

## Session 8

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### **Holistic Disaster Recovery: Creating a More Sustainable Future**

**Decision Making in Sustainable Disaster Recovery (Part I)    Time:            3 hours**

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**(Slide 8-1)**

**Objectives:**

- 8.1    Discuss choices made by stakeholders, including their implications**
  - 8.2    Discuss the politics of recovery decision making**
  - 8.3    Discuss the process of planning in sustainable disaster recovery**
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**Scope:**

**(Slide 8-2)**

**The recovery process is shaped by the decisions, or choices, made by individuals, groups and organizations before and after a disaster. For example:**

- Choices made before a disaster can affect the level of hazard vulnerability facing a community, its level of preparedness, the ability to respond and the ability to recover.
- Choices made in the post-disaster environment often address the most basic human needs, including food, shelter, clothing and financial or psychological aid.
- Choices made by those tasked with the provision of assistance and those who receive it, can dramatically affect individuals, families, businesses and communities.

Decision making during recovery is shaped by a number of factors, including the political nature of disasters and the role of planning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Specific factors facilitating and hindering sustainable disaster recovery will be discussed in Sessions 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

- Disasters are inherently political events, in part because of the competition for and the allocation of scarce resources.
- **Issues faced in the post-disaster environment include:**
  - The equitable distribution of aid;
  - The speed of assistance; and
  - Power across stakeholder groups, which shape the political context of decisions made at the local, state and federal levels of government.
- Recovery planning provides a sound framework to explain how decisions can be made objectively based on a rational analysis of information and the strategic allocation of resources.
  - This approach is particularly relevant to achieving a sustainable recovery.
  - While the creation of pre-disaster recovery plans can facilitate this process, local recovery is more accurately characterized as an adaptive process.

**Note:** If the instructor chooses to conduct the case study analysis in Session 9, students should be informed that they must identify an appropriate case study for review from the literature. Student teams (consisting of no more than three people) will be expected to do a 45 minute presentation. **Each presentation should address the following topics:**

- A description of identified stakeholder groups;
- An analysis of choices made by stakeholder groups, including their impact on the recovery process; and
- A description of inter-organizational relationships using the horizontal and vertical integration framework.

Students should make sure to identify case studies that are sufficiently detailed to obtain this information. If in doubt, students are encouraged to seek guidance from the instructor.

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**Readings:*****Student Readings:***

Beatley, Timothy. 1995. *Planning and Sustainability: The Elements of a New (Improved?) Paradigm*. HRRC Publication No. 132A. College Station, Texas. Texas A&M University, College of Architecture, Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center. <http://hrrc.tamu.edu/publications/index.shtml>.

Burby, Raymond J., Timothy Beatley, Philip R. Berke, Robert Deyle, Steven French, David R. Godschalk, Edward Kaiser, Jack D. Kartez, Peter May, Robert Olshansky, Robert Patterson, and Rutherford Platt. 1999. Unleashing the Power of Planning to Create Disaster Resistant Communities. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 65.

Nigg, Joanne M. 1995. *Disaster Recovery as a Social Process*. Article No. 284. Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center. <http://www.udel.edu/DRC/publications.html>.

Platt, Rutherford. 2001. Congress and Natural Disasters: A Symbiotic Relationship. Pp. 47-63. In *Facing Our Future: Hurricane Floyd and Recovery in the Coastal Plain*. Greenville, North Carolina: Coastal Carolina Press.

Reddy, Swaroop. 1992. *A Study of Long-Term Recovery of Three Communities in the Aftermath of Hurricane Hugo*. HRRC Monograph 9B. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University, College of Architecture, Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center. <http://hrrc.tamu.edu/publications/index.shtml>.

Schwab, Jim, Kenneth C. Topping, Charles Eadie, Robert Deyle and Richard Smith. 1998. The Planning Process, pp.75-89. In *Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction*. PAS Report 483/484, Chicago, Illinois, American Planning Association.

***Instructor Reading:***

Ingram, Helen. 1977. Policy Implementation Through Bargaining: The Case of Federal Grants-in-Aid. *Public Policy*. Vol. 25, No. 4.

