

# Cultural safety and the Emergency and Disaster Management Act

Promoting cultural safety in emergency management is a key principle in the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA). Many regulated entities in the Province are implementing new Indigenous engagement requirements (IERS) for the first time, including incorporating measures to promote cultural safety in all phases of emergency management.

The EDMA does not provide a definition of cultural safety; however, the Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance document refers to it as “an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in emergency management. Culturally safe environments are free of racism and discrimination”<sup>1</sup>.

New duties under the EDMA for regulated entities (provincial ministries, local authorities<sup>2</sup>, critical infrastructure owners and public sector agencies) are being phased in over time. This document aims to support regulated entities in implementing cultural safety requirements described in the EDMA by providing:

- a background summary of cultural safety recommendations and activities to contribute to the discussion of what it means in an emergency management context,
- a description of the cultural safety obligations in the EDMA, with a focus on what is currently required
- ways to operationalize the EDMA requirements, and
- resources to support implementation.

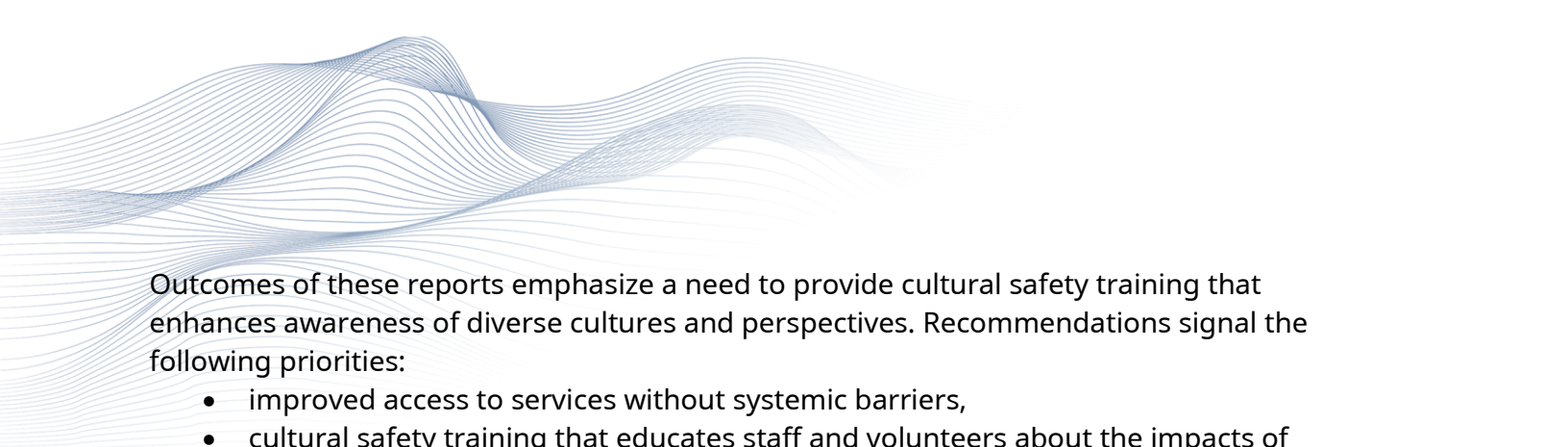
## Cultural safety recommendations and activities in emergency management

Recommendations to incorporate cultural safety into emergency and disaster risk management are highlighted in several reports on lessons learned, particularly in the context of emergency evacuations.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) definition for cultural safety in health care: [FNHA Anti-Racism, Cultural Safety and Humility Framework](#) defines cultural safety as “an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.”

<sup>2</sup> Local authorities are defined in the EDMA as a municipality, regional district, the Nisga’a Nation, or a treaty first nation. Nisga’a Nation and treaty first nations may choose to prepare risk assessments and emergency management plans as described in, and governed by, the EDMA.



Outcomes of these reports emphasize a need to provide cultural safety training that enhances awareness of diverse cultures and perspectives. Recommendations signal the following priorities:

- improved access to services without systemic barriers,
- cultural safety training that educates staff and volunteers about the impacts of colonization and racism, and about applying trauma-informed and rights-based approaches in emergency management, and
- inclusion of Indigenous voices in all phases of emergency management.

