

## Principles of systemic disaster risk thinking

### Speed read

- There are thirteen principles of systemic disaster risk thinking.
- Principles look beyond rules and laws and focus on translating values, behaviours, and actions into tangible outcomes that influence; (1) good practices, (2) innovative thought leadership and (3) purposeful decisions.
- These principles are relevant to all sectors, professional disciplines, and communities.

### Key points

1	<b>Embrace uncertainty</b> The changing risk context involves greater uncertainty and challenges to goals and objectives. Recognise there will be many different perspectives to be negotiated. Use <b>inclusive governance</b> and <b>systems thinking</b> to help. Do not be overwhelmed or wait for certainty before taking action.
2	<b>Think globally, act locally</b> Thinking globally while acting locally is a must in a growing, interconnected world. <b>Alignment and cohesion of efforts</b> is at the core. Acting locally is best exercised by well informed and inclusive communities. Community expertise, engagement and trust is critical to reducing disaster risks and building resilience.
3	<b>Place-based, systemic resilience and sustainable outcomes</b> <b>Treat resilience as capacity building</b> and take a community-level, place-based approach to understand the points where risk is realised, the things of value that are affected and who bears the costs. Use <b>systems thinking</b> to get an understanding of the dynamic, complex moving parts that make up a resilient society. Look for the points of intersection and weigh up if it is <b>values, rules, or knowledge</b> that enable or constrain progress and act accordingly.
4	<b>Establish long-term sustainability goals</b> Plan to avoid systemic failure and invest in mitigation when setting long-term sustainability goals. <b>Inclusive governance</b> , and investment is key to not only long-term sustainability but short-term, incremental interventions. Consider policy, domains, climate change and systemic disaster resilience as interconnected.
5	<b>Reposition current and emerging leadership</b> <b>New leadership qualities</b> are needed to meet the challenges of the future. Disasters have shown leadership can emerge unexpectedly, in traditional and non-traditional settings, motivated by passion, hope and a sense of agency. Be equipped with trusted, contemporary knowledge and be prepared to engage and educate others about systemic risk and vulnerability. <b>Help others up-skill and be involved in the system.</b>

6	<b>Fit governance to the characteristics of the decision context</b> Structures, rules, and arrangements influence whose views and priorities are considered. As the magnitude of change becomes increasingly uncertain, it is important that <b>diverse and broad stakeholder values and knowledge</b> are incorporated in decisions made.
7	<b>Foster networked systemic risk cultures as a powerful, enabling force</b> Change is happening too quickly for slow moving strategies to be effective and more frequent considerations of risk are necessary. Treat inclusive, <b>networked risk cultures</b> as an enabler of opportunity and invest in developing cultures attuned to the changed systemic risk context.
8	<b>Provide access to and be transparent about decisions</b> Ensure that diverse stakeholders have access to the decision-making process in some form. Move from <b>transactional or competitive relationships</b> and invest in <b>collaboration for collective impact</b> .
9	<b>Treat decision-making as an active learning process</b> Change the <b>nature of decision-making</b> , including the processes used. Regard decision-making as a trial, experiment, or interim measure – <b>actively learning from doing</b> . Act early, regularly assess and adapt continuously.
10	<b>Re-evaluate purpose and priorities</b> <b>Evolving disaster risk management</b> to include systemic disaster risk reduction and resilience. Focus on people, place, and values and be clear on purpose and objectives. Align these with <b>local, place-based accountable decisions and longer-term time horizons</b> .
11	<b>Take a systems approach</b> Use a <b>systems approach</b> to illuminate complex interconnections and relationships. With this understanding it is possible to select the best intervention points for action.
12	<b>Recognise values, vulnerability, and social justice</b> <b>Change purpose and objectives when values change</b> . Be transparent about why particular decisions were chosen over others and work with stakeholders to agree on the goals and objectives for reducing disaster risk.
13	<b>Provide equitable access to risk knowledge</b> Regularly talk about the progress of a disaster risk reduction and resilience activity. It <b>fosters trust and participation</b> , allowing risk owners the opportunity to accept, treat or transfer the risk. Engage and support people to understand and use risk information to more effect and avoid an imbalance of knowledge and power.

# Quick Guide



Australian Government  
National Emergency  
Management Agency



Australian Institute for  
Disaster Resilience

## Take action

- Save these principles for easy reference or pin them up in your home or office.
- Take some time to think about and list the different ways that you might incorporate these principles into your role.

## More information

- Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience 2021, Systemic Disaster Risk: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-systemic-disaster-risk>
- A range of resources are available via the curated disaster risk reduction collection: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/collections/disaster-risk-reduction>