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## 8.1 Discuss the choices made by stakeholders, including their implications

### (Slide 8-3)

Key recovery decisions are made at all levels of government. However, the inter-organizational environment which shapes decision making requires close coordination if local governments hope to achieve a sustainable recovery. **Key governmental issues include:**

- Local governments are usually the most directly impacted, yet they are typically the least prepared to address the logistical, financial and technical aspects of recovery and reconstruction.
- FEMA, which is typically the best prepared to provide technical assistance following disasters, is the farthest removed from a clear understanding of local needs.<sup>2</sup>
- States can play an important role, linking federal programs with identified local needs. The ability of states to facilitate the transfer of information varies across the United States as described briefly in Session 3.
- The effects of these decisions are magnified in the post-disaster environment. Many decisions must be made quickly, sometimes with limited information or by individuals with limited disaster experience.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The provision of disaster assistance by FEMA necessitates deploying staff from the regional office as well as Disaster Assistance Employees from across the country. As a result, they are not as familiar with local needs as state officials who interact with local governments on a regular basis. While the federal government is usually the most prepared to address recovery, FEMA has failed to develop a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the disbursement of recovery grant programs to address planning for long-term recovery and reconstruction. Furthermore, most events are localized and fail to meet federal disaster declaration thresholds. This scenario requires local and state organizations to develop a means to facilitate the recovery process.

<sup>3</sup> The process of pre and post-disaster recovery planning is perhaps the most significant weakness in the overall emergency management system. FEMA does not possess an adequate means of assisting states and local governments undertake effective recovery planning, nor do many states or local governments possess a recovery plan.

**(Slide 8-4)**

- Intense pressure exists to distribute aid and take action.
  - In many cases, states and local governments are not equipped to manage the large influx of federal dollars and the magnitude of additional responsibilities.
  - In the majority of cases in which disasters do not trigger federal assistance, a series of local and state decisions must be made regarding how assistance will be provided.

**The decision making milieu can be shaped by a range of additional factors. These may include:**

- Balancing the need to make rapid decisions with incomplete information and the creation of sound policy;
- Issues surrounding public health and safety; and
- Decisions, which can dramatically affect the future of a community, are inherently political in nature.

**(Slide 8-5)**

- **The following characteristics shape post-disaster decision making:**
  - The framing of issues;
  - The role of public participation;
  - Negotiation;
  - The workplace environment; and
  - The unique perspectives of individuals, groups and institutions.

- **While recovery decisions are made by individuals at differing levels of government, these choices are shaped by the following characteristics:**
  - An individual's current knowledge and experience; and
  - An understanding of existing circumstances found both within and external to them and the group or organization to which they belong.

**(Slide 8-6)**

- Decision making in the post-disaster environment often relies on the use of political power, negotiation or policy dialogue;
- Pre-existing societal, economic and political contexts play key roles in how decision makers behave;
- Decisions may address a disaster victim's most basic needs (housing, food, safety);
- Decisions may be shaped by complex, recovery programs that frequently contain competing objectives;
- Decisions may be shaped by the methods used to achieve desired ends. Examples include political power, negotiation, and policy dialogue;
- The influx of funding that an agency or organization may be ill-equipped to manage;

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- Decisions that differentially affect varied segments of society;
- Reconstruction alternatives that may permanently alter the physical makeup of a community;
- Potential costs must be measured against possible benefits;
- Determining the beneficiaries of public policy decisions;
- Determining who stands to lose or bear a disproportionate share of the costs;
- Determining if decisions result in equitable outcomes; and
- Determining the appropriate level of public input in decision making.

(Slide 8-8)

### **Stakeholder Choices and their Implications**

The choices made by stakeholders and their implications are listed below in order to provide a series of possible outcomes given decisions commonly made by those involved in recovery. Choices are generally described across the traditional phases of emergency management.

As the decisions and their implications are discussed, the instructor should ask students to identify additional choices made by stakeholders, including their implications. In addition, the instructor should ask students to analyze how decisions made in differing phases of recovery can affect options and outcomes. **Examples may include:**

- The decision to build in known hazard areas and how this increased level of hazard vulnerability may limit recovery options (i.e. incorporating hazard mitigation); and
- How an effective response to a disaster can set the stage for a sound recovery.

#### ***Choices affecting hazard vulnerability:***

- Building in known high hazard areas (i.e. the floodplain, on barrier islands, on steep sloped areas, the wildfire-urban interface, etc.);
- Purchasing property in known high-hazard areas;
- Incorporating mitigation measures into new and existing construction; and
- Placement of infrastructure (which tends to guide future development).

#### ***An increased level of hazard vulnerability can have the following consequences:***

- Greater damages following disasters;
- An increased number of injuries or deaths;
- Hindering the ability of individuals and organizations to recover financially;
- Increased levels of business disruption; and
- Increased difficulty responding to disaster victims when a disaster strikes.

