

A flood of suggestions

Summary from the flood response community consultation stall held on 5 June 2011. An initiative of the Gabba Ward Office working with the West End Community Recovery Committee and in conjunction with the West End State School fiesta



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Good thinking

99 Consulting would like to thank the many people who stopped to talk about their flood experiences in the midst of the West End State School fiesta excitement. Special thanks go to those who helped with logistics, materials and the consultations:

- Helen Abrahams Councillor for the Gabba Ward who provided coordination and some materials*
- Marilyn Trad from the West End State School Parents and Citizens Association for support and coordination*
- Peter Stewart for bumping the stall in and out*
- Sam Goddard, Mary Maher and Steve Capelin from the West End Community House management committee who gave time and energy to join in at the stall*
- Joe Hurley and Kat Ogilvie on staff at West End Community House who helped bump in and out and were on hand if people needed flood recovery assistance*
- Philip Davison who made his utility available*
- Fred Drake who made some office dividers available for the display*
- Emma Heard for the cover photograph.*

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1. Executive summary

The *Flood of Suggestions* community consultation stall, part of the Council-sponsored *West End says Thank You* event on 5 June 2011, yielded a range of ideas that should be incorporated or adapted for use in a local flood response plan for the area. The idea of a local flood response plan emerged in the aftermath of the January 2011 floods which inundated many areas around the Brisbane River, including homes, businesses and public spaces and facilities in the South Brisbane-West End area.

People were very happy to offer their insights and many, including those who only had time for a quick look before hurrying off with children to the adjacent school fiesta, commented that it was a good idea to use local knowledge to help be better prepared for a possible future flood event.

Some suggestions highlighted issues that are the responsibility of Brisbane City Council and other key authorities, but others were relevant to a self-managed response by the local community.

The themes for a local flood response plan that emerged are summarised below and described in more detail in section 3.

1. Resources, roles and coordination:

Develop or call on systems for:

- identifying where **community help**, resources and utilities can be marshalled
- identifying **local leaders/authorities** and their respective roles and responsibilities
- **coordinating efforts** between the community and authorities
- **supporting vulnerable citizens** through the combined efforts of formal and informal helpers/services
- meeting **varying needs** at discrete pre- and post- flood points in time.

2. Communication:

Have a planned approach for reliable and location-specific communications to meet the information needs of a range of people - those in the area, those evacuated from the area, those who are flood-affected or those wanting to help others who are flood-affected.

3. Volunteering and donating:

Have better systems, understandings and readiness to optimise the availability of volunteers and relevant businesses who can assist safely in a timely way, and with minimal waste of their time and good will or of goods that could be salvaged.

4. Preparing for inundation:

Activate responses to target vulnerable people, properties and vehicles in flood-prone streets before inundation, to minimise loss and damage.

5. Post-flood peak clean up:

Have a well-publicised protocol that manages traffic to give heavy rubbish trucks, front end loaders etc priority and unimpeded access at certain hours to do bulk clean up work.

6. Prevention:

- Review the local land-use plan to consider whether proposed higher density populations in flood-prone streets should be retained.
- Have a range of community education strategies that mean people are better informed about flood impacts and the options to minimise them.

It is recommended that Council and the West End Flood Recovery Group go further with this exercise to engage more people who are in a position to advise on specific local disaster response challenges. Because many people who were flood-affected and many who volunteered are known or are contactable by the Ward Office, West End Community House and others, it is suggested that firstly a series of small group sessions be run with some of these people to capture their advice and do some problem solving, and then ultimately, consult with them to test out a draft local flood response plan.

The stall display and kit for stall helpers developed for the 5 June event is a useful resource for other community groups who may be interested in a similar exercise in areas which were flood affected.

2. Introduction

Brisbane City Council sponsored community ‘thank you’ events in the aftermath of the January 2011 floods. These events were opportunities to acknowledge the significant contribution of volunteers to the flood clean-up effort and to give volunteers and people affected by the floods the opportunity to meet up again and celebrate the recovery achievements to date.

