



Community Engagement Approach

OUR COMMUNITY · OUR CFA



cfa.vic.gov.au

Acknowledgement of Country



Country Fire Authority proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and waters on which we live and work, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present. .

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Foreword

Chief Officer



CFA's vision is that Victorian communities are prepared for and safe from fire. As a trusted authority in fire safety, with over 52,000 connections into communities across the State of Victoria, we have a unique ability to support our communities and empower them to be fire ready.

Engaging with communities is critical for CFA to achieve its vision and the way we engage is foundational to our success as a progressive, community-based organisation that puts the community at the centre of everything we do and provides programs and services that make a positive difference.

CFA's Community Engagement Approach outlines CFA's capability and commitment to meaningfully connect with local communities and empower them to prepare for fire. We have adapted the Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework to establish how CFA will continue to enhance its community engagement through the delivery of evidence-based, tailored programs and resources for the benefit of the Victorian community.

Our approach draws on the concept of sharing responsibility. We articulate our role and our expectations of communities as part of the engagement process. In doing so, we are recognising that drawing on our collective efforts, experiences and expertise makes us better prepared and safer from fire.

Ultimately, engagement is not a one-way street and CFA relies on communities to take an active part in living safely with fire. I encourage you all to have a conversation with your local brigade to see how you could contribute. When fire inevitably comes, we are all thankful for your fire prevention and preparation efforts. It can save lives.

Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke that loops back under the 'A'.

Chief Officer



Introduction

CFA is not just the Country Fire Authority; we are the community's fire authority. We are made up of over 52,000 Victorians dedicated to protecting the life and property of more than four million people. To properly serve the community, the community must be at the centre of our planning, of our decision-making and of our service delivery.

Community engagement builds our communities' preparedness for fire by enhancing their knowledge, developing their skills, strengthening their connection to CFA, and creating understanding of shared responsibilities for fire safety.

Our mission

To protect lives and property



Our mission has been constant for decades. It drives how our members operate and it underpins all of our work to:

- educate people about how to prevent, prepare for and respond to fires
- seek input on CFA's projects, programs and community-facing resources
- identify and address community fire risk
- support our members to plan, innovate, deliver and evaluate locally tailored and targeted initiatives

Our vision

Victorian communities are prepared for and safe from fire



This is our ultimate end-state. The way we engage with our communities clearly puts the communities at the centre of everything we do, highlighting the importance of good quality engagement. We provide programs and services that make a positive difference embracing best practice, local knowledge and experience. It reflects our broad reach across the state and our focus on empowering communities to understand and address their fire risk.



We put **SAFETY** first



We excel through **TEAMWORK**



We are dynamic and **ADAPTABLE**



We act with **INTEGRITY**



We **RESPECT** each other

Our values form the foundation for how we work. They highlight the behaviours we see as important to demonstrate to one another, the wider sector and the Victorian community.



Purpose

The Community Engagement Approach outlines how CFA works to achieve our strategic goal to put the community at the centre of everything we do in order to meet the following outcomes:

- The community has confidence in our advice and services.
- The community is educated, engaged and empowered to manage its fire risk.
- The community changes its behaviour to manage their fire risk.

Drawing on the concept of shared responsibility, the document describes responsibilities of both CFA and local communities in working together to achieve common goals. This includes what communities can expect when CFA engages with them on fire preparedness, as well as CFA's expectations of local communities around how they will engage with CFA on fire preparedness.

The Approach defines CFA's approach to meaningfully connect and effectively engage with local communities, and CFA's commitment and capability to deliver the right set of tools and capabilities to empower communities to prepare for fire.



Community Engagement: what is it and why do we do it?

Definition

Community engagement is defined as:

...a planned process with a specific purpose to empower communities to prevent and prepare for fire. It involves working with individuals and groups to encourage active involvement in decisions that affect them or are of interest to them.

(Adapted from the Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025)

It includes educating people about fire safety, obtaining feedback about plans and projects, and working directly with communities to address fire risks. Community engagement activities can be delivered through a range of face-to-face and online options, including exercises, classes, focus groups, workshops, interviews, surveys and case studies.

High quality community engagement is important to reduce our fire risk and increase our community preparedness. We ensure this by putting community at the centre of everything we do, which helps us to:

- increase understanding of our unique and diverse communities and take action that responds to their needs and expectations
- enhance relationships, partnerships, collaborations and capability with our emergency sector partners and locally-connected groups to broaden our reach
- improve our collective ability to deal with complex and emerging issues together
- improve service delivery outcomes by providing an opportunity to hear diverse experiences and ideas
- encourage input and participation into the design and delivery of our programs and services so that they are most relevant.

