

September 2026

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
After Action Review of
Recovery and Repopulation
for the Eaton and Palisades
Fires



McChrystal Group



McChrystal Group

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The background of the slide features a photograph of a building facade. On the right side, a large sign reads 'McCrystal Group' in a serif font. The image is darkened and serves as a backdrop for the title.

● Scope and Methodology

Scope and Purpose: LA County leaders need a fact-based assessment of recovery and repopulation that captures lessons learned and strengthens future readiness

Following the January 2025 fires, LA County leaders and partners identified the need for an independent review of recovery and repopulation efforts to assess what worked, identify opportunities for improvement, and inform future preparedness, recovery, and resilience efforts.

WHAT WE EXAMINED

01 Recovery and repopulation operations following the January 2025 fires: An independent review of the transition from response to short-term recovery between January 7 and March 31, 2025.

02 Six critical focus areas: Communications; Volunteer and Donations Management; Recovery; Repopulation; Shelter, Housing, and People at Higher Risk; and Public Health and Access and Functional Needs.

03 Prior recommendations and future capabilities: A status review of the 2018 Woolsey Fire AAR and an assessment of County program, funding, and capability expansion to support future disaster response and recovery efforts.

WHAT THIS AAR IS

- A comprehensive, fact-based evaluation of recovery and repopulation
- A learning tool for the County and its partners
- A forward-looking analysis of systems and capabilities
- An evidence-based assessment tested against multiple sources

WHAT THIS AAR IS NOT

- **Not** an investigation on what happened
- **Not** a critique of individuals or departments
- **Not** a determination of legal liability or fault
- Does **not** address ignition, fire behavior or suppression

Our Methodology, Approach and Evidence Base

OUR APPROACH

McChrystal Group's after-action review methodology examines how people, processes, governance, and technology interacted during a complex event to identify strengths, uncover systemic challenges, and develop actionable recommendations that improve future operations.

19

County departments' operations reviewed

111

Stakeholder interviews

1,500

Public survey responses

85

Woolsey AAR (2018) recommendations reviewed

WORKING GROUP STRUCTURE

Primary Working Group. Provided strategic guidance, validated the review framework, and prioritized key areas of assessment.

Six Focus Area Working Groups. Examined operational performance across each review area through regular working sessions and stakeholder engagement.

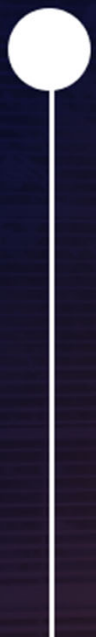
Cross-Functional Participation. County departments, district offices, and partner organizations collaborated to assess challenges, validate findings, and identify opportunities for improvement.

DATA COLLECTION

Document and Records Review. Examined County plans, policies, procedures, and operational records.

Stakeholder Engagement. Conducted confidential interviews and internal surveys with County and partner participants to capture candid feedback and lessons learned.

Community Outreach and Feedback. Incorporated public survey responses and insights from five community engagement events to understand resident experiences and recovery needs.



Overview of Findings and Recommendations

Focus Areas: The review examined six focus areas that shaped recovery and repopulation outcomes across LA County



Communications



**Volunteer and
Donations
Management**



Recovery



Repopulation



**Shelter, Housing,
and People at
Higher Risk**



**Public Health and
Access &
Functional Needs**

PRIMARY FINDING

County personnel and their partners repeatedly built effective structures in real time, many of them while personally affected or displaced. Many of those structures were effective, but they rested on improvisation and individual relationships rather than standing plans, codified authorities, and rehearsed systems.

Communications Findings

Communications systems enabled coordination at scale, but roles, authorities, and resident-facing processes did not consistently keep pace with recovery needs.

FINDINGS

- LA-RICS Performance
- CJIC Scaling and Public Authority
- Repopulation Communications
- Custody Communications



Together, these findings suggest that while core communications capabilities performed effectively under significant pressure, greater clarity around authorities, governance, and resident-facing communication processes would strengthen future recovery operations.

