



## CASE STUDY – TEACHING NOTES

# Building Community Strength through Recovery

TOWN OF LYONS, COLORADO: 2013 FLOODING

**Learning Objective:** Review and analyze a small town’s approach to managing a complex recovery while maintaining open communication, transparency, and flexibility with the whole community.

**Keywords:** Recovery, Flood, Severe Storm, Local Government, Recovery Planning, Community Engagement, Capacity Building, Psychological and Emotional Recovery, Mutual Aid, Education Systems

## Instructor’s Introduction

This Teaching Note is intended to prepare an instructor to use this case study in a classroom (live or virtually). The note expands on the lessons learned in this case study, intended to help disaster management students learn from a real-world disaster recovery experience. Selection of learning objectives, discussion questions, and activities can be customized based on audience and time allowance. It is suggested that students read the Background and Challenges sections (Part One) and pause to discuss the scenario and complete part one activities, before moving on to read the Actions, Results, and Lessons Learned sections (Part Two).

This case study describes lessons learned by the administration of a small town after a catastrophic flooding event. Despite competing priorities amid a stressful recovery effort, Lyons officials proactively led extensive community engagement during the town’s recovery planning process. The town’s leaders provided opportunities for the whole community to participate in the town’s recovery effort, advancing social trust, community cohesion, and psychological recovery among residents.

To become more familiar with relevant concepts before teaching the case, please review the following:

- [National Disaster Recovery Framework](#)
- [Lyons Recovery Action Plan \(townoflyons.com\)](#)
- [Community Recovery Management Toolkit | FEMA.gov](#)
- [American Psychological Association](#)

### Student Learning Outcomes:

- Examine the power of community participation and transparency when developing a disaster recovery plan.
- Learn about the psychological and emotional impacts during disaster recovery and how survivors can healthily cope and recover from their experience.

### Key Takeaways:

- Creating the opportunity for public participation in an intentional recovery planning process gave residents an outlet through which to share their stories and contribute to the long-term recovery vision for their community, leading to recovery outcomes town members could support and be proud of.
- Starting the long-term recovery planning process early in disaster operations can provide hope to residents, showcasing forward-looking leadership in a critical, stressful time for the community.
- Messaging and communications are key to managing public expectations during disaster recovery.
- Restoration of public spaces, art, historic landmarks, and recreation facilities can make all the difference for survivors’ psychological health and generate momentum for continued recovery efforts.

## Part One Discussion Activities

### Discussion Questions:

1. This was a traumatic disaster that impacted the lives of every resident in Lyons. What are some commonly experienced psychological health impacts that outside responders should be aware of when interacting with local officials and survivors after an incident like this?

*Teaching Note: According to the [American Psychological Association](#), survivors of the event could be feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or grief stricken. They could have stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches, chest pain, or nausea. They may be experiencing changes to their thoughts and behavior patterns, including having difficulty concentrating, disruption to sleep, and difficulty making decisions. Survivors may also have increased strain on interpersonal relationships, which may manifest in conflict or internal withdrawal. Communicating their experience, finding common ground and support from other survivors, and recognizing it will take time to adjust are parts of healthy coping with disaster-induced trauma.*

2. What are some cascading, or resulting, impacts that the severe damage to the roads, water lines, and sewer lines caused within Lyons?

*Teaching Note: The damaged infrastructure caused cascading economic impacts to local households and business owners/workers. The loss of income and two month delay in transportation and water access caused a resulting delay in survivors assessing the damage to their homes and beginning the disaster assistance and housing repair/reconstruction process.*

3. Given Lyons' priority of returning survivors to their homes and businesses as soon as possible after the roads and water services were restored, what sorts of actions, engagement, or policies would you advise local officials to take during the third month of recovery if you were a member of the Colorado Department of Local Affairs or FEMA Community Planning and Capacity Building teams? How could they help return a sense of normalcy now while looking ahead to improve resilience for future floods?