***Choices affecting preparedness:***

- Maintaining an adequate disaster kit;
- Purchasing flood insurance; and
- Maintaining adequate pre-disaster outreach and educational efforts.

***A low level of preparedness can have the following consequences:***

- Longer response and recovery periods;
- Increased levels of business interruption;
- Greater economic losses; and
- Increased likelihood of injuries and deaths.

***Choices affecting response capabilities:***

- Maintaining an adequately trained staff;
- Purchasing and maintaining adequate resources; and
- Participating in emergency management assistance compacts.

***A low response capability can have the following consequences:***

- Putting people at greater risk of injury or death in the immediate aftermath of an emergency or disaster; and
- An increased reliance on state and federal assistance.

***Choices affecting recovery capabilities include:***

- Identifying grant program eligibility requirements (this applies to disaster victims, local, state and federal government officials);
- Developing a disaster recovery plan;
- Maintaining recovery experts or hiring them post-disaster; and
- Developing an equitable recovery assistance program.

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***A limited ability to effectively recover from disasters can have the following consequences:***

- Uneven or inequitable recovery of disaster victims based on class, race or gender;
- Hazard vulnerability comparable to or exceeding that prior to the disaster;
- Missed grant program opportunities;
- Decreased economic standing of individuals, families, businesses, etc.;
- Increased reliance on state or federal resources; and
- Unsustainable reconstruction practices.

**(Slide 8-10)**

**Post-disaster recovery operations**

In order to understand post-disaster recovery decision making, it is important to understand the organizational structure of federal, state and local recovery operations.

***Federal and state recovery operations characteristics:***

- Federal and state recovery tends to be highly codified, based on the administration of existing federal recovery programs;<sup>4</sup>
- Federal recovery operations are characterized by “stove piped” programs that are rarely coordinated under shared goals and objectives;
- Federal recovery operations do not emphasize recovery planning as part of their mission; and

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<sup>4</sup> Following a presidential disaster declaration, a Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) is designated by the Director of FEMA. The FCO is responsible for the review of immediate state needs and the oversight of all federal programs implemented post-disaster. The State Coordinating Officer (SCO), designated by the Governor, is tasked with coordinating state and local recovery actions with federal officials. Typically, the SCO is the state Director of Emergency Management and is also designated the Governor’s Authorized Representative (GAR). The GAR is responsible for the state administration of federal recovery programs and ensuring compliance with the FEMA-State Agreement. The agreement, executed by the Governor and FEMA Regional Director, sets forth agreed upon federal assistance and the conditions under which aid will be provided. Working collaboratively, the FCO and SCO establish a central Disaster Field Office (DFO) and additional field offices as warranted in order to effectively administer federal and state recovery programs and council disaster victims (44 Code of Federal Regulations, 1998, pp. 418-420).

- The commitment to state-level recovery planning varies widely across the country (Mileti 1999, pp. 232-236).

**(Slide 8-11)**

***Local recovery operations characteristics:***

- Most local governments have assigned emergency management duties to a specific individual;
- Local emergency management officials are typically focused on response rather than recovery activities;
- Local recovery processes are typically established post-disaster on an ad-hoc basis, rather than following a pre-disaster recovery planning process;
- This approach tends to require a large degree of adaptive planning, particularly at the local level, often by officials who have little or no experience in disaster recovery;
- FEMA and most states do not maintain an effective means of providing recovery planning assistance;
- Most local governments do not achieve a sustainable recovery;
- Furthermore, they are forced to rely on existing staff or the hiring of outside experts; and
- Unlike most state and federal employees tasked with emergency management, the vast majority of tasks associated with disaster recovery at the local level are performed by individuals who have different day-to-day responsibilities. Planners, public works personnel, and economic development specialists are among those frequently drawn into recovery, learning as they go.

## **The post-disaster workplace environment**

The post-disaster workplace environment following federally declared disasters play an important role in shaping the social and psychological dynamics between FEMA and state officials, providing the backdrop in which decisions are made.