Our priorities



1 To recognise, enable and leverage the value of active participation in our community in the design and evaluation of content, programs and activities.



2 To use research, evidence and behavioural insights to inform development, design, delivery and evaluation of risk-based engagement and educational activities.



3 To build our members' skills, abilities and knowledge in order to plan, deliver, monitor, evaluate and report on our community engagement activities.



4 To adapt our engagement approach to be inclusive of diverse cultures, abilities, age, gender, and past experiences.



Engagement principles

CFA, like other government organisations, is committed to meaningful, principled and inclusive public participation. This enables better decisions around disaster prevention and recovery and helps to build more resilient communities.

Improved engagement can support better outcomes, so we aim to build stronger relationships and more engaged communities through our work. We are community-centred and place based, working from brigades up to state level to ensure we have the most effective content, programs, resources and tools.

The community engagement principles we adopt are aligned to the Victorian Government's Public Engagement Framework 2021-2025. These common principles and guidance are part of our sector's shared response to Recommendations 5.3 and 5.4 by the Inspector-General for Emergency Management.



Our engagement needs to be:



Community-centred

CFA is a part of the community. Making sure the community is prepared for and safe from fire requires community-centred decision-making.



Valuable

Community engagement outcomes create value for CFA, individuals, and the community. Value is delivered through the appropriate and efficient use of resources. Value also applies to participants and their time.



Accountable

CFA is accountable for the quality of public engagement. We plan for and are clear about how participants' privacy is protected. Community engagement is evaluated and reported.



Informed

Communities are given the knowledge, resources and opportunity to take part in engagement. Having an informed community leads to more effective fire preparedness.



Meaningful

The process of community engagement must be meaningful. This means developing a clear purpose and objectives. Communities should have agency to take part in the decisions that affect their lives.



Transparent

It is important to be clear and open about all aspects of the community engagement process. This means sharing information about the program or project, its background and rationale.



Inclusive

Public engagement is inclusive and accessible. This enables effective engagement and the full participation of all involved. The engagement design is human-centred.

Shared responsibility

We will be successful if the community partners with CFA to actively manage their fire risk. We aim to empower communities to own their fire risk and work with them to manage their risk collaboratively and effectively. In each community, the best decisions are shaped by the people they affect. The place-based planning approach we use ensures communities are at the centre of decisions made about the reduction of risk in their area.

CFA's knowledge of fire risk, combined with communities' understanding of what is important, their local knowledge and experience, informs our actions. We draw on the concept of shared responsibility, where CFA outlines our promise to communities and expectations for them to participate actively and seek out advice to reduce risk and change behaviour.



Our promise to communities

We afford communities greater opportunity to act while maximising support in preventing, preparing for and responding to fire.

We acknowledge that our environment and communities are geographically and demographically diverse. Therefore, our engagement approaches are considerate of different locations, cultures, abilities, age, gender, and past experiences.

We understand the need for locally tailored engagement and education to suit risks, priority and capability needs, and population groups in our communities. Therefore, we embrace evidence as well as local knowledge and experience to inform our programs and products, and target and tailor local plans to reduce risk for communities.

We improve fire preparedness planning for people who are at greatest risk and considered vulnerable by collaboratively working with care and health sectors to develop and deliver meaningful outcomes.

We commit to risk-based planning, research, best practice processes and using evaluation to improve the quality of our work. Therefore, we involve stakeholders in the research, design, delivery and evaluation of fire prevention and community preparedness programs.

We provide expert knowledge and technical expertise to ensure communities have a better understanding of fire management practices and their fire risk.

We plan, innovate, deliver and evaluate locally tailored and targeted initiatives, design accessible content for programs and training to meet contemporary best practice.

We commit to be open and honest, ensure a participatory approach, work towards behaviour change in our communities, listen and respond to communities' needs effectively.

Our expectation of communities

Our expectation is that communities will be open to collaborating with CFA on community-driven solutions. We recognise that not everyone has the same level of capability and capacity to drive or support fire risk management, but that people will give what they can in terms of their time and effort to preventing, preparing for and responding to fire.

We expect our communities to:

- act safely and help others around them who may not be in a similar position in terms of capability and capacity
- reach out for support to CFA as trusted and respected partner to improve fire preparedness planning and response to fire
- inform CFA of opportunities for collaboration and gaps in community capability and capacity to prevent, prepare and respond to fire
- seek advice, expertise and recommendations for reducing fire risk, improving planning and ensuring safety
- take action to reduce their risk from, and increase their resilience to fire
- participate in CFA programs and local prevention and preparedness activities where possible
- use CFA community engagement channels to inform, share and educate themselves to take appropriate action to manage fire risk
- share and promote CFA resources (content, campaigns, initiatives, programs, etc.) within communities
- continue to improve their fire risk knowledge and adapt behaviour to manage fire risk, following CFA advice.

