



ARTICLE | ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

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We find ourselves at a unique time, searching for answers to a problem whose scope is beyond anything we have ever encountered before. It is affecting our jobs, families, and communities. However, it is in communities that we will find the solutions to emerge stronger and more resilient than ever.

We have entered a space many of us never anticipated - a worldwide pandemic. In response to COVID-19, governments around the world have implemented “Social Distancing” (we prefer physical distancing) measures that have brought the traditional sense of community and neighbouring to a full stop. So, how can we be “good” neighbours when we cannot be in the same space? For the last few months, communities, neighbours and families have searched for social solutions to being physically confined at home. Organizations, schools, and governments are also at a unique crossroads searching for solutions to providing services to residents when almost all their supports require human contact. As we move through the pandemic and flatten the curve - what is on the other side?

As cities and communities start to look at recovery, how do we learn from what has happened and move forward in a better way? Many recovery models have been created to help the economy thrive or to reduce risk management and disaster. (for example: The Institute of Place Management’s Framework

Phases of Disaster



Source: [SAMHSA.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)



Post-COVID-19 Framework for Recovery



Source: [Institute of Place Management](https://www.instituteofplacemanagement.com)

above) or frameworks to help describe the impact recovery has on emotions and time to recover (For example SAMHSA.gov). While these recovery models are great, they do not consider the role community can play. So how can we build an asset-based recovery model?

An asset-based recovery approach builds upon community work already underway and allows residents to contribute their gifts and skills to care for the community.

To recover from a pandemic or disaster, we need to build social capital in our communities. One way to do this is through Asset-Based Community Development recovery. This recovery focuses on the assets that have emerged or are already in the community and allows communities to be more resilient. Here are some things to consider during your recovery planning:

- What dependencies have been created from the pandemic (i.e. technology)?
- What capacities have been built?
- Which unknown assets have come to light?
- What has changed that you do not want to lose?
- What are the long-term changes?

Below is an asset-based renewal framework that draws upon what has been disrupted in our communities, what has emerged and what has been revealed by recognizing gifts, fostering connections, and telling stories. This framework is different because it is a bottom-up approach. It allows individuals, associations, organizations/non-profits, businesses and municipalities to think about what role people and communities play in moving forward.

COVID 19 ASSET-BASED RENEWAL FRAMEWORK



CRISIS



DISCOVERY



RESURGENCE

“It turns out, social capital (our relationships, networks and neighborhood trust levels) have everything to do with resilience. There is a whole pile of social science research that shows that social capital is a bigger driver of recovery than income.”

Ron Dwyer-Voss

CRISIS

A crisis is an event or series of events that suddenly and unexpectedly disturb patterns of life. Moments of crisis illicit feelings such as vulnerability, disorientation, uncertainty and loneliness. These feelings can find expression in the following actions:

ACTIVITY

Vulnerability is a loss of security and protection. To be vulnerable, is to be exposed. Things that once brought assurance have been taken only to reveal our fragility. Marked as “fragile,” we seek ways to protect the rawness of our reality. Like bubble-wrap, this protection mysteriously occupies and entertains us with every pop. This is when vulnerability can lead to incessant activity, for it is harder for reality to hit a moving target. Activity can shield and distract us from the truth of our situation. For this reason, within the Crisis stage, we will experience increased “pops” of activity.

RE-CREATION

Disorientation is the loss of direction. It is a feeling that comes when structure is removed, and familiar patterns and rhythms change. When a way is lost, there emerges an impulse to hold on to and re-create what was. Re-creation finds a tool in technology from on-land to on-line¹. Here we fashion inferior technological counterfeits of what was i.e. virtual coffee chats, concerts, parties, worship, etc.

RESEARCH

Uncertainty can lead to doubting one’s abilities, knowledge, or direction. In doubt, we ask questions and seek answers. We often look for these answers outside of ourselves and our community. The answers we find are imparted to us by professionals, subject matter experts and media outlets. Our power to know is handed over to systems and institutions. Local wisdom is lost in our pursuit of professionalized knowledge, where research replaces relational ways of knowing. In moments of uncertainty, Google searches increase while news reports play in the background.