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*The characteristics found in the Disaster Field Office (DFO)<sup>5</sup> include:*

- Limited privacy and close proximity. The physical layout is exacerbated by high stress levels associated with the immediate post-disaster environment.
- Depending on the size of the disaster, work loads frequently exceed twelve hour days, seven days a week during the first months of a disaster. In the case of major disasters, comparable work schedules may be maintained by mitigation and recovery staff for up to a year after the event.
- Typically, the DFO is a vacant warehouse or building that is converted to a working office.<sup>6</sup> The DFO is a federal building and security is brought in to monitor incoming staff and make sure that disgruntled disaster victims are not allowed in the facility. Disaster-specific badges are created and required to gain access. The end result is typically a maze of partitions and cubicles on concrete floors that may house hundreds of federal and state employees.
- The buzz of activity in the DFO is incessant, significantly limiting the ability of staff to undertake detail oriented work associated with policy formulation, strategic planning, or grants management.
- When not in the DFO, staff are in the field, assessing damages, meeting with local government officials, or attending public meetings at night. Staff are expected to meet with large numbers of disaster victims in order to explain how they can apply for an array of state and federal programs.
- In many cases, victims may be homeless, temporarily living in a shelter, or trying to figure out whether they can afford to rebuild their home. Making major life altering decisions in the aftermath of a disaster places an inordinate amount of stress on victims who may be struggling with the provision of basic needs for themselves and their family.

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<sup>5</sup> The Disaster Field Office (DFO) serves as the primary facility where FEMA and the State initiate the long-term recovery effort.

<sup>6</sup> FEMA maintains an operational capacity to quickly identify and rent space and install the necessary electrical and computer wiring, set up desks, chairs, partitions, computer terminals, copiers, and faxes.

- Public meetings are highly charged events, requiring staff to regularly address an overwhelmed and sometimes hostile audience. Over time, this can have a demoralizing effect on those individuals who are not used to intense dialogue occurring on a nightly basis. Depending on the scale of the event, such meetings may occur for up to one year following the disaster.
- Public meetings are held in the evenings in order to enable citizens to attend after work. Staff often work all day in the DFO or in the field, followed by public meetings, returning to work the next morning to begin the process again.
- Physical and emotional exhaustion are common among state and federal officials. Recognizing the tensions associated with disaster recovery and a poor work environment, FEMA often has a psychologist on staff to counsel employees.
- Large-scale disasters frequently necessitate the creation of a Disaster Recovery Operations Center (DROC). The DROC is a facility housing employees who develop and review applications, process cost reports and undertake day-to-day mitigation, Infrastructure Protection Assistance (public assistance), floodplain management and other long-term disaster recovery activities. In most cases, the majority of individuals working there are state emergency management staff implementing recovery grant programs.
- FEMA brings in a number of Disaster Assistance Employees (DAE's) to supplement FEMA regional staff that are deployed to a state impacted by a federally declared disaster. DAE's are FEMA employees that work only when "activated". In large-scale disasters, DAE's arrive from around the country. This can present problems when DAE's are unfamiliar with state policy or regional customs.

**(Slide 8-13)**

### **Understanding of risk**

Disaster assistance policy established by federal, state and local governments as well as individual decisions are driven to some extent by an understanding of natural hazard risk. Decisions made by individuals and government officials typically underestimate vulnerability to natural hazards.

#### ***Factors impacting risk perception include:***

- Temporal factors such as the frequency, magnitude or how recently an event has occurred can impact the salience of disasters and, in turn, the nature of actions taken by citizens and decision makers to reduce their impact.
- The statistical likelihood of natural hazards are frequently misunderstood. Take for example, the frequency of flood events over time. Each event should be viewed singularly, independent of future events. Thus, when a “100-year” event happens, the likelihood of it happening again the following year is the same; a 1 percent chance per year.
- A person’s interpretation of risk results in decisions and behaviors based on this understanding.
- Inaccurate information can lead to an individual assuming a greater level of risk than he or she realizes. In other circumstances, individuals and communities armed with accurate information are willing to assume a certain level of risk to live in area prone to natural hazards.
- In some cases choices are driven by factors such as the desire for an oceanfront view. In other circumstances, individuals may have limited options based on income or the availability of affordable housing.
- The ability to educate individuals, local, state and federal officials about the nature of risk, including its ability to increase or decrease over time has significant policy implications.

**(Slide 8-14)**

**Disaster recovery, public expectations and policy frameworks**

- Disaster recovery is a difficult, confusing and lengthy process.
- State agencies, local governments and disaster victim's expectations regularly exceed the current design of disaster recovery frameworks.
- Decisions must be made quickly, sometimes before victims are ready to assume a more active role associated with sound participatory planning.
- Adroit personnel tasked with involving the public in recovery decisions must be able to gauge when and to what extent citizens can contribute to a meaningful dialogue. A key part of early discussions should address public expectations and how these expectations mesh with the realities of recovery.