Delivery of our promise

Our programs

We work together with our communities to reduce risk through our community engagement activities. Our programs are underpinned by evidence, data, research, local knowledge and behavioural insights to inform our approach. We involve our members, communities and subject matter experts in program design and delivery. This enables us to tailor and target messages and support at a local level for maximum impact on local risk.

We focus on both the causes of fires and the interventions that may help to prevent or at least reduce their impact. We also consider what's important to communities through the design phase. Our programs are reviewed continually as we learn from evidence, research and best practice and apply those lessons to our program development.

Please refer to the list of our current programs **CFA Community Engagement Programs | CFA (Country Fire Authority)**

Our content

We develop and maintain a range of content to support our community engagement efforts. This includes publications, key messages, web content, educational resources and state-based public campaigns.

- Publications
- Multimedia – animations and videos
- Campaign resources and key messages
- Engagement tools

We ensure that our content is current, accessible and supports the community to better understand how they can effectively prevent, prepare for and respond to fire. We are continually improving our engagement with communities through the development of content which is regularly reviewed and updated. Reviews can also be triggered by a change in legislation. Development, design and review of our content involves input from our members, communities and subject matter experts.

Our capability

CFA members are equipped to provide information relating to fire and emergencies to our communities. Our local knowledge and experience help us to effectively engage with community about their risk and what they need to do to stay safe. We have dedicated volunteer and staff roles to support our community engagement efforts. We have also developed a range of training tools and resources to build our engagement skills, knowledge and abilities.

We use design thinking and best practice approaches to meet local needs and build capability. In doing so, staff connect with regions, districts, volunteers, subject matter experts and communities so that our products and services are relevant and current. This helps us build the capability of our members to deliver services that are risk-based, targeted and tailored to meet local needs. We also ensure that evaluation, monitoring and reporting are built into our capability, leading to an improved understanding of what's happening on the ground, what's working and what isn't. By continuing to improve our products, resources, training and approaches, we're adapting to changing community needs and expectations.

Our partnerships

When CFA engages with the public on fire risk management, we partner with a wide range of government, corporate and community organisations. As well as leading engagement initiatives, CFA can play a key support role within a multi-agency approach, leveraging our expertise and building on our reputation as a trusted and respected organisation.

We look for partners with similar values and standing in the community. We look for opportunities to further the reach and resonance of our messaging around our three core strengths:

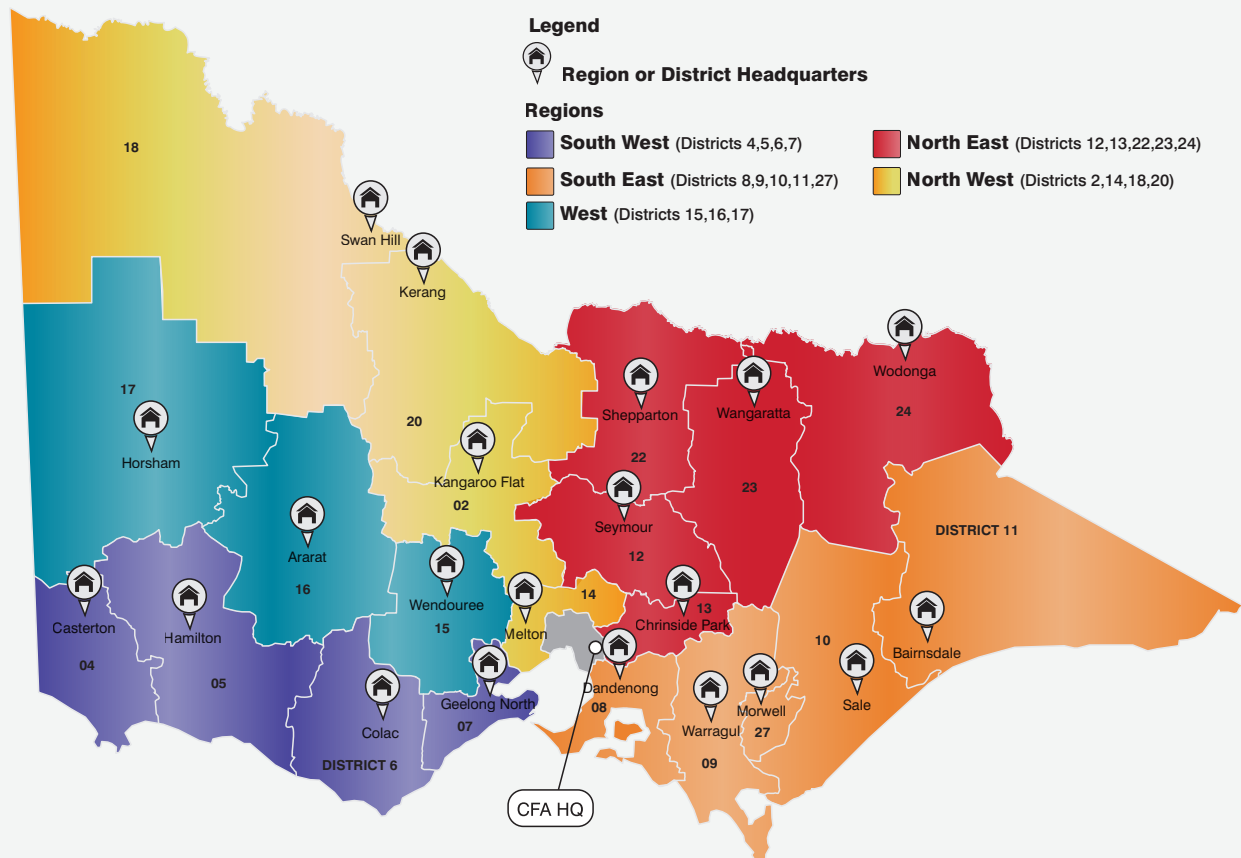
- Fire safety
- Community connectedness
- Volunteering

