



Community Engagement and Accountability
(CEA) Catalogue
Americas, 2025

MODULE 3

CEA in Emergencies

GLOSSARY

CEA (Community Engagement and Accountability): An approach that promotes the inclusion of communities in all phases of a project or response, ensuring that their voices, needs, and rights are considered.

CEA policy: Formal document that establishes an organization's commitments to community engagement, including key roles, responsibilities, and principles.

Checklist: A practical tool that allows for verification that key CEA elements have been considered in a program, emergency, or institutional process.

Code of Conduct: A set of principles and standards of behavior that staff and volunteers must follow in their interaction with communities and during their humanitarian work.

Context analysis: Process of gathering and evaluating information about a community or situation to understand its characteristics, dynamics, and needs before designing an intervention.

Emergencies: Critical situations that require an immediate humanitarian response, such as disasters or social crises, where specific CEA tools adapted to the urgency are applied.

Feedback kit: A tool that allows for the collection, analysis, and response to community comments and opinions in a structured and responsible manner.

Feedback: Opinions, comments, or suggestions that the community shares about an organization's actions, used to improve the quality and relevance of the work.

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross. Humanitarian organization that is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. It is the world's largest humanitarian network. We support the local action of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in more than 191 countries, bringing together more than 16 million volunteers for the good of humanity.

Institutionalization of CEA: Systematic integration of community engagement and accountability into the structure, policies, strategies, and operations of a National Society.

Logical framework: A planning tool that defines objectives, results, activities, and indicators for a program or project, facilitating its monitoring and evaluation.

Minimum actions: Set of essential activities that must be integrated to ensure effective community engagement in programs, projects, or emergencies.

Needs assessment: Process to identify the priorities, resources, problems, and aspirations of a community before implementing a program or intervention.

NS (National Society): Red Cross or Red Crescent organization that operates within a specific country as part of the International Movement.

Programs and projects: Medium- or long-term interventions that seek to generate sustainable positive change in communities.

Training: Training sessions designed to strengthen the capacities of staff and volunteers in CEA and other key areas.

Work plan: Document that organizes and schedules activities, responsibilities, and resources needed to implement actions. In this case, CEA.

03

Emergencies

Despite the increased urgency and complexity, it remains important, necessary and possible to involve communities in emergency response operations. Unfortunately, there are many examples of operations that have gone wrong because they have not sufficiently involved local people, from

relief items being sold in markets, to volunteers and staff being attacked and even killed, because of community fear and misunderstanding. Within the emergency phase we have 10 minimum CEA actions.

To learn more about this topic we recommend you read from page 74 of the [CEA Guide](#).

To download the toolkit you can go to [this link](#).

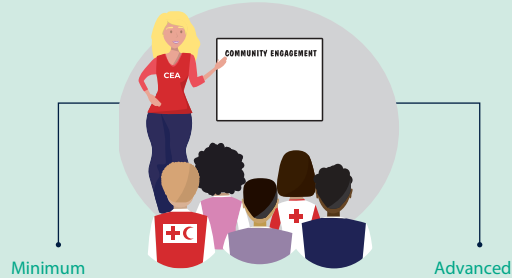
Corallo Brothers, IFRC, 2023



Ten actions to engage communities during emergency response operations

All stages

1 Community engagement is integrated across the response



- Brief staff and volunteers on CEA
- Discuss CEA in operational meetings
- Identify a CEA focal point
- Train staff and volunteers on CEA

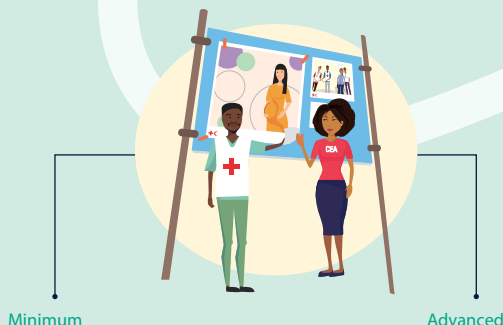
Planning the response

4 Discuss response plans with communities and key stakeholders



- Discuss response plans and ways of working
- Coordinate internally and externally to avoid causing frustration in communities
- Use participatory planning approaches
- Cross-check plans with communities before implementing

5 Discuss and agree selection criteria and distribution processes with communities



- Explain selection criteria and targeting
- Respond to questions and complaints
- Discuss distribution processes
- Agree selection criteria together
- Use community-based targeting
- Plan distributions with the community

Emergency Assessment

2 Understand community needs, capacities, and context



- Secondary data review
- Rapid needs and context analysis
- Detailed needs and context analysis
- Interagency joint assessments

3 Carry out the assessment with transparency and respect for the community



- Discuss assessment plans with community representatives
- Introduce the National Society and explain the assessment purpose
- Brief staff and volunteers on the assessment purpose and process
- Train staff and volunteers on communication and feedback
- Coordinate with external partners
- Verify assessment findings with communities

6 Include community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets

Minimum

- Plan community engagement approaches with all sectors
- Include activities and indicators in the response plan and budget



During the response

8 Support community participation in making decisions about the response



Minimum

- Involve the community in key decisions

Advanced

- Enable active community participation
- Plan the exit with communities

7 Regularly share information about the response with the community



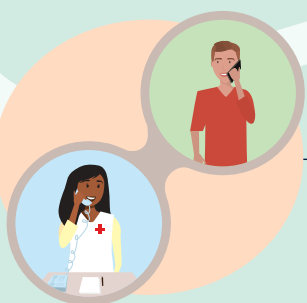
Minimum

- Keep sharing information about the response
- Communicate exit plans clearly

Advanced

- Check communication approaches are effective

9 Listen to community feedback and use it to guide the response



Minimum

- Establish a simple feedback mechanism
- Check the operation is meeting people's needs
- Monitor for unintended consequences
- Act on feedback and monitoring data