In the West End-South Brisbane peninsula, the local Councillor, Helen Abrahams, consulted with the West End Community Recovery Committee and a range of locals to design a thank you event that would reflect something of the nature of the local community and fit in with local events.

As a result, the Council-supported event took place on June 5, adjacent to the West End State School campus where their fiesta was underway. Part of Horan Street was closed for this purpose to supplement the space available.

‘West End says thank you’ was an enjoyable event with a warm and friendly atmosphere and a varied range of activities comprising:

- a farm animal petting enclosure
- a paper boat-making activity for all ages with the ships then set to sail on a Brisbane River drawn onto the roadway
- a photo montage booth to create a visual image of many faces who had been part of the flood recovery process
- a story telling and illustration stall where people could tell their flood story, have it summarised and then turned into a cartoon by an illustrator at the stall
- information tables staffed by West End Community House and Red Cross in case people who attended also had flood recovery information or support needs

- the *Flood of Suggestions* stall where people were consulted about their flood experiences with the intention to later use this information in a local flood response plan. The results of this consultation is the subject of this report.

3. Summary of community input

The full list of comments made by people attending *the Flood of Suggestions* stall is included at Appendix 1. This needs to be read to understand the breadth of experience and specific issues that prompted suggestions.

There were several types of comments - those that described what happened and those that focused on a suggestion about improving responses for 'next time' or emphasised a specific technical solution. Some stressed prevention ideas to mitigate potential disaster. Some highlighted problems and some highlighted what worked well. Others raised questions. Most suggestions were about communication and information issues.

A summary of the recurring issues and those that lend themselves well to a local flood response plan are summarised below:

Strategies or systems that could be set up for the future

Mapping community resources and coordination

- Need a register of organisations and groups who have resources and people to help
- Have information about where local community hubs and places are that are safe, likely to have power, resources, information and so on: "Where is the village hall?"
- Have information for people about who are the local community leaders and those with some roles of responsibility / authority - who does what and how do you contact them?
- Have arrangements in place so that local responses can pull together better with local government
- Have better information about how power supply links to which areas
- Have a system to give access to generators for critical recovery/communication points and community hubs
- Have a traffic management plan to support better traffic flow and minimise loss of public transport services
- Support essential human services like disability personal care services, meals on wheels and home nursing services to have their own disaster response strategies for flood-prone areas to ensure clients are not made more vulnerable
- Have a strategy that focuses on children so that they have access to low-stress, safe places and well-supported carers
- Make the most of the community's understanding of how needs change at different points in time pre-and post- the flood peak. Well-timed responses are critical - have a plan that adapts to the needs as they change in the hours, days and weeks following a flood.

Communications

Have a range of communication strategies, systems and hubs that can be activated to meet the needs for detailed, reliable information of:

- those people in the area
- those who have temporarily evacuated to other areas
- those people with or without power
- those who are likely to flood or have been flooded
- those with special communication needs (the deaf, people whose first language is not English and so on)
- those who want to help out.

Volunteering and donating

- Have volunteer management and communication systems that are more effective, perhaps coordinated from Council Ward offices
- Develop more sophisticated approaches and community understanding about donating goods as well as safe handling, restoring, cleaning and disposing of damaged goods
- Encourage Council to have an emergency response contracting arrangement in place to optimise the involvement of commercially owned bobcats and various sorts of clean up machinery that may be able to offer reduced cost clean up in various neighbourhoods.

Preparing for inundation

- Have tow trucks available to move vehicles in known flood areas
- Have a system to support police or others to do comprehensive doorknocking linked to resources for helping people move themselves and/or goods to high ground, especially vulnerable people such as those with disabilities, the elderly and so on.