Through collaboration we can deliver community outcomes and we are increasingly looking for innovative ways to strengthen existing partnerships and build new relationships. Partnerships can be managed at a statewide, regional or local level, depending on the program or project. The key categories of our partners are illustrated below.



Community engagement staff and volunteers

Our teams are spread across geographically and demographically diverse landscapes with unique community risks.



Brigades

1,200 Volunteer Brigade Community Safety Coordinators.

- Operational roles
- Brigade management roles
- Brigade support roles

Districts and regions

Community Education Groups and networks
Group Community Safety Coordinators

- 106** Community Liaison Bushfire Engagement (staff)
- 14** Community Engagement Coordinators (staff)
- 4** Service Delivery Coordinators (staff)
- 6** Managers Community Safety (staff)

State community engagement

17 Staff

- Program development
- Content and capability
- Engagement and strategy

Our commitment

Inclusion and diversity

To ensure that Victorian communities are prepared for, and safe from, fire we must reflect the diversity of the community we serve. We must also have inclusive environments where diversity in all its forms is understood and celebrated, so that we learn from diverse communities to improve our response.

CFA is committed to creating respectful, safe and inclusive places for all.



Gender

Disasters impact people of different genders differently. The impacts aren't always immediately evident and sometimes people aren't comfortable sharing this information. Consistent with the Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic), CFA will conduct Gender Impact Assessments on all new community engagement policies, programs and services that have a direct and significant effect on the public, and those up for review.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

CFA commits to work closely with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria, including incorporating Aboriginal fire knowledge and cultural burning practices into fire management.



LGBTIQ+

CFA commits to providing a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ+ people and supports community events such as Midsumma Pride March.



Disability

CFA is working towards making our activities and content accessible for all members of our community, including people with disabilities. CFA recognises the additional fire safety risks faced by people with disabilities. Our engagement programs and partnerships seek to support and empower people to manage these risks.



Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

CFA understands that many different cultures have a connection with fire, and we recognise the importance of engaging with multicultural communities. We commit towards developing fire preparedness information and resources that are co-designed, culturally specific and in-language.



Age

CFA recognises the additional fire safety risks to younger and older people. We target and tailor our engagement programs to meet these needs. CFA provides child safety training to our members and requires Working with Children Checks for key programs and engagement activities.

Child safety

CFA is a child safe organisation. We have a Child Safety Executive Policy that outlines CFA's commitment to child safety. It includes guiding principles that underpin our approach to creating safe, supportive and positive environments for children and young people, free from abuse or harm. Child safety is a key consideration in program design and delivery, supported by relevant training. We promise to champion and demonstrate compliance with child safety standards in the way we engage.

Acknowledgement

CFA recognises and values the knowledge and wisdom of people with lived experience of fire, the traditional owners of the land, our volunteers, our staff, our partners, stakeholders and our communities. Local knowledge helps us to understand risk and target and tailor local plans to reduce risk for communities and individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable and at greatest risk.

Privacy

To comply with privacy guidelines, we ensure we only collect personal details that are needed and we make people aware of how we use the data. Privacy Impact Assessments are completed as required.

Further information

Our CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework, our Annual Report and a range of publications and information can be found on our website.

A range of educational resources for our community members and partners are also available to access through the site. Follow this link to be a part of CFA community engagement www.cfa.vic.gov.au