**(Slide 8-15)**

- Following disasters questions are frequently raised by disaster victims concerning the length of time necessary to distribute assistance, entitlements versus the provision of loans, and those policies that limit or restrict assistance.
- Recovery programs have very different implementation timelines and methods of disbursement. Individual Assistance programs, insurance claims and Small Business Assistance home repair loans, for example, are received much sooner than the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds used to acquire or elevate flood-prone homes.<sup>7</sup>
- In general, federal disaster recovery programs are not intended to make victims "whole." Rather, programs were designed to assist individuals and families recover.

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<sup>7</sup> The Individual Assistance program can inadvertently provide a disincentive to undertake actions that will reduce future disaster-related damages. Much of the problem can be linked to differing program implementation timelines. Individual assistance staff can rapidly assess an individual's eligibility to obtain funding needed to make home repairs. Conversely, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, intended to reduce future vulnerability, was not designed to provide rapid assistance to homeowners. Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides the financial means to relocate or elevate structures, thereby greatly reducing the likelihood of future flood-related losses. The Individual Assistance program provides for repairs to homes regardless of their natural hazard risk. Thus, if a homeowner receives an Individual Assistance check and makes repairs to their home, they may be less likely to participate in a buyout or relocation project. However, it is not uncommon for a homeowner to make "temporary repairs" under the Individual Assistance program in order to make the home livable while waiting for an acquisition to occur. As a result, state and federal programs may be used to repair a home that will ultimately be acquired and demolished.

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- The evolution of disaster recovery programs has significantly raised public expectations.<sup>8</sup> In addition, unrealistic expectations are often placed on the distribution of state recovery funds by Governors and elected officials of affected states. When those expectations are not met, questions are raised by disaster victims, elected officials and the media.
- Increasing federal disaster assistance in the United States represents a prime example of liberalism. That is, liberalism defined as the concept that large-scale federal programs can fix localized problems.<sup>9</sup>
- Unless local, state and federal leaders seriously address broader issues of land use and institutionalize concepts of sustainability and hazard resilience, communities and states will continue to seek large federal payouts following federally-declared disasters.
- Constituent groups involved in receiving and/or providing aid carry with them a range of perspectives concerning what constitutes acceptable assistance. Policy decisions made during times of disaster recovery frequently differ from those performed during regular day-to-day activities. Actions that may not be taken during “peacetime” are considered, in part, because of the well publicized suffering of victims.

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<sup>8</sup> The level of assistance is relative. Those who have experienced the disaster recovery process regularly express frustration regarding the bureaucratic nature of aid programs and the inability of programs to meet their needs. Experienced disaster victims and local government officials, however, frequently “learn the ropes” over time regarding how to obtain recovery assistance, including how to blend assistance programs to meet their needs. Rising public expectations apply to response activities as well. Should, for example, the state plow private driveways covered in snow following a snowstorm? Should the state use public funds to repair private bridges following a flood? In both cases, local governments and states have provided this level of assistance.

<sup>9</sup> H. W. Brand argues (2001) that while the role of government has always been questioned in America, the public can accept major change in times of perceived crisis. Examples include an enhanced federal role in research, public education and the construction of the interstate highway system in response to the cold war. He goes on to assert that when programs addressed social issues such as busing and poverty that could not be tied to a specific threat public support waned. In the case of disaster assistance, those receiving the aid, the politicians who represent disaster victims as constituents, and state agencies responsible for program oversight, not surprisingly, support the provision of assistance. Typically, the more the better. Yet the long-term questions associated with making difficult, politically charged decisions regarding placing limits on future development or reducing post-disaster assistance to individuals and communities that fail to take into account the risks associated with natural hazards when making day-to-day decisions are infrequently addressed. The limitations of recovery programs, like many of great society ideals expressed by President Lyndon Johnson, are due in large part to the ineffective linkage to state and local realities. This is certainly true when large sums of federal aid arrive in communities post-disaster.

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## **Decision making and the media**

*Public perceptions and expectations are shaped by two primary sources:*

- Technical experts; and
- The media.

The media's impact is tied to their primary function - disseminating information. Newspapers, television, radio, and more recently the internet all provide avenues for information exchange. In the context of emergency management, messages regarding preparedness and mitigation have been relatively successful in a variety of states and communities.

- During the recovery process, stories are frequently framed in a negative context; the slow disbursement of recovery funding, the identification of disenfranchised disaster victims who fell through the cracks, and the inability of local governments to effectively implement recovery programs post-disaster to name a few examples.
- Stories that attempt to explain how the recovery process works, including, for example, the steps necessary to implement programs are not typically deemed worthy or do not make for exciting copy.
- The relationship between the media and those charged with recovery becomes awkward and at times confrontational.
- This limits the breadth of discourse and possible opportunities to improve what are chronic problems in the current design of the recovery system. Nor does it allow for the reporting of helpful information to disaster victims that are often starved for information regarding their status relative to the receipt of aid.

