



## Holistic Disaster Recovery

*Ideas for Building Local Sustainability  
after a Natural Disaster*



Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center  
University of Colorado



# HOLISTIC DISASTER RECOVERY

## IDEAS FOR BUILDING LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

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*produced by the*



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## Preface

This is an all-purpose handbook on how to build sustainability into a community during the recovery period after a disaster. It has background information, practical descriptions, and ideas about what sustainability is, why it is a good for a community, and how it can be applied during disaster recovery to help create a better community. The book is intended to be used by local officials, staff, activists, and the disaster recovery experts who help the community during disaster recovery—including state planners, emergency management professionals, mitigation specialists, and others. It is geared mainly toward small to medium-sized communities.

Every locality is different, and every disaster is different. It would be impossible to tell precisely what should be done in every situation. Instead, the handbook illustrates a range of options for a number of hypothetical situations, gives basic information on a few ways to accomplish those options, presents examples of how other localities have handled certain situations, and lists places to get more information and help, locally and outside the community. It will engage managers and decisionmakers in a variety of strategies for using the recovery period to help a community make itself a better place to live, protect its natural environment, improve its resilience in the face of disasters, be safer, be more attractive to business, better manage growth, and preserve its history and culture for its future residents. Whether a community is just getting over the emergency period after being stricken by a hurricane, earthquake, flood, or other disaster, or whether it is looking ahead and wants to know how to get ready to handle the aftermath of such an event, this handbook will provide ideas, guidance, examples, and places to look for more information.

The first chapter introduces the concept of sustainability, defines it in the context of recovery, and explains its usefulness. The second chapter explores the process and procedure of sustainable or holistic recovery. The next six chapters cover the fundamental principles of sustainability as applied to specific disaster recovery situations. Chapter 9 is a summary. At the end of each chapter is a list of information on that topic and places to get more. The chapters on the principles of sustainability (4 through 8) are presented so that a reader with interest in or need for ideas on a particular sustainability principle—say, economic vitality—can turn directly to that chapter and obtain a fairly comprehensive picture of those issues in recovery. In order to make each of those chapters stand alone it was necessary to repeat some information in each of them. At the end of the handbook is a glossary of terms. Throughout the chapters information is enclosed in boxes. The shadowed boxes summarize information contained in the text or give hints about holistic recovery. The boxes with the wide upper and lower borders give examples from the real world. Other graphics and tables are enclosed in boxes with a single-line border.

This handbook is intended to complement other documents already available on recovery, reconstruction, planning, mitigation, and related local concerns. It does not cover all those issues comprehensively, even though they are all touched upon. Instead, it gives a collection of ideas and guidance for looking at disaster recovery in a new way—from a local government perspective and with the broad ideals of sustainability firmly in mind.

This handbook can be accessed and downloaded from the Hazards Center's website at [www.colorado.edu/hazards/](http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/). Also at that site is 12-page synopsis of the concept of holistic recovery as explored in this handbook. The synopsis is entitled "Building Back Better," and is Issue 3 of the Natural Hazards Center's periodical the *Natural Hazards Informer*.

## Acknowledgments

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To produce this handbook, the Natural Hazards Center contracted with professionals with expertise in the various aspects of sustainability and recovery, asking each of them to draft a chapter on their speciality that would combined with others into a manual or handbook geared toward community leaders and decisionmakers and the people who would advise them during recovery from a disaster. Those experts became the Contributing Authors to this handbook:

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The Contributing Authors were critical to the process of generating this handbook and are to be highly commended for their willingness to stake out new territory and to participate in this group endeavor. After the Contributing Authors finished their work, however, the Natural Hazards Center compiled the materials into the present arrangement and format, and edited the content. Thus, credit goes to the contributors, but errors and omissions are the Center’s own.

Many other people helped in various ways. Assistance on Chapter 4’s case study searches was provided by Calah Young and Angus Jennings, City and Regional Planning graduate students. Helpful input on Chapter 3 was supplied by Duane Holmes, National Park Service; Bob Cox and Floyd Shoemaker, Federal Emergency Management Agency; and Brenda Phillips, Jacksonville State University. Finally, Jennifer Barnard Miller, graduate student at the University of Colorado, made invaluable editorial and substantive contributions throughout the volume.

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