

I: The Consensual Hallucination

Ye cannot live for yourselves; a thousand fibres connect you with your fellow-men, and along those fibres, as along sympathetic threads, run your actions as causes, and return to you as effects.

-Herman Melville[28] variant found in [6]

[T]he common thread found in successful operations is that participating organizations have understood and accepted their roles.

-FEMA Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101[14]

Goal

Create a planning team that combines diverse executive leaders, community/business stakeholders and experts to agree on a vision (not a document) for the plan.

Mission

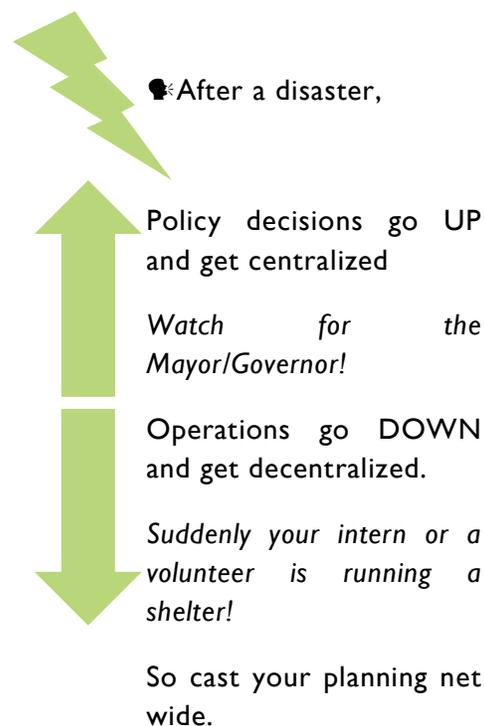
Planners that write by themselves will never have their plans used. Instead, convene creative teams with disparate views. Recruit a high-level executive sponsor to act as Incident Commander. Convene an advisory group with stakeholders from different response partners (including nonprofits, the media and the public) to help define strategy. Pull a smaller planning workgroup together to work through the details. Instead of just a document, this process will make the plan a **consensual hallucination** of the best ideas shared between the folks who will actually run the response

Operational Approach

- Never write a plan in isolation or hire a consultant to write a plan in isolation. It will not help manage an emergency. Period. The best plan only really exists in the minds of those who will run the response [29].
- You need both senior leaders and outside stakeholders because in a crisis, senior leaders will get heavily involved, centralizing policy [30]. Meanwhile, there's so much to do that operations will get centralized, meaning low level staff and outside organization will suddenly be heavily involved in managing the response[31].
- The public has to understand the plan – as they are likely survivors and the primary first responders. Give them planning awareness, knowledge of their role, real understanding of likely impacts and a clear picture of what organizations can and cannot do for them [13].
- Bring the media into planning before it's news. Consider naming local media to help manage national media when it appears[22].



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Raise Wicked Problems	2
Capabilities Not Analogies	3
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Objectives

1. Choose a clear executive sponsor from the pool of senior officials who would actually lead your response. She will act as your **Incident Commander**; this is desperately important [32].
2. With the Incident Commander's help, ensure a clear communications line to elected officials. If they don't understand your plan, they will intervene and create their own system in a disaster, which will slow down the response[33].
3. Form a core team of five to ten planners who can represent all capabilities used in the plan [15].
4. Schedule regular meetings with this group. This helps you embed pre-crisis planning within your organizational structure and culture [31]. Emergency planning shouldn't just be a separate unit – emergency planners are there to support the entire organization.
5. Form an advisory group of 15-20 people to discuss and vet the plan contents throughout the process (not at the end). This core group should not just be emergency managers but should include stakeholders from across the community – for example, business, the media and social leaders. Different roles bring critical new perspectives. In particular, nonprofits and civil society groups (like neighborhood associations) will rush in after a disaster with their own activities – they more sync'ed you are with these unexpected partners early on in planning, the better off you'll be[33].
6. Make the scope and purpose of the process clear to all involved from the beginning with the  **Emergency Plan Project Start Agreement**. First question: What's your end goal for the planning process?

Why There Can Be No Agency Plans

Most agencies suffer from the *Robinson Crusoe Syndrome* –imagining that they are the only person on the island. They (we) write their own plans; they don't connect these to others' plans. This arises from a fear of critique, a general sense of invulnerability, and an expectation that things will generally work the way they have in the past. These ideas are, well, wrong. Organizations are rarely comfortable with productive jurisdictional planning because it sits outside their comfort zone. It “won't make sense” to executives for whom the organization is their power base [31]. But it is the only way to succeed. In particular, partnerships grow from critique and organizations that have been critiqued by partners usually perform better in an emergency response [22, 34]. The public, too, is more likely to listen to you if it shares your idea of what the disaster *means*, which is much more likely if its representatives were involved in planning[33]. Don't be afraid. Put yourself out there.

 Why do you need an Incident Commander so much? Plans need simplicity; you'll only get there if you have an **Incident Commander** to lead the organizational learning portion of Plan Design (see below) [16], the reflection on the approach to the problem, and the adaptation to the incident as the problem

The  **Emergency Plan Project Start Agreement** is an initial brainstorming tool and a contract between the planner, the plan stakeholders, and the executive sponsor.