**(Slide 8-18)**

- Antagonistic relationships limit the ability of the media to assist local governments, the state or FEMA to identify tangible evidence of problems in the system, including flawed or uncoordinated policies that limit local governments and victim's ability to recover from a disaster. This should not be surprising given that the role of the media is to report their findings to the public, not to provide governmental agencies an analysis of their findings in private.
- Those tasked with recovery often become defensive when confronted, particularly when it appears that media-related conversations emphasize negative outcomes rather than positive achievements. Taking a defensive position limits the potential for dialogue.
- Local, state and federal officials must become more adept at utilizing the media to assist in the formulation of positive change. This requires a deft approach given the media's inherent skepticism.

**(Slide 8-19)**

**Use of data to shape policy and decision-making**

The ability or inability to gather key pieces of information in the post-disaster environment plays a key role in shaping policy decisions at the federal, state and local levels. Data is a precious resource in emergency management.

- The information available in the post-disaster environment is often limited or incomplete, yet decisions have to be made rapidly given the dire and immediate consequences of inaction.
  - The creation of a pre-event recovery plan allows decision makers the ability to take the time to contemplate potential disaster scenarios, how they will affect their community, and develop a range of measures to address them (Geis 1996, Wilson 1991).
- Intense pressure is exerted on federal, state and local officials to provide needed aid as quickly as possible.
- The failure to effectively obtain and analyze this information can affect not only short-term strategic planning, but also limit the ability of organizations to capitalize on a relatively short policy window that opens and closes in each disaster.

- **This window can, if effectively managed, result in significant improvements in a community's or state's overall quality of life, not only through the reconstruction of the built environment, but also through actions that:**
  - Reduce the area's vulnerability to future events;
  - Improve available housing and infrastructure;
  - Enhance the local economy and the environment; and
  - Improve recreational opportunities.

**(Slide 8-20)**

- ***Examples of tasks requiring detailed information include:***
  - The deployment of needed resources in the immediate aftermath of a disaster;
  - The assessment of long-term recovery needs; and
  - The rapid disbursement of funding to individuals and local and state governments.
- Needs must be balanced with programmatic rules associated with the disaster response and recovery assistance packages.
- When large sums of federal and state dollars are allocated, scrutiny is high regarding the wise use of these resources.
  - State and federal audits frequently occur following large-scale disasters.
    - Audit findings do not typically assess the key issue of balancing the rapid disbursement of funds with existing rules and programs within which emergency management professionals must operate.
    - Emphasis is placed on why resources were not disbursed quickly enough or instances of how program rules were not followed.
    - At the local level, the use of data can help identify community needs while achieving the programmatic objectives of federal programs.

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## 8.2 Discuss the politics of recovery decision making

(Slide 8-21)

The disaster recovery process is highly politicized. Decisions made both before, during and after events are shaped by political processes. **Specific political factors include:**

- ***The differential balance of power and how it can affect the allocation of scarce recovery resources.*** Powerful interests are more capable of obtaining resources post-disaster than those that are not politically connected. **Specific examples may include:**
  - The ability to alter local budgets to meet disaster victim's needs; and
  - The ability to lobby state or federal emergency management agencies to release funding and technical assistance above that traditionally allocated.
- ***The equitable distribution of assistance can become politically contentious.*** The reality, or perception of inequitable disaster assistance based on race or class can quickly garner significant media attention and generate heated debate.
- ***The pressure to act quickly with incomplete information.*** The speed of recovery process can be driven by the media and elected officials who may not have a sound understanding of the recovery process. Political pressure to act may, in fact, limit the ability to more comprehensively analyze community needs and develop a post-disaster recovery strategy.
- ***Allocating state and local resources during a disaster that does not meet a federal declaration threshold requires a high level of political will.*** All states have a state-level disaster declaration process that must be met prior to seeking federal assistance. However, fewer states and local governments maintain a disaster relief fund intended to aid local governments and individual citizens following localized events.