*Teaching Note: Answers will vary. Some of the support provided involved peer-to-peer technical assistance from local officials that had experienced a similar incident, helping set expectations about timeframes for recovery progress so that local officials could communicate accurate information to their public stakeholders, and encouraging them to start a long-term recovery planning process that brought community members together and invited them to be part of the decision-making process.*

## Part Two Discussion Activities

### Discussion Questions:

1. The case study notes several community-driven projects that helped with the mental and emotional recovery of town residents. What do you think enabled these smaller initiatives to be brought to fruition among competing demands for project funds after disaster?

*Teaching Note: Among other drivers, the intentional community participation in developing the Recovery Action Plan helped bring these opportunities about. Providing weekly public meetings and forums to discuss community members' priorities and progress made towards recovery required substantial dedication of capacity and resources, but ended up being essential to guide the community through a successful recovery.*

2. Two of the guiding principles of the National Disaster Recovery Framework are (1) Engaged Partnerships and Inclusiveness, and (2) Psychological and Emotional Recovery. How did Lyons' approach to recovery planning and management embrace each of these principles?

*Teaching Note: Answers will vary.*

## Activity 1: Recovery Project Planning in Action

**Duration:** 40 minutes

**Setup:** Divide the class into four groups: 1) Arts, Culture & Historic Preservation, 2) Economic & Business, 3) Health & Human Services, and 4) Housing.

**Instructions:** Open and review the [Lyons Recovery Action Plan](#). Within your breakout group, spend 30 minutes analyzing one prioritized recovery project according to your assignment. Prepare a brief that summarize what recovery issue the project seeks to remedy, why the project is important, and any key partners or resources that could help execute the project. Designate one team member to report out to the rest of the class. After 30 minutes, come back together and have each group discuss their project with the class.

- Group 1: ACH.1.1.1 (page 25) – Create a live-work development that can provide affordable housing for artists, as well as a space to incubate their trade and business.
- Group 2: BIZ. 2.2.1 (page 37) – Work with the Lyons Historical Society to develop and promote cultural heritage tourism related to Lyons’ historic buildings and sites.
- Group 3: HHS. 4.1.1 (page 45) – Create volunteer opportunities for youth in the rebuilding process (post 2013 flood disaster), such as basic carpentry and home rebuilding, clearing debris, and planting vegetation.
- Group 4: HOU. 1.3.3. (page 60) – Encourage the construction of alternative and sustainable housing developments with different ownership models.

**Discussion:** As the students report their findings, consider the following prompts:

- Was there anything in the content of the Recovery Action Plan that surprised you, or that you noticed would be particularly crucial or, conversely, particularly challenging to implement your assigned project?

*Teaching Note: Answers will vary.*

- What’s the impact of having a published document detailing recovery projects and accountable parties? Are there any drawbacks to funding recovery projects without a formal plan or public input?

*Teaching Note: Answers will vary. The plan provides transparency so residents can hold officials and task forces accountable for progress on long-term initiatives. The process also surfaced impactful recovery project ideas from the community that officials may not have thought of or prioritized on their own. One example of a drawback to not providing engagement opportunities is that it may make residents feel disconnected or unempowered to positively impact their community, potentially exacerbating emotional traumas caused by the flood.*

- Lyons is a small, tight-knit community. What might be some tactics for officials of larger local jurisdictions to foster community participation in a disaster recovery planning process?

*Teaching Note: Answers will vary.*

## Follow up with the FEMA Guidance Development Office

The Guidance Development Office (GDO) develops and distributes FEMA’s Interagency Recovery Coordination (IRC) case studies. Our team would appreciate your feedback on these case studies and accompanying teaching notes. Please let us know how you have used this case study for a learning experience and your thoughts on what went well or could have been improved. To get in contact with our team, email [FEMA-RECOVERY-ICD-GDO@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-RECOVERY-ICD-GDO@fema.dhs.gov).