



Disaster Recovery Fundamentals

This document provides organizations and small businesses (“organizations”) with a basic understanding of disaster recovery. It aims to explain what recovery is, what to expect, how long it takes, and why planning for it is important.





What is disaster recovery?

Disaster recovery can be understood as the complex, whole-of-society process of coming to terms with, and working to resolve, the impacts of a disaster across the social, economic, built, and natural aspects of a community. Unlike business continuity, recovery is about learning how to live within and adapt to a new reality. For some, this may look similar to what existed before the disaster, but for many this will look and feel very different.

Recovery is a deeply personal experience unique to each of those affected, whether at an individual, organizational, or community level. When undertaken with clear purpose and intent, recovery can provide a unique opportunity to improve upon pre-existing conditions.



- > ***Recovery isn't always about getting back to the way things used to be.***
There is a unique opportunity in recovery to address and implement risk reductive strategies and infrastructure that can mitigate impacts from future events.
- > ***Disaster recovery differs from business continuity.***
Business continuity outlines capabilities of an organization to continue operations at pre-defined levels during/after an event for a limited period of time. Disaster recovery outlines how an organization will restore fully functional operations and “recover” from unfavourable or unusual impacts due to the event.





What types of impacts could my organization face following a disaster?

The impacts of a disaster can be far-reaching, compounding, and may evolve over time. The scope, scale, and type of impacts depend on several factors, and organizations often experience both direct and indirect impacts.

- **Direct impacts:** Result directly from the disaster, such as damage or disruption to materials, operations, and infrastructure or loss of service-delivery or economic opportunities.
- **Indirect impacts:** Consequences of the direct impacts, but with a delayed effect, such as personnel shortages, supply chain disruptions, inflation, or resource scarcity.

Impacts are interconnected, making it unlikely that one impact is isolated from another. Organizations may experience impacts across four main areas:

Social

Effects on the health and well-being of people and social networks (increased stress or mental health challenges for employees or increased welfare needs within the community);

Economic

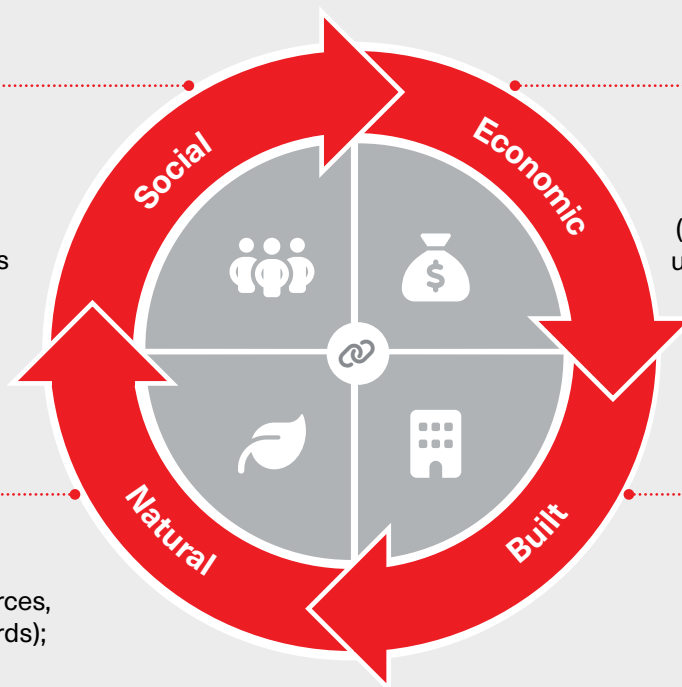
Effects on financial stability or the broader local and regional economies (loss of inventory, sales disruption, unexpected expenses or demand, or stock market fluctuations);

Natural

Effects to the natural environment (contamination of natural resources, debris, emissions, or new hazards);

Built

Effects on physical infrastructure (damage to facilities, equipment, or inventory);



In addition, the impacts of a disaster can amplify pre-existing issues for an organization. Challenges that existed before a disaster occurred are likely to be exacerbated in the aftermath.



***For example,** organizations struggling with under-staffing may feel further strain to continue operations due to personnel displacement, budget cuts for hiring, and refocusing of priorities on recovery efforts.*



