

**IAEM 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference & EMEX**

*Turning the Tide on After-Action  
Reviews:  
Engaging the Public as a Best Practice*

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## BACKGROUND

There is a disproportionate risk-sharing burden between the public and government under current Emergency Management (EM) approaches in Canada and the United States (U.S.), as well as underrepresentation of the public perspective in EM. This may become increasingly problematic in future years, as climate change projections anticipate an increase in the frequency and severity of natural hazard events, likely resulting in more frequent response and recovery cycles and increased strain on limited EM resources. It is well-established that public investment and engagement in EM is critical to community disaster resilience (CDR), but there is an identified “need for more research that sheds light on how participation is, or can be, facilitated in the post-disaster recovery context.” (Chandrasekhar, 2012). This poster proposes that After-Action Reviews (AAR) be adapted to serve as a standard engagement tool with the public in the post-hazard environment with a goal to enhance CDR through increased public ownership and investment across all EM pillars, helping to reduce overreliance and strain on government and emergency responder resources.

## QUESTION & METHODS

**Question:** Why should public participation in post-hazard AAR processes be standardized as a best practice in the field of EM?

### Methods

- Review and analyze multiple post-hazard AARs in Canada and the U.S. in the past decade with a view to understanding the potential value of public input in AARs.
- Review published studies, frameworks, and research on the opportunities and challenges of engaging the public in EM processes.

## KEY FINDINGS & CONSIDERATIONS

- Exclusion from EM processes may result in a lack of public investment and ownership across all pillars of EM, creating a moral hazard (Anderson, n.d.).
- Significant literature exists outlining the importance and benefits of public participation in post-disaster recovery processes (Chandrasekhar, 2012; Hamideh, 2020; American Planning Association, 2014; Wells et al., 2013).
- Capturing public perspectives in the AAR process can challenge, augment, or legitimize feedback from traditional EM stakeholders in post-hazard AARs (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2015).
- Traditional EM stakeholders can identify some public challenges and concerns in post-hazard AARs (Citygate Associates, LLC, 2019); however, lack of public input into the AAR process can result in an incomplete understanding of individual motivations and barriers for action or inaction during emergencies, a false perception of the level of effectiveness of different hazard response components, and a missed opportunity to identify how the public can more effectively support CDR while public investment in EM and the recovery process is high.