CONNECTION

A crisis can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Loneliness is a natural drive or desire within us that causes us to seek out others. When we cannot be together, we seek to feed this desire through social media or other technological platforms. In these times of loneliness and isolation, systems and institutions want to make sure that we do not bear this burden alone. The screen becomes a portal into our homes, where with a click of a button, the kitchen table becomes a boardroom table, and a living room becomes a classroom. Within this screened existence we achieve transcendence. Connected through wires, we are unable to take root in a place, and embodied community withers.

¹ A line borrowed from Cormac Russell

Crisis Questions

- What feeling(s) do you identify with most? Why?
- What are some activities you would not have normally engaged in if it were not for this crisis?
- What dependencies have been created at this time?

DISCOVERY

The feeling that moves us from Crisis to Discovery is fatigue. Incessant activity, information overload and screened connections leave us tired and asking, “how long can we keep this up?” In this stage one will find that patterns emerge, deeper connections are made, and confidence is gained.

PATTERNS

In the Crisis stage, a disorientation occurs, and familiar rhythms are lost. Within Discovery, new patterns develop, and perspective is gained. Our resilience is recognized, a rhythm emerges, and we begin to settle in. Part of this settling has to do with the stories we tell ourselves. New narrative patterns frame our experience which help us to see what is possible, rather than focus on what has been lost.

CONNECTION

Through our screens we are able to connect instantly, with minimal effort. In the Crisis stage, our loneliness drives us towards relational breadth. Within the Discovery stage, we seek relational depth. Because of fatigue, the emotional effort required to maintain multiple relationships is too much to bear. For this reason, our social circles get smaller which enables us to connect in meaningful life-giving ways.

CONFIDENCE

To discover is not simply to seek what is new, but it is to reveal what is hidden. As the limits of our systems and institutions are revealed, we, as a community, realize the strengths and abilities that we have to create another way. With our hands, we are able to make, build and sustain. The Crisis stage is susceptible to a scarcity mindset, but in Discovery, abundance is revealed. Skills, interests and connection emerge. Things that were once purchased are now made, and the community’s role and functions are reclaimed.

Discovery Questions

- What experiences are you having that are working for you?
- What gifts have you come to recognize in yourself and in others?
- Do you have a story that comes out of this experience that inspires hope?
- What is something you have done for yourself that would typically be done for you?

RESURGENCE

The Resurgence Stage is marked by hope which in turn inspires action. It is the reclamation of a community's power. It is a conscious step toward addressing and working with what has been revealed by recognizing gifts, fostering connections, telling stories and asking questions.

Renewal Questions

- In what ways has your connection with others energized you?
- What has changed during this time that you don't want to lose?
- What are things you needed that you wish you had that the community can now provide?
- What challenges have been revealed that you feel need to be addressed?
- What capacities have been revealed or strengthened that can assist in addressing these challenges?

Thinking about the future when there is so much uncertainty and changing elements is not an easy process. Most times we pull out the old framework and alter it to fit the needs of what is currently happening. Instead we must take the time to pause and ask questions to see if there are ways to do things better. We must remember that these are unprecedented times, we have not been through this before and we do not have all the answers. We need to give permission to be emergent and creative. Remember that constraints can lead to creativity and innovation.

RESOURCES

- [Not Letting \(Another\) Crisis Go to Waste by Tim Brodhead](#)
- [IPM's The Time to Act is Now: A Framework for Post-COVID 19 Recovery for our Towns and Cities](#)
- [A Good Place is Better than No Place by Jonathan Massimi](#)
- [Phases of Disaster diagram by U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, SAMHSA](#)
- [When Disaster Hits, Your First Responder Probably Will Not Be a First Responder by Ron Dwyer-Voss](#)

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