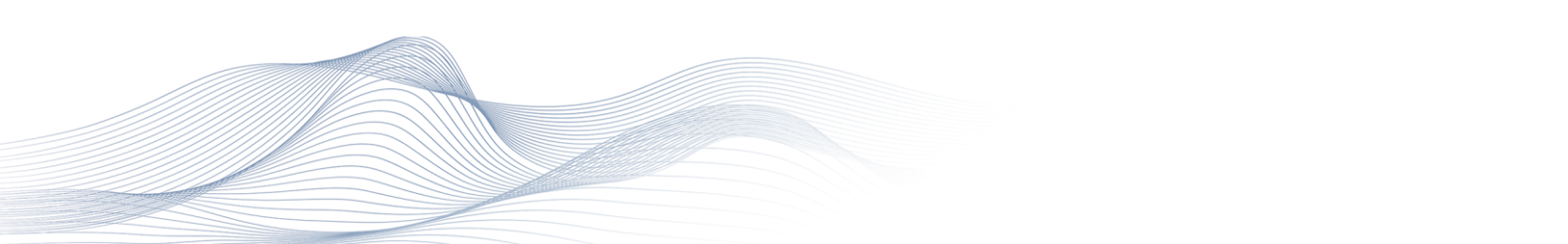
For example, the B.C. Ombudsperson report [Fairness in a changing climate: Ensuring disaster supports are accessible, equitable and adaptable](#) (2023) includes examples, experiences, and recommendations related to cultural safety in Emergency Support Services. Reports such as [Addressing the New Normal: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disaster Management in British Columbia](#) (2018) recommend that governments build cultural sensitivity training and awareness of racism and discrimination into emergency management plans, and to create a volunteer cultural awareness training requirement<sup>3</sup>. Recommendations from Indigenous-led reports such as the T̓silhqot̓in National Government's [Nagwentled – Changing Waters: Learning from the 2024 T̓silhqox Landslide](#) report (2025) and the First Nations Leadership Council's [B.C. First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#) describe a need for emergency planning and response to recognize and affirm Indigenous rights and title. Drawing on key learnings, these reports build on a depth of experience in emergency and disaster risk management and articulate new calls to action for the Province and Canada.

EMCR is implementing recommendations related to cultural safety in various ways including the development and implementation of legislation, regulations, and operational guides in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous governing bodies (IGBs). Funding to support the implementation of these new requirements was offered to all First Nations and local authorities in B.C. through the Indigenous Engagement Requirements Funding Program. EMCR also provides funding for cultural safety and cultural humility training through the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund. See the Funding section for further information.

In 2021, EMCR introduced policies that support cultural safety activities and functions in emergency response and recovery and EMCR continues to incorporate cultural safety into programs and resources. For example, evacuation guidance enables evacuation during an 'evacuation alert' rather than waiting for an 'evacuation order' based on considerations such as intersectional disadvantage, sociocultural context, and geography. In addition, evacuees who require short-term basic services, can access support through an online self-registration process – the [Evacuee Registration and Assistance \(ERA\)](#) tool. These alternative options to

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<sup>3</sup> Additional reports are available on the [Provincial emergency management reports page](#)



choose when to evacuate and how to access support improve the accessibility of services that evacuees need which is a measure that promotes cultural safety.

In 2019, the FNHA and EMCR signed a Letter of Understanding (updated in 2025) and a [Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility in Emergency Management Services for First Nations in B.C.](#) Through this partnership, the FNHA provides leadership and guidance on how EMCR can better support cultural safety in emergency and disaster risk management services and activities.