Post flood-peak clean up

- Have a protocol for deployment of heavy vehicles and traffic management so that the public know when to stay off the roads to allow easy access by heavy equipment (say early morning) and when to move in to help householders

Preventative measures

- Review and amend the Brisbane City Council Local Plan in the light of real flood risks and the implications for mass evacuations from areas designated for much higher density
- Have a whole public education strategy to make sure people are better informed about:
 - insurance issues
 - how to be flood-ready or flood-proof
 - how to build or renovate in flood areas in ways that minimise the impacts from inundation and make it easier and less costly to recover (both houses and apartments)
 - appliances and household technology that are least impacted by floods
 - appliances and household technology that have special requirements during floods (such as preparation of water tanks and how to safely deal with photovoltaic power systems)

Building on the positives

Some residents and businesses who were badly hit by the flood waters found themselves buoyed up by a surge of community help of many kinds that 'just appeared'- analyse what worked and how help 'appeared' in order to build this strength into a local response plan.

4. The consultation stall method

The stall had three tables set out with large sheets of paper and pens to seek input from people on:

- suggestions about logistics
- suggestions about people
- suggestions about places.

The heading on each piece of paper and the office divider/screen behind each table gave prompts to help people further understand the purpose of the stall. These are attached at Appendix 2.

As people approached the stall they were greeted and invited to write down their insights or explain their views so that the stall worker could record them. Several people commented that this was a good idea and most people stopped to read the notes made by others even if they didn't add their own comments.

Pens and paper with a printed photo frame edge was available in case young children wanted to draw a flood picture while waiting for parents at the stall.

Most contributors were unaccompanied adults who had time to linger and think about the issues.

One person left his contact details so he could be part of the further development of a local response plan.

Part of a display of framed flood photographs which had been part of an earlier Avid Reader bookshop exhibition were hung around the stall and were for sale. These attracted quite a bit of attention as people looked at views of flooded but familiar landmarks.

The equipment, volunteer instructions and prompt sheets for participants were all fairly simple and could easily be replicated by other groups wanting to do a similar exercise. For a stall attached to another community event (as this one was, next to the school fiesta) it would be a good idea to have extra volunteers roaming the crowd with clip boards and question sheets so that people who needed to be supervising children and so on could also have a way to feed in their ideas.

Appendix 1 Participant comments

Places

1. Need a register of all organisations who have resources and people who can help
2. We found the Community Centre after 5 days - they were very helpful as were our neighbours bringing extra ice for eskies
3. West End Community House was very helpful to us
4. Princess Theatre Church, Annerley Road Woolloongabba - this group is able to give assistance
5. Review the Local Plan in light of the real risk from flooding → the higher density living = many more people affected = many more people to evacuate = many more people to provide help to
6. People need to be aware of who their community leaders are and where community spaces are!
7. Where is the “village hall”?
8. Use the ‘natural’ community hubs as places to have notice boards and updates of reliable information.

Prevention

1. Educate the public more on insurance issues
2. Do more education about being flood proof or flood ready
3. Build with materials that can easily be removed and replaced if you know you are in a flood prone area. This worked for us - we built a granny flat knowing it could be flooded one day. Pulling out and replacing the plaster board was pretty easy and cheap
4. Publish household technology tips - some gas hot water systems use electricity for ignition so don't work once the power is gone, water tank preparation, safety and solar power systems ...
5. There are some key engineering solutions that need to be done in new unit blocks to make them more flood-proof. E.g. Electrics in the basement need to be relocated if they are vulnerable. All the electrical components for repairs sold out in hours. Our unit block has bought a backup generator for pumping out the basement.
6. You can fit a check valve to the storm water pipes to prevent them backing up as the river rises.
7. Build higher houses in flood free areas

Logistics

Preparation

1. Have tow trucks available to move vehicles to dry ground before costly damage incurred

2. Door knocks - make people aware of safety issues. Assist people moving to dry ground. Have buses provided to get to high ground.

Coordination, roles and responsibilities

3. Who has what role and responsibility - army, police, SES, Council officers... Who do you have to take notice of/obey if, for example, they tell you that you have to evacuate?
4. Handle enquiries and volunteering offers at the Ward office level (with extra staff) rather than volunteering Queensland.