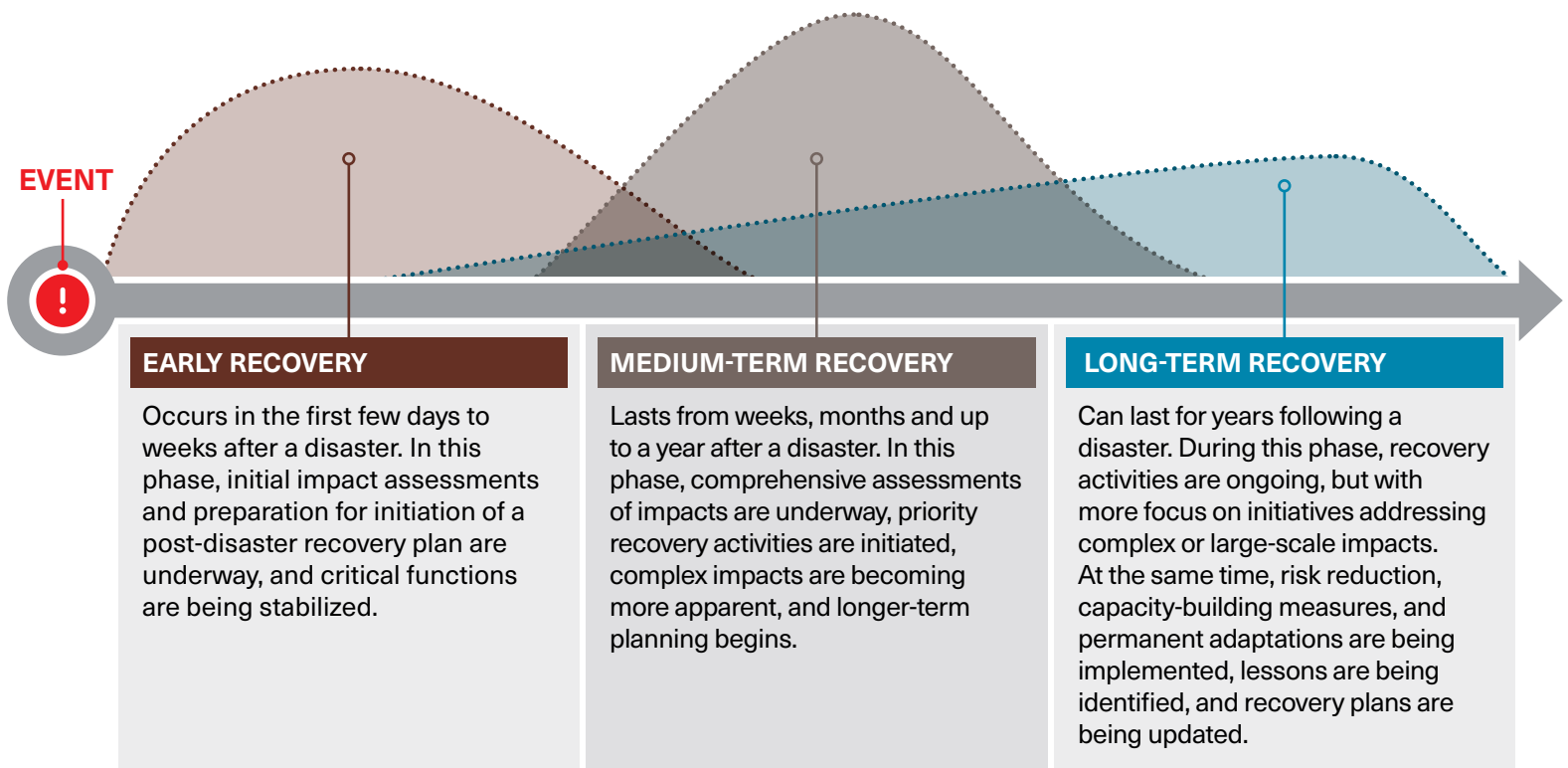


How long does it take to recover? What can my organization expect?

Recovery takes time, and can continue for days, months, and even years after a disaster. While the recovery process begins as soon as the response is initiated, the time it takes to recover varies and each organization has to move at its own pace and capacity. Recovery often takes longer than anticipated, which is normal.

The timeframe for recovery depends on factors like the scope and scale of the event, pre-existing conditions, local context, leadership, the capacity to recover of those affected, readiness level, and available resources, among other factors. Remember that while some issues may be resolved easily, others may require long-term, multi-party solutions. It is important to remember that not everyone recovers at the same pace.

Recovery typically unfolds in three overlapping phases, which are fluid in timeframe depending on the scope and severity of the impacts:



It is important to note what your local, provincial and federal governments, as well as non-governmental agencies, are doing for recovery efforts. This includes being aware of any programs or initiatives that may impact your organization or create an opportunity for you to obtain additional supports.





Why should an organization plan for recovery?

Planning for recovery isn't just something to consider after a disaster has occurred. Wherever possible, this essential function should take place well before disaster strikes. While some impacts may be unavoidable, proper planning can help mitigate the severity of impacts and facilitate a smoother recovery process.

Recovery planning will look different for every organization, but may include activities such as:

- Completing a risk assessment to help shape priorities, considerations, decision-making structures, key contacts and supports, and roles and responsibilities during the recovery phase;
- Developing a recovery plan that corresponds with your emergency action and business continuity plans;
- Identifying individuals to form a recovery team, assigning positions, and defining their roles and responsibilities;
- Preparing or reviewing potential supports for personnel;
- Training for and regularly exercising your recovery plan; and/or
- Reviewing and updating your plan annually or after identifying opportunities for improvement through an exercise or after a disaster.