## Emergency and Disaster Management Act requirements

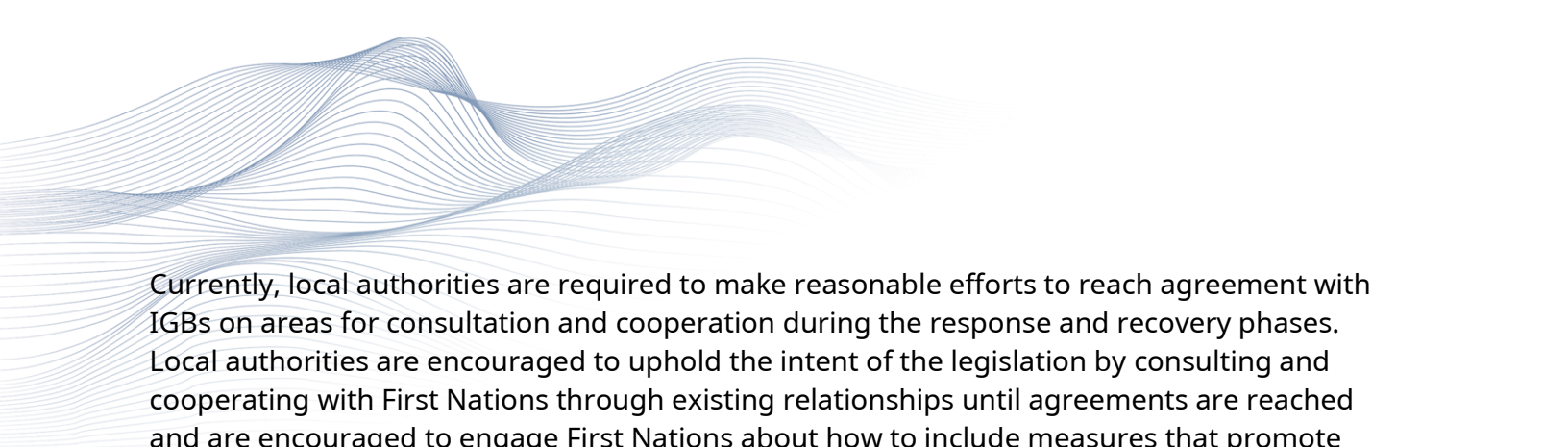
The EDMA describes principles for effective emergency and disaster risk management including incorporating cultural safety in all phases of emergency management. Emergency management plans, policies and programs that promote cultural safety leads to improved safety for all. The requirements described in the EDMA associated with cultural safety are in relation to emergency management plans and training.

Regulated entities required to develop an emergency management plan must now include measures to promote cultural safety. For local authorities, these requirements will be brought into force by regulation, which will also signal the requirement to consult and cooperate on risk assessments and emergency management plans. Please subscribe to the [Emergency management legislation in effect](#) webpage for further updates.

## Indigenous Engagement Requirements

The EDMA requires regulated entities to engage, consult, cooperate, and coordinate with IGBs in all phases of emergency management. For example, regulated entities are required to consult and cooperate with IGBs when preparing, reviewing, and revising risk assessments and emergency management plans. Consultation and cooperation on risk assessments and emergency management plans is a process through which meaningful engagement with IGB about measures to promote cultural safety can take place.

The EDMA was developed using a distinctions-based approach and the IGB that must be consulted and cooperated with under the Act are those that represent First Nations with land-based rights. As such, the EDMA doesn't include specific requirements for local authorities to consult with Indigenous peoples who are not from a local First Nation. However, emergencies can and affect other Indigenous Peoples—urban Indigenous people living in B.C. who may have moved from other provinces or territories, Métis and Inuit Peoples — and Indigenous peoples can be affected differently by emergencies. During the planning phase, local authorities are required to consider cultural safety and intersectional disadvantage when developing emergency management plans.



Currently, local authorities are required to make reasonable efforts to reach agreement with IGBs on areas for consultation and cooperation during the response and recovery phases. Local authorities are encouraged to uphold the intent of the legislation by consulting and cooperating with First Nations through existing relationships until agreements are reached and are encouraged to engage First Nations about how to include measures that promote cultural safety. For more information, refer to the [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance](#) document.

## Measures to promote cultural safety in emergency and disaster management

This section offers a description of measures that promote cultural safety based on current EMCR policy, guidance, and programs as a starting place for consideration. The best source of information about measures to promote cultural safety is from the Indigenous people and IGBs being consulted and cooperated with as required by the EDMA.