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- **Rutherford Platt, in his book, *Disasters and Democracy* notes several key points that merit attention.<sup>10</sup> They include:**
  - The federal declaration process can be highly politicized. A federal declaration typically results in the influx of large sums of money to states. As a result, local, state and federal politicians actively seek disaster declarations.
  - The fallacy of federal assistance supplementing state and local capabilities. In fact, Platt argues that the current system encourages a local and state “codependency” and a “moral hazard” in which little incentive exists for local and state governments to take action to reduce future losses. Rather, vulnerable communities are encouraged to continue practices that place an increasing number of people and structures at risk, with the expectation that the federal government will continue to provide post-disaster aid.
  - This approach has resulted in rising disaster costs and the continued reliance on congressionally appropriated supplemental funding beyond that available under the Stafford Act.

**(Slide 8-23)**

- Disasters can shape political careers.
  - A visit to an area impacted by a disaster has become an expected duty of elected officials. It serves as an unprecedented opportunity to directly impact the lives of citizens (voters) through promises of assistance during perhaps one of the most trying times of their lives. Handled appropriately, politicians can reap significant rewards. This is true at all levels of government.
    - The mayor and town council officials must meet with constituents to hear concerns and identify unmet needs that will be reported to state or federal officials or incorporated into local recovery plans.
    - State representatives and agency officials regularly meet with concerned citizens or local officials to assess impacts and identify potential state or federal assistance. Members of Congress may promise to fight for additional supplemental funding.

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these factors will be discussed in more detail in Session 10, objective 1, disaster recovery programs an entitlement.

- Federal officials, particularly the President, or staff visiting a declared area, will frequently promise significant federal assistance.<sup>11</sup>
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### **8.3 Discuss the process of planning in sustainable recovery**

**(Slide 8-24)**

Pre and post-disaster planning can be a critically important tool used to facilitate sustainable recovery and reconstruction efforts (Schwab, et. al 1998).

- In Session 2, we discussed the widely held belief that disaster recovery is the least understood aspect of emergency management.
- Many experts also believe that it is the most complex.
  - These factors suggest that planning for post-disaster recovery is essential.
  - Pre-disaster planning is not, however, a guarantee of success, nor does it accurately describe the actions of most communities, states or even the federal government.
  - Adaptive planning more closely explains what happens following a disaster.
  - The current system of disaster recovery in the United States is not really a system at all, nor is it effectively driven by planning principles.
  - Recovery in this country consists of a loosely knit array of programs, many of which run counter to the established objectives of one another.
  - The following information is intended to provide both a description of recovery planning as it is currently practiced by most local governments as well as those aspects of planning that facilitate a sustainable recovery.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Joe Allbaugh, former FEMA Director, publicly questioned why federal assistance should be provided to a Midwestern community that had been repeatedly impacted by flooding. The comments were aired nationally and drew strong local opposition.

<sup>12</sup> A more detailed discussion of specific factors facilitating a sustainable recovery is found in Sessions 12 and 13.

(Slide 8-25)

## **The planning process**

Sound planning serves as a strategic means to outline a plan of action. Each hierarchical step is intended to provide a clearly defined set of policies based on a rational framework for action. The components of the planning framework are explained in greater detail below. **The traditional planning process involves a series of common components.**

**They include:**

- Mission statement;
- Goals;
- Objectives; and
- Policies

***Mission Statement:*** Provides universal guiding principles of the plan.

***Goals:*** Goals represent broad statements that are achieved through the implementation of more specific, action-oriented objectives. Goals provide the framework for achieving the intent of the mission statement.

***Objectives:*** Objectives represent specific, measurable tasks that are frequently assigned a defined period of time to complete.

***Policies:*** Policies are defined as a course of action agreed to by those individuals responsible for the creation of the plan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ideally, the planning process involves significant contributions from relevant stakeholders, including the public.

**(Slide 8-26)**

***General planning benefits include:***

- Engaging in a *process* that helps to clarify group decision making.
- Developing a strategic approach to achieve desired ends.
- Developing an action oriented framework that allows for the identification of broad goals and measurable objectives designed to achieve them.<sup>14</sup>
- Planning provides a tool to codify community needs and involve an array of stakeholder groups in shaping the plans content and direction.
- The planning process allows for the identification of complimentary objectives.

In many cases, those engaged in recovery planning fail to effectively incorporate these basis tenets. Furthermore, most local governments involved in disaster planning, broadly speaking, fail to address recovery and reconstruction issues (Mileti 1999).

**(Slide 8-27)**

**Berke and Beatley (1997) have identified several problems common in recovery plans. They include:**

- Plans do not place sufficient emphasis on recovery and reconstruction, instead focusing on response and preparedness-related issues;
- The importance of the planning process, including the role of on-going dialogue, is underemphasized. Instead, emphasis is placed on the creation of a planning document;
- Plans are not used during recovery to guide decision making; and
- Public officials may not be aware of the plan, and therefore do not use them as a basis for making decisions.