Advanced

- Improve the feedback mechanism
- Discuss feedback with partners
- Monitor community engagement approaches
- Collect case studies of feedback being used

Evaluating and learning

10 Include the community in the evaluation



Minimum

- Evaluate community satisfaction
- Share evaluation findings internally

Advanced

- Communities help plan the evaluation
- Organise a community-led evaluation
- Discuss findings with communities
- Discuss findings with partners

3.1 How do I apply CEA in an emergency?

3.1 At all stages of the response

Minimum Action 1: Community engagement is integrated across the response.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Brief staff and volunteers on CEA.
 - **Tools** 10 24 25
- Discuss CEA in operational meetings.
 - **Tool** 23
- Identify a CEA focal point.
 - **Tool** 8

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Train staff and volunteers in CEA (for more information on workshops go to space #5 'Trainings').

3.1.2 Emergency assessment

Minimum action 2: Understand community needs, capacities, and context.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Secondary data review: Save time and resources and reduce assessment fatigue in communities by checking information the National Society already has on affected areas. For example, previous programme or operation.
- Rapid needs and context analysis.
 - **Tool** 13

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Detailed needs and context analysis: Expand the rapid needs and context analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the situation².
- Interagency joint assessments: In large emergencies, it may be possible to conduct a joint needs and context analysis with other agencies. This can save time and resources and reduce assessment fatigue in communities.

3.1.3 Plan the response

Minimum action 3: Conduct the evaluation with transparency and respect for the community.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Discuss assessment plans with community representatives.
 - **Tools** 13 17
- Introduce the National Society and explain the assessment purpose.
 - **Tool** 14
- Brief staff and volunteers on assessment purpose and process.
 - **Tool** 10

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Train staff and volunteers in communication and feedback.
- Coordinate with external partners.
- Verify assessment findings with communities.

² See page 46 of the CEA Guide for further guidance on context analysis.

Minimum Action 4: Discuss response plans with communities and key stakeholders

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Discuss response plans with and ways of working.
 - **Tools** 17 20
- Ask communities how they want the National Society to work with them.
 - **Tools** 15 16
- Coordinate internally and externally to avoid causing confusion in communities.
 - **Tool** 24

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Use participatory planning approaches: Use participatory planning approaches such as community workshops and meetings, people-centred design, vulnerability capacity assessments or activities such as ranking, decision trees, mapping, etc.³⁴
- Cross-check plans with communities before implementing.
 - **Tool** 17

Minimum Action 5: Discuss and agree selection criteria and distribution processes with communities.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Explain the selection criteria and targeting.
 - **Tools** 18 19
- Respond to questions and complaints.
 - **Tool** 15
- Discuss distribution processes.
 - **Tool** 24

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Agree selection criteria together.
 - **Tool** 18
- Use community-based targeting: Depending on the context, it may be possible to carry out targeting with the participation of the whole community.
- Plan distributions with the community.
 - **Tool** 24

Minimum action 6: Include community engagement and accountability activities and indicators in response plans and budgets.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Plan community engagement approaches with all sectors.
 - **Tools** 22 24
- Include activities and indicators in the response plan and budget.
 - **Tool** 7

3.1.4 During the response

Minimum Action 7: Regularly share information about the response with the community.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Keep sharing information on the response.
 - **Tools** 19 14
- Communicate exit plans clearly.
 - **Tool** 20

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Check communication approaches are effective.
 - **Tools** 7 19

Minimum Action 8: Support community participation in making decisions about the response.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Involve the community in key decisions.
 - **Tools** 16 17

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Enable active community participation.
- Plan the exit with communities.
 - **Tool** 20

³⁴ See page 52 of the CEA Guide to learn more about participatory planning.

Minimum Action 9: Listen to community feedback and use it to guide the response.

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Establish a simple feedback mechanism.⁴
 - **Tools** 7 15 16 24
- Check that the operation meets people's needs.
 - **Tools** 7 16 24
- Monitor for unintended consequences: Monitor the impact the response is having on the wider community to ensure that there are no unintended negative consequences that could harm people. For example, putting marginalised groups at greater risk through targeting criteria processes or destabilising local markets through food distribution.
- Act on the feedback and monitoring data.
 - **Tool** 15

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Improve the feedback mechanism.
 - **Tools** 7 15 16
- Discuss feedback with partners.
 - **Tool** 24
- Monitor community engagement approaches.
 - **Tool** 7
- Collect case studies of feedback being used.
 - **Tool** 12

3.5 Evaluating and learning

Minimum Action 10: Include the community in the evaluation

At a minimum level (when capacity, time and resources are limited)

- Evaluate community satisfaction.
 - **Tools** 7 16
- Share evaluation findings internally: Share evaluation results with your colleagues so that others can benefit from lessons learned and avoid repeating mistakes.

At an advanced level (when there is more capacity, time and resources)

- Communities help plan the evaluation: Ask community representatives and members how best to conduct the assessment.
- Organise a community-led evaluation: Have the community lead and carry out the assessment process themselves.
- Discuss findings with communities.
 - **Tool** 19
- Discuss findings with partners: Share evaluation results with external partners to ensure that others can benefit from lessons learned and avoid repeating mistakes.



Panama Red Cross, 2025



Scan the QR code or click [here](#) to download the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Guide.



Scan the QR code or click [here](#) to download the Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Toolkit.

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