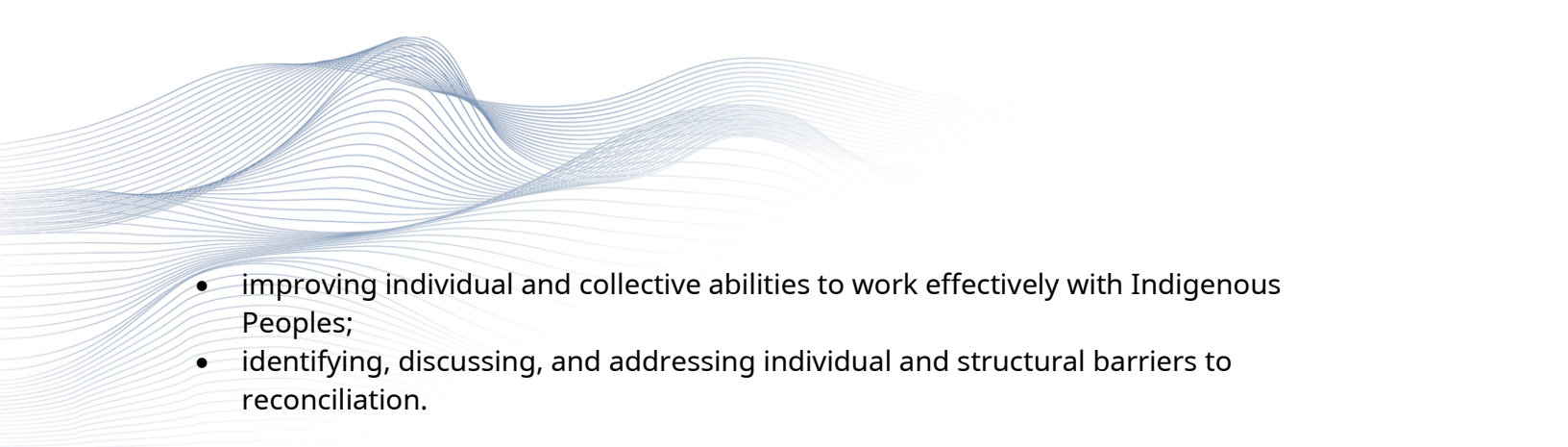
### Incorporate cultural safety training and exercises in emergency preparedness

The Emergency Support Services Program Guide and [Addressing the New Normal: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disaster Management in British Columbia](#) recommend cultural safety training for staff and/or volunteers who provide emergency support services. The EDMA also specifies that the minister may require a regulated entity to support or participate in specific emergency management training and exercise programs, including emergency management planning sessions or programs related to cultural safety or intersectional disadvantage.

Training activities can be put into practice by conducting an emergency management exercise. Exercises can include multiple themes and operational practices. For example, a discussion-based exercise with representatives from local government, First Nations and Emergency Support Services (ESS) volunteers could review an evacuation scenario and consider how to incorporate measures to promote cultural safety.

The Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF) Indigenous Cultural Safety and Cultural Humility funding stream supports exercises and lists the following learning outcomes:

- recognizing Indigenous People's unique connection to the land and the concept of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge;
- identifying key historic events marking the history of Crown-Indigenous relations in Canada;
- recognizing the concept of intergenerational trauma and resiliency and how it affects contemporary Indigenous Peoples;

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- improving individual and collective abilities to work effectively with Indigenous Peoples;
  - identifying, discussing, and addressing individual and structural barriers to reconciliation.

## Considerations for emergency management planning

Emergency management plans provide an overview of organizational structure, governance, and measures across all phases of emergency management. All emergency management plans under the EDMA are required to include measures to promote cultural safety. Incorporating these measures may be phased in over time.

A starting place may be to incorporate each organization's approach to provincial cultural safety requirements, reflect institutional commitments to cultural safety, and create a space of safety when consulting and cooperating with IGBs when preparing, reviewing, and revising emergency management plans. For example, EMCR policy 2.15 to activate cultural activity locations and policy 2.14 to activate First Nations community navigators are emergency response resources that promote cultural safety and can be referenced in local authorities' emergency management plans (see Resources section). Each organization's approach to incorporating cultural safety into training and exercises, after-action reviews, and ESS program can also be referenced in their emergency management plan.