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<sup>14</sup> Ideally, the tasks associated with measurable objectives are assigned to individuals or organizations responsible for their implementation.

**(Slide 8-28)**

*The results of failing to create a plan may include:*

- An ad hoc, uncoordinated approach to complex problems (Rubin 1995);
- Limited stakeholder involvement;
- Missed opportunities; and
- An adaptive planning approach.

**(Slide 8-29)**

### **Adaptive Planning**

In the case of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, many local, state and federal agencies actually adopt an **adaptive planning approach**, rather than a traditional pre-disaster recovery plan.

- While past research has emphasized the critical nature of pre-disaster recovery planning (Schwab, et. al 1998) a more accurate description of reality requires a discussion of an adaptive approach.
- Utilizing an adaptive approach does not preclude a sustainable recovery, nor does the development of a pre-disaster recovery plan guarantee success.
- Of those that do develop a plan, both pre and post-disaster, many do not go beyond the basic implementation of existing local, state or federal programs.

**(Slide 8-30)**

Understood in a broader socio-political context as well as a practical standpoint, the ability of local and state governments to embrace the concepts of adaptive planning can pay big dividends in the post-disaster environment. **Adaptive planning as it applies to disaster recovery is described below:**

- Planning for disaster recovery must remain flexible, capable of capitalizing on opportunities that present themselves with little advance warning.
- Successful recovery necessitates moving beyond the over-reliance on federal, and in some cases, state programs to develop localized approaches that effectively link community action with identified needs.
  - This may necessitate identifying innovative approaches that recognize the limitations of recovery assistance programs post-disaster.
- An adaptive approach is frequently necessary. In fact, it can be argued that such an approach must be utilized following disasters regardless of whether a pre-disaster recovery plan has been developed.
  - The degree to which adaptive planning is used varies based on three primary factors:
    - The comprehensiveness of the pre-disaster plan;
    - The degree to which the plan has been implemented post-disaster or exercised to identify gaps or areas in need of improvement; and
    - The nature, or complexity of the disaster, including unforeseen issues and challenges.

**(Slide 8-31)**

- Organizational structure and the infrequency of major disasters can result in an adaptive planning approach.
  - State and local governments cannot typically maintain the staff required to address the complexities and breadth of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction.
    - As a result, state and local governments may be unable to maintain institutional memory, including lessons learned following past disasters and the methods used to recover from them.
    - This can cause significant problems in the post-disaster environment.
  - This further emphasizes the need to develop sound disaster recovery plans and tangible measures before a disaster, if at all possible.
  - It is not uncommon for significant numbers of local and state employees to find work elsewhere during the recovery effort, due to the extensive work hours, high degree of job-related stress and poor pay.

**(Slide 8-32)**

- Local and state governments must remain flexible, considering that changes in federal and state policy occur both during and across different disasters.
  - As Rubin points out, major disasters frequently result in significant federal policy shifts (2001).
    - Policy change during the disaster recovery process can be linked in many cases to the identification of better data.
    - In the immediate aftermath of a major disaster, information can prove wildly inaccurate.
    - Over time, better information may be collected, potentially causing policy makers cause to alter previous actions.

**(Slide 8-33)**

- States must quickly assign mitigation and recovery priorities based on the nature of disaster impacts, the identified needs of victims and the capability of state agencies to respond effectively to local needs.
- At the local level, policy change can cause significant disruptions in the recovery process, particularly among those that are unwilling to adapt.
- State-level leadership can impact the ability of a state to obtain desired objectives, which may necessitate convincing federal officials to amend existing policy.
- The level of political power, or influence at the state level can result in significantly different policy “interpretations” among federal officials.
- At the local level, the political will to enact meaningful pre and post-disaster policies that enhance a local government’s ability to recover and better protect their citizens and the built environment from future events is linked to elected officials who are subject to be voted in or out of office.
  - Those at the local level who are tasked with formulating disaster recovery policy must do so with the understanding that elected officials ultimately approve the plans, ordinances and broader actions that can significantly impact recovery and mitigation efforts.
- The savvy planner, floodplain administrator, building inspector or other local official is adept at recognizing just how far they can push for changes given the makeup of their governing body.

**(Slide 8-34)**

**Class Discussion:** Students should describe specific steps that could be taken by FEMA to better educate state and local officials about recovery planning. Students are expected to rely on the materials presented and readings assigned up to this point in the course.

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