Communications Recommendations

Communications recommendations strengthen governance, improve resident-facing communications, and sustain critical communications infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen and Expand LA-RICS Utilization**
- **Formalize CJIC Governance and Scaling**
- **Standardize Repopulation Communications**
- **Modernize Custody Communication Protocols**

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"I felt proud seeing the press conferences outside the Pasadena Convention Center – they gave me confidence that things were well in hand."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations improve communications governance, strengthen public information delivery, and enhance the County's ability to coordinate effectively during future recovery operations.

Volunteer and Donations Management Findings

Volunteer and donations efforts benefited from strong partner engagement and community support, but reliance on informal coordination structures and non-standardized processes limited consistency and scalability during peak demand.

FINDINGS

- No Formal VDM Model
- Cash Donation System



Together, these findings highlight opportunities to strengthen volunteer and donations management through formal governance structures and activation-ready systems that can scale effectively during future disasters.

Volunteer and Donations Management Recommendations

Strengthening volunteer and donations management requires establishing clear governance, defined partner roles, and activation-ready processes that can rapidly mobilize resources during future incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Formalize a VDM Model**
- **Update Cash Collection Process**

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"Was and am unaware of Los Angeles County's Volunteer and Donation Management System – did not know one existed."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations establish a more coordinated, scalable, and sustainable volunteer and donations management capability that improves preparedness and enables the County to more effectively leverage community support during future disasters.

Recovery Findings

Recovery operations delivered meaningful outcomes under compressed timelines, but gaps in planning, governance, and service integration created challenges in scaling recovery efforts and streamlining the resident experience.

FINDINGS

- Debris Removal Operations
- Outdated Recovery Plan
- Disaster Recovery Center Coordination
- Fragmented Resident Experience



Together, these findings suggest that while recovery operations achieved significant progress under demanding conditions, enhanced recovery planning, stronger governance structures, and a more integrated resident service model would improve efficiency and community outcomes during future disasters.

Recovery Recommendations

Recovery operations would benefit from stronger planning, clearer governance, and more integrated service delivery models that improve coordination and reduce friction for impacted residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Update and Maintain a Disaster Recovery Plan**
- **Establish Recovery Readiness Capabilities**
- **Strengthen Disaster Recovery Center Governance**
- **Integrate Resident Services and Benefit Access**

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"The debris application process was generally understandable and transparent... contractors were very respectful and contacted us in advance."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations strengthen the County's ability to transition into recovery, coordinate recovery operations at scale, and deliver a more seamless and resident-centered recovery experience during future disasters.

Repopulation Findings

Repopulation operations successfully supported resident reentry, but inconsistent access procedures and unclear decision-making processes created challenges for both residents and participating agencies.

FINDINGS

- Access Passes and Checkpoints
- Repopulation Decision Authority

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

“Being expected to drive a long way and wait a long time, to get a piece of paper, which could be easily copied, was irritating. A digital pass applied for online should be available in this day and age.”

— Public survey respondent

Together, these findings highlight opportunities to strengthen repopulation operations through standardized resident-facing procedures, clearly defined authorities, and more consistent interagency coordination.

Repopulation Recommendations

Strengthening future repopulation efforts requires formalizing governance structures, decision authorities, and communication processes to support a more coordinated and predictable resident reentry process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Standardize and Communicate Processes**
- **Codify and Document Decision Authority**

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"Considering the scale of the destruction, the county did a good job in repopulation."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations establish a more formalized repopulation framework that enhances decision-making, improves stakeholder alignment, and provides residents with clearer guidance during future incidents.

Shelter, Housing, and People at Higher Risk Findings

Shelter, housing, and support for people at higher risk benefited from strong partner support, but gaps in governance, planning, coordination, and population-specific preparedness created challenges in delivering consistent services at scale.