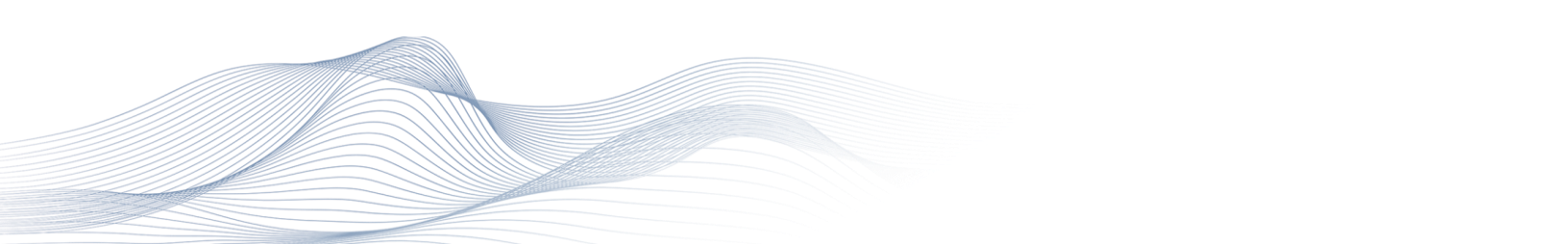
## Strengthen Emergency Support Services

Recommendations for cultural safety have been identified in reports based on experiences shared by Indigenous Peoples in evacuation scenarios and when accessing ESS. Coordinated preparedness efforts with neighbouring communities before an emergency occurs can promote cultural safety and strengthen ESS capabilities. [Emergency Support Services \(ESS\)](#) provides further information including resources to help build ESS programs that reflect the diversity of the people, language groups, and cultures that make up the communities they serve, including Indigenous youth.

## Incorporate After-Action Reviews and recommendations

After-action reviews (AARs) are an important part of the continuous learning cycle in emergency management. They are commonly conducted following an emergency event, at the end of a deployment, or after completing a training exercise.

The purpose of an AAR is to provide a valuable opportunity for local authorities, IGBs and/or agencies involved to examine what happened during the event, why it happened, the challenges, identify what worked well and identify lessons learned and what could be improved for future events.



Typically, the AAR process involves gathering information through facilitated engagement sessions and/or surveys, analyzing the information to identify key themes and lessons learned, and summarizing the related findings in a report.

Incorporating AARs or similar reviews into regular practice contributes to more effective response operations and improves coordination and communication between all partners. Groups involved may wish to include efforts and dialogue to identify and evaluate their ability to provide cultural safety and how it can continue to be included in the emergency management cycle.

For more information about AARs, templates and resources see the [EMCR after-action review webpage](#).

## Advance disaster mitigation

Disaster mitigation refers to long-term measures taken to identify, remove, or reduce hazards to prevent emergencies or, to a reasonable extent, reduce their scale, scope and adverse effects. Effective mitigation is informed by risk assessments in the development of appropriate mitigation measures. These may include both structural and non-structural interventions such as land use policies, building retrofits, and nature-based solutions such as living dikes.

Culturally safe approaches that consider diverse knowledge systems may strengthen both the understanding and mitigation of risk. Investing in measures to promote cultural safety may contribute to a strong foundation for effective disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