Communication and information

5. Have more communication with BCC so that neighbours and Council can pull together
6. Radio announcements about loss of services should be more specific as we could have found places to charge our phones/laptops - when the electricity went off we lost access to detailed information even though we had a radio
7. Have regular live radio updates for the local area - numbers etc. broadcast to all for assistance
8. St Francis' church on Dornoch Terrace or nearest large place with power - set up a makeshift Internet café
9. For those of us who still had power, communication worked fairly well, but we needed more community noticeboards or local networks (not electronic) to keep those badly affected in the loop
10. Too many donations of things that people didn't need or want, like second hand clothes. Need to give the public very clear information about what is needed - cash, generators etc at the different stages of the clean-up.
11. Need a website or similar to find out what's happening, including for locals who had to evacuate to other areas. How to get accurate, specific information like whether their part of the street was re-opened or not...
12. Need a non-web based information source as well.

Volunteering

13. People wanted to help but spent five hours on a Council bus
14. Better knowledge by organisers about where help is needed (Problem - a sense of frustration)
15. Many white goods et. could have been cleaned - too much "throw it out" and "get rid of it" → a symbol of wanting to dissociate? → work with professional cleaners/refurbishers
16. In some cases volunteers did more harm than good - threw things out or demolished things they shouldn't have
17. If people are in shock they may find it hard to control/manage volunteers
18. A register of people who are able to help before the flood hits would be useful
19. More volunteers to help move things before the flood hit would have reduced the clean up so much. Perhaps a data base on line where you could enter your address and details and then somebody could connect suitable people to those in need.

Food

20. Food security issues during the flood - Coles and local shops were sold out and then closed.
21. West End was potentially land-locked → issue for those flooded and greater numbers of flood affected people needing to leave because they can't provide food and water for themselves
22. Location of food markets at Rocklea needs review and re-location to a non-flood affected area
23. Hand sanitiser and fruit should always be delivered by Kevin Rudd ☺

Power

24. Find a school or church or similar in Highgate hill that would stay open to allow people to charge their lap tops or phones
25. We would have benefited from being able to recharge our phones. Let us know which streets are on the hospital grid so we know who won't lose power
26. Mick's Nuts had more flooding in 1974 but lost more stock this time because of power outage
27. New landline handsets don't work without power but the old fashioned ones do. Luckily we had an old one stashed away so could use it
28. Local government should provide generators on loan to properties that have no power.

Roads and Traffic

29. There was traffic chaos on the first day after high water. By the second day you need to have heavy rubbish trucks and equipment in early in the day (5.00-7.00am) so they can move freely and not be stuck in traffic. By day 4 or 5 in Fairfield this was working smoothly. Should do it as a routine procedure
30. Need skilled traffic control people. Means people/helpers are not waiting too long stuck in traffic. Need a clear and predictable system that people can follow
31. Put the local traffic and road closure information on Internet so helpers can be aware.

Council-business recovery efforts

32. Council didn't use resources like bob cat companies - no people on the ground who knew how to use the resources
33. Council also expected that the aid of this equipment would be free indefinitely. Biggest issue was that Council did NOT financially support these companies - for fuel, tyres, insurance, wages...

Safety

34. Educate people in safe handling of rubbish, particularly of asbestos. Make masks available.

People

Seniors

1. Meals on wheels list of recipients - we did help elderly neighbours (as per Premier's speech) but could have taken meals to others if we knew who they were
2. My husband helped clean up the homes of many old people who had no way to move heavy items beforehand and no one to help them. It would have been good if volunteers had been deployed before the flood hit to help them prepare.

Work colleagues

3. Renewed understanding of the "work place" value - my staff came from all over and gave so much effort and positivity to get us up and running again. We are now transforming this same feeling into work training and team building.