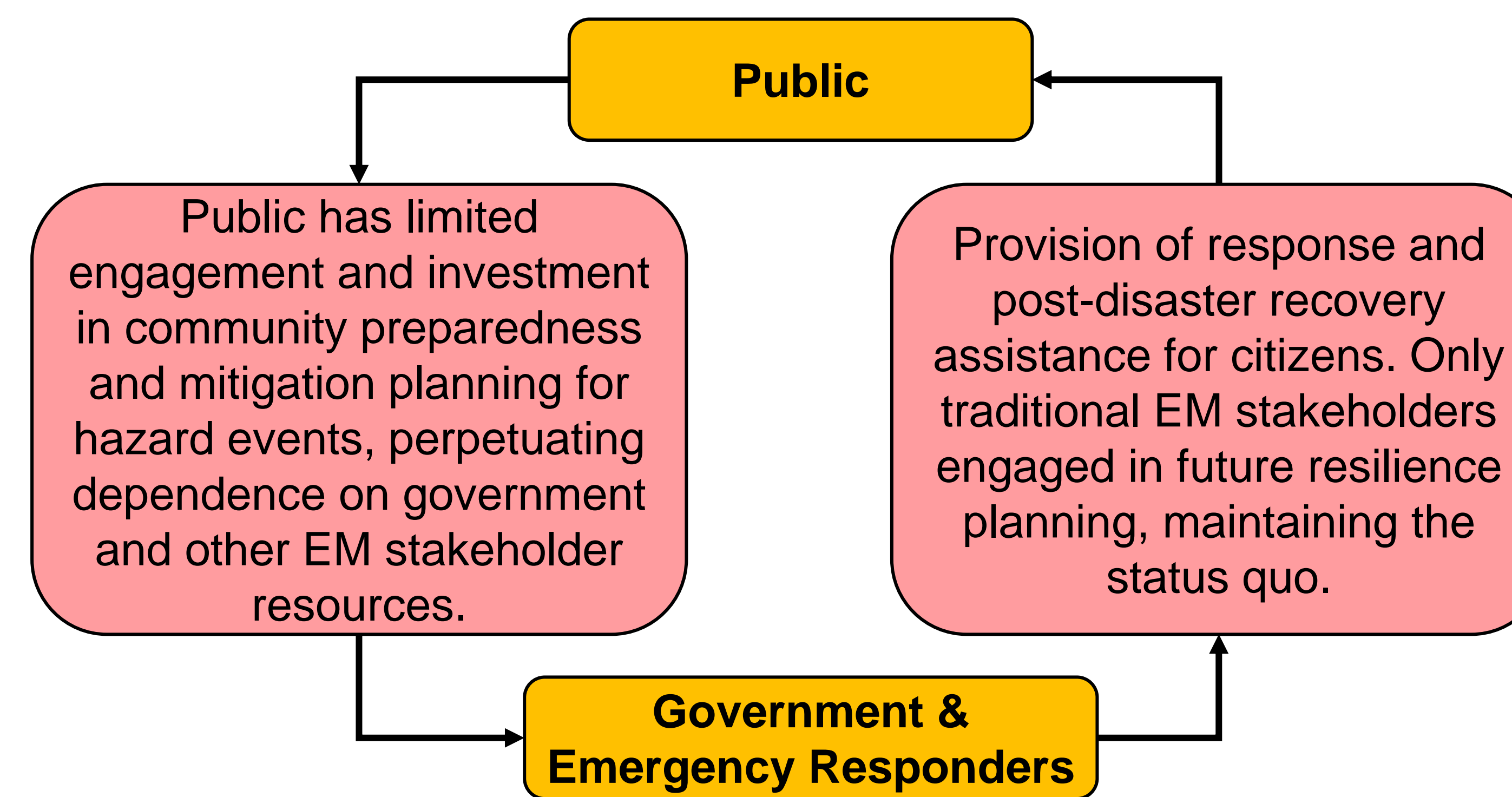


Figure 1: Moral Hazard

Inviting public participation in the AAR process in a meaningful, productive, and structured manner.