## Resources

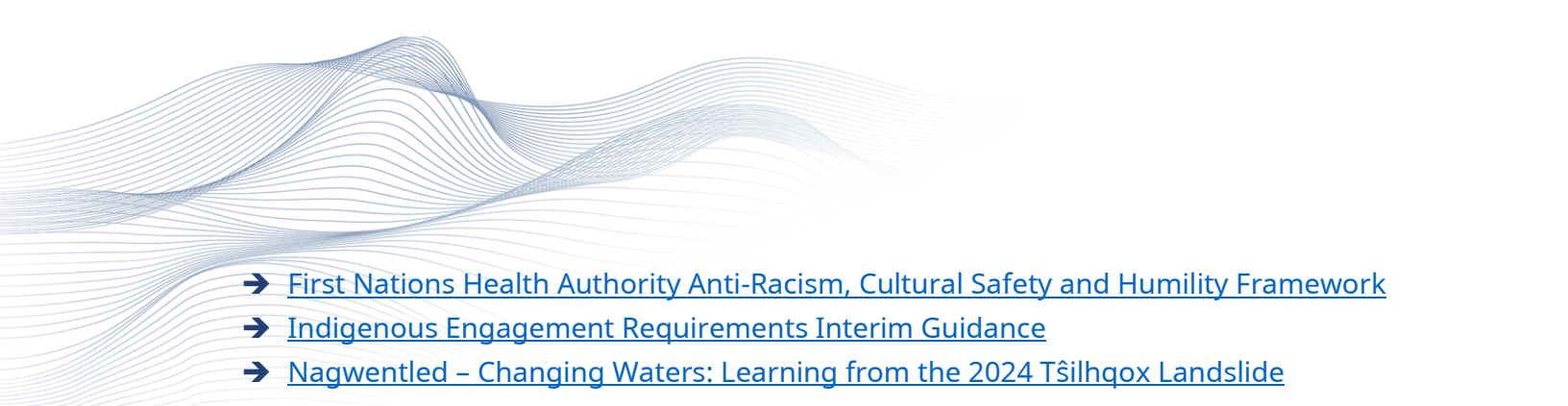
The following provides a starting place for information gathering. This is not an exhaustive list of all available resources.

### Emergency management legislation & policy

- [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#)
- [Emergency and Disaster Management Act](#)
- [EMCR Policy 2.14 First Nations Community Navigator for ESS](#)
- [EMCR Policy 2.15 Cultural Activity Locations Support](#)

### Reports & guides

- [Addressing the New Normal: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Disaster Management in British Columbia](#)
- [B.C. First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan](#)
- [Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction by First Nations in B.C.](#)
- [Evacuation Operational Guide for Local Authorities](#)

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- [First Nations Health Authority Anti-Racism, Cultural Safety and Humility Framework](#)
  - [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance](#)
  - [Nagwentled – Changing Waters: Learning from the 2024 Tâilhqox Landslide](#)

### Webinars and learning opportunities

- [Indigenous Cultural Safety Learning Series](#)
- [First Nations Health Authority Cultural Safety Webinars](#)
- [UBC Learning Circle – Cultural Safety in the Face of a Pandemic](#)

## Funding for cultural safety activities in emergency management

[Opportunities for funding activities](#) in response and recovery such as the Community Navigator, Cultural Activity Locations, and After-Action Review are available through EMCR.

### Indigenous Engagement Requirements Funding Program (IERFP)

In 2024 and 2025, EMCR offered funding to all First Nations in B.C. and local authorities to support the implementation of the Indigenous engagement requirements described in EDMA. Eligible activities include support for the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and cultural safety across emergency management practices.

Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- activities that support collaboration in developing emergency management plans and/or risk assessments (e.g., engagements to explore how to incorporate cultural safety, or how to identify and reduce disproportionate impacts in plans and/or risk assessments),
- activities that support local reconciliation efforts such as meetings, engagement, and training, including building understanding of cultural safety in emergency management, and
- planning for and delivering cultural safety and humility training to local emergency management staff and volunteers.

See the [Indigenous Engagement Requirements Funding Program \(IERFP\)](#) webpage and program guide for more information about program timelines and eligible expenses.

### Community Emergency Preparedness Fund (CEPF)

[The CEPF is an application-based funding program](#) intended to support First Nations and local governments to better prepare for disasters. The funding is provided by the Province and administered by the Union of BC Municipalities.



## Disaster Resilience and Innovation Funding (DRIF) program

The [DRIF program](#) is an expression of interest (EOI)-based funding program that supports First Nations and local governments to improve their resilience to natural and climate-driven disasters through:

- improved understanding of risks, vulnerabilities, and risk reduction options;
- the development and implementation of structural and non-structural risk reduction projects.

## More information

Online: [www.gov.bc.ca/EmergencyManagementAct](http://www.gov.bc.ca/EmergencyManagementAct)

Email: [EMCR.IER@gov.bc.ca](mailto:EMCR.IER@gov.bc.ca)

The information in this document is for convenience and guidance and is not legal advice or a replacement for the legislation or independent legal advice.

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