People who received help from volunteers

4. People gave an overwhelmingly positive amount of practical help
5. People asked what we needed and then made it happen. Not sure how it all worked but all the help and forms and advice just came our way
6. Some elderly people had little access to information about what was going on or how to get help.

People with disability, families, carers

7. My daughter's personal support workers didn't come to work while the floods were on - they were a bit worried about what was going on with the floods and the traffic and buses were not running normally (my daughter has disabilities). So I had to get from West End to her place in the best way I could every day to cook for her and do the support work.

Children

8. It was invaluable to have access to a kid-friendly friend's house where my child could play and have fun all day with other kids. It meant we could get on with cleaning up and not have to expose him to the danger of the filthy house or the sight of it
9. It's good to talk to young children and check how they are feeling. Let them see that you are okay. Reassure them where you can that things will be okay
10. Give children the positive experience of helping out - packing up to leave etc.

Other

1. Money towards people affected by floods takes too long (It's June, another 6 months for \$160m to be distributed). Too slow (12 month time frame)
2. Overall the response worked pretty well.

Appendix 2 The questions in the stall display

Questions about logistics displayed in the consultation stall

Communications and access to Information

What worked well?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Phones and Internet

What was needed that could be provided / solved in a similar future situation?

What worked well?

Volunteer recruitment, allocation of tasks, support, trouble shooting

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Food and Water

What was needed?

Where could food aid be based?

What worked well in terms of food supply?

Where could water supply be based?

What worked well in terms of availability of drinking water?

Toilets

Was there enough access to toilets?

Where were they needed?

What didn't work?

First Aid

What was needed?

What locations needed first aid on tap?

Any problems?

Power

What worked well?

What should be avoided in future?

What was needed that would be helpful to have in a similar situation?

Cleaning up

What worked well?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Access to storage space for flood response materials

Was this needed?

If yes, where could it be done?

Transport

What were the needs and issues?

What worked well?

What could be done better in future?

Emergency accommodation

What were the needs and issues?

What worked well?

What could be done better in future?

Access to storage space for flooded residents' belongings

Was this needed?

What do you think the options might be in a similar situation?

Access to Police or other authorities

Was this needed?

Was there enough access to police?

What could be done better in a similar future situation?

Local organisations

Were local organisations:

Linked up?

Contactable?

Helpful?

Leadership

Did people emerge who were able to offer leadership to help steer things along?

What worked well?

What else might have helped in leadership terms?

Questions about groups of people displayed in the stall

Children

What worked well to meet children's needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Elderly people

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

People with a disability

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Indigenous households and individuals

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

People who didn't speak much English

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

People needing a home (including those already homeless)

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

People taking in others (& possible overcrowding)

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Tenants/Renters

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Tourists or new arrivals

What worked well to meet their needs?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Flood-affected business owners

What worked well?

What should be avoided in future?

What was missing that would be helpful in a similar situation?

Prompts about places displayed beside local aerial views showing the extent of river inundation

Please number your comment if it links to a dot placed on the map - problem spots, good spots to offer help from, useful community facilities...

A map of the area showing where flood waters had gone was displayed at the stall.

(Note - Most people just wrote their comments about particular places rather than marking them on the map.)

west end says thank you

**celebrate on
sunday 5 june 2011**

a day for community connection
the west end thank you fair is for local residents to get together, say thanks to our flood volunteers and celebrate all that is great about our community!

Photos of faces of volunteers wanted for community portrait
a photomontage of everyone who helped in the flood will be created. send your photo to the gabba ward office prior to the day
email: thegabba.ward@ecn.net.au

art and entertainment
interactive busk-art and a talented line up of musicians

a flood of stories
join storytellers and a cartoonist as they record your stories of january

planning for our future
many things went well in our response to the flood what could we do better? share your ideas and advice that will help inform future responses to disasters

**an initiative of the gabba ward office
working with the west end
community recovery committee
and coinciding with the
west end state school fiesta**

11:00am to 3:00pm
horan street
west end

BRISBANE CITY