep people safe and healthy or fill any gaps for recovery.
• Work with Indigenous communities and vulnerable groups to make sure they are supported and their voices are heard during their recovery.
• Work with local businesses to make sure they have the support to recover with minimal damage in order to keep your local economy thriving.
• Use and share relevant data and your experiences in past grant-making areas to inform policy and funding decisions.

“We believe that communities that are supported to build their capacity will be better able to respond to the impacts of natural disasters.”

AN EXAMPLE OF ADVOCACY

The San Francisco Foundation advocated for adequate funding for non-profits before, during, and after hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005. They implemented California’s Private Non-Profit Disaster Reimbursement Program, got government to recognize the role of non-profits in disaster relief and the need for inclusion in planning, and increased foundation sector funding to non-profit disaster preparedness.
CONCLUSION

Natural and human-made disasters change a community. While the devastation can have a lasting negative effect, many communities rise from the disaster stronger, more connected, and better prepared should any other crisis hit their region. We hope this resource has made you aware of the need for preparedness measures and the role your community foundation can play in the response, recovery, and rebuild strategies in your community.

RESOURCES

4. The Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Planning (ADRP) approach has been designed with aboriginal communities in mind. The ADRP process includes a user-friendly guide to help you work through the various steps to increase resiliency in your community http://www.jibc.ca/news/new-online-resource-launched-strengthen-disaster-resiliency-aboriginal-communities
5. Aboriginal Disaster Resilience Knowledge Sharing Toolkit: Outlines how to use storytelling and talking circles to facilitate the sharing of Traditional Knowledge (TK) about Aboriginal resilience among TK holders, their communities and local emergency management practitioners. It focuses on accessing information about community strengths, past emergencies, existing risks and wise practices to help Aboriginal communities become more resilient to disasters. https://adrp.jibc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ADRP_-Knowledge_Sharing_Toolkit1.pdf
7. The Center for Disaster Philanthropy: a full-time resource to help donors make more thoughtful disaster-related giving decisions and maximize the impact of their gifts. It includes toolkits, tip sheets, resources and impact stories: http://disasterphilanthropy.org/
8. The Disaster Playbook: a collection of strategies, stories and resources compiled from submissions from grantmakers nationwide, in order to advance learning and understanding on how the philanthropic sector can respond to and, in some cases, lead the recovery in their communities, while implementing the lessons learned and preparedness practices in order to mitigate damage and loss of life should a disaster strike. http://disasterplaybook.org/about/how-to-use-the-playbook/
ENDNOTES