FINDINGS

- Shelter Governance
- Staffing Shortfalls
- Access and Functional Needs (AFN)
- Shelter Transition and Demobilization
- Public Information
- Children in Care
- Custody Populations
- Justice-Involved Housing



Together, these findings highlight opportunities to strengthen shelter and housing operations through formal governance structures, enhanced preparedness, and more coordinated support for vulnerable populations during future disasters.

Shelter, Housing, and People at Higher Risk Recommendations

Strengthening shelter, housing, and higher-risk population support requires formalizing coordination structures, improving preparedness capabilities, and building processes to deliver more responsive and effective services during future incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalize Process
- Build a Shelter Staffing Readiness Plan
- Strengthen AFN Capabilities
- Formalize Shelter Transition Protocols
- Create Unified Shelter Information System
- Align Planning for Custody Populations
- Develop Justice-Involved Housing Framework

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"We vegetarians were fed real vegetarian meals at every meal... I liked that the fire chief came and talked to us and a map of the fire progress was updated daily."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations establish a more coordinated and resilient shelter and housing capability that improves operational readiness, strengthens support for vulnerable populations, and enhances the County's ability to meet community needs during future disasters.

Public Health and Access and Functional Needs Findings

Public health and access and functional needs capabilities played a critical role in supporting impacted communities, but gaps in operational readiness, preparedness planning, and coordination structures limited the County's ability to consistently meet evolving public health and human services needs during the incident.

FINDINGS

- ESF-8 Operationalization
- PPE Readiness
- Public Health Messaging
- Rapid Needs Assessment
- AFN Preparedness
- Residential Care Coordination



Together, these findings highlight opportunities to strengthen public health preparedness, improve coordination for vulnerable populations, and institutionalize critical capabilities that support response and recovery operations during future disasters.

Public Health and Access and Functional Needs Recommendations

Strengthening public health and access and functional needs capabilities requires formalizing preparedness programs, establishing standing coordination structures, and enhancing operational tools that support vulnerable populations before, during, and after future incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Adopt a Public Health Response and Recovery Role Annex**
- **Institutionalize PPE Readiness Playbook**
- **Conduct Public Health Communications Exercise**
- **Develop Rapid Needs Assessment Toolkit**
- **Designate a Year-Round AFN Lead and Liaison**
- **Establish Residential Care Emergency Coordination Program**

IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORDS

"Maybe more County [personnel] driving around with aid and PPE in the weeks that followed. When people went back to their lots would have been the best way to distribute these materials. Or have a checkpoint set up."

— Public survey respondent

Together, these recommendations establish a more resilient public health and human services framework that improves readiness, strengthens coordination, and enhances support for residents with access and functional needs during future emergencies.

Delegating Ownership to the 25 Recommendations

The AAR generated 25 recommendations that vary in complexity, investment requirements, and implementation timelines, requiring coordinated ownership across multiple County departments.

DESIGNATED LEAD AGENCY	RECOMMENDATIONS
Office of Emergency Management	7
Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department	3
Public Social Services	3
Chief Executive Office	3
Public Health	2
Probation	1
Public Works	1
Children and Family Services	1
Justice, Care and Opportunities	1
Aging and Disabilities	1
Emergency Medical Services	1
LA-RICS Authority	1

11

NEAR-TERM

Largely codify practices already demonstrated during the incident. Generally low or moderate cost.

9

MID-TERM

Require plan development, program builds, or multi-agency agreements.

5

LONG-TERM

Involve higher cost, technology platforms, multi-year data and partner integration, or sustained investment.

OEM leads more recommendations than any other department, reflecting its cross-cutting coordination role rather than sole responsibility for delivery.

The 2018 Woolsey Fire Recommendations

Assessed at the Board's direction to track implementation, not to validate the original findings.





Questions and Discussion

McChrystal Group

McChrystal Group makes it possible to optimize your organization **without compromising performance**. Forged in