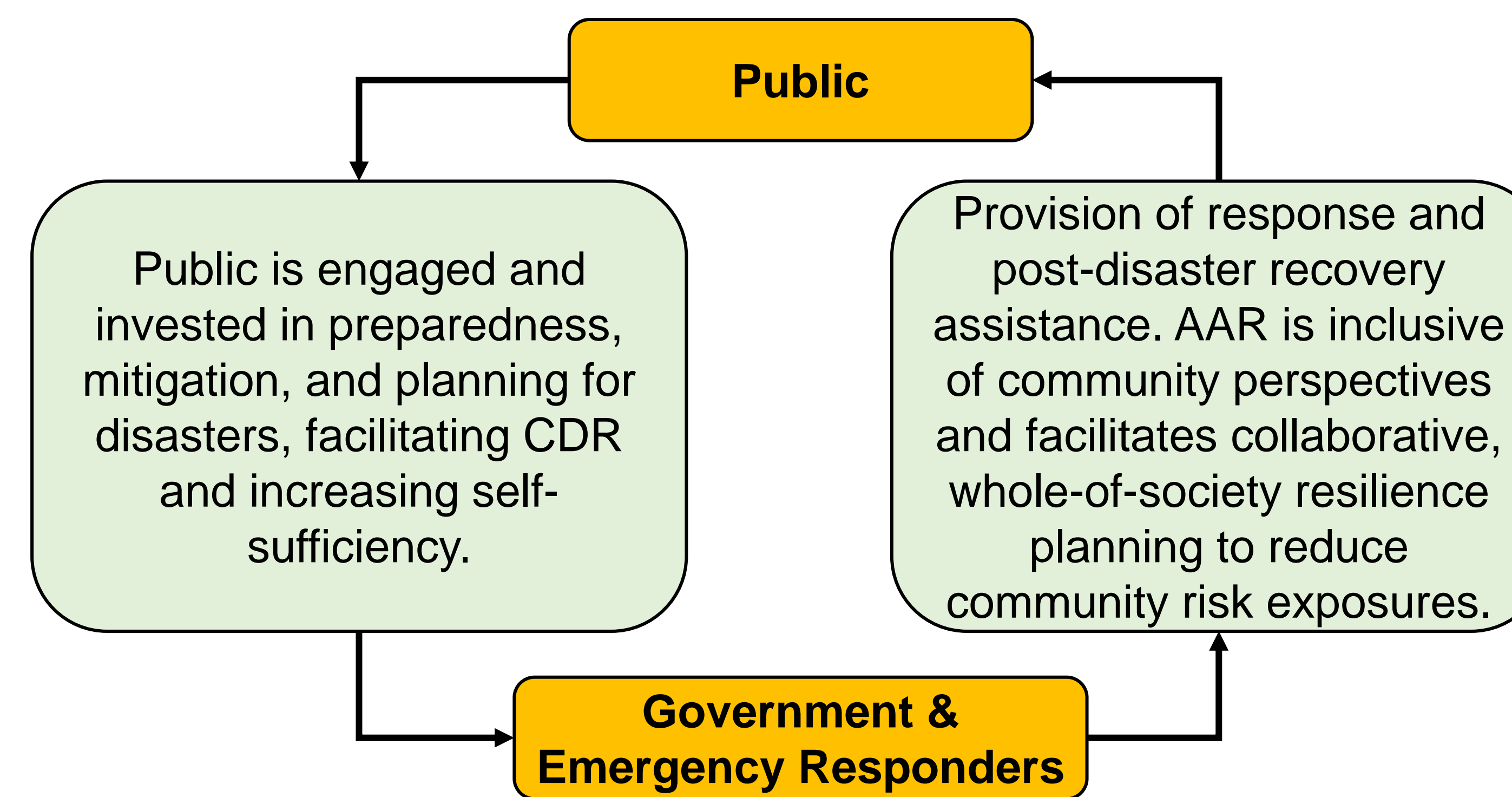


Figure 2: Improved Risk-Sharing and Community Resilience

*“Public engagement after a catastrophe builds hope, trust, and confidence in government, relationships, new leaders, and opportunities to improve long-standing community challenges.”*  
– American Planning Association

## RESULTS

Public participation should be included in post-hazard AARs to achieve the following mutually-beneficial outcomes for government, EM stakeholders, and community members:

- Facilitation of a balanced “top-down” and “bottom-up approach” to CDR (Chandrasekhar, 2012), helping to achieve whole-of-society engagement in EM and a “360-degree story of [each] event” (Citygate Associates, LLC, 2019).
- Identification of public resources, networks, and groups with capacity to support emergency preparedness and volunteer response, thereby helping to reduce strain and overreliance on government resources and staff.
- Information-sharing opportunity to address misconceptions, confusion, and misinformation regarding emergency response capabilities and capacities in the community.
- Information-sharing opportunity to discuss and share preparedness resources, tools, and activities to improve community resilience based on identified community needs, priorities, and preparedness gaps.
- Legitimization of government recovery and resilience priorities and action items in post-hazard AARs, substantiated through public input and identification of shared community goals.

## NEXT STEPS

- Further research is required on the efficacy of different engagement methods to collect public feedback in AARs, with consideration for the flexibility, ease of use, and accessibility and impact of each method.
- Build upon the *American Planning Association’s* Briefing Paper on Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery to develop a standard model for engaging the public in post-hazard AARs as a method of building CDR, designed with a trauma-informed lens (Rosenberg et al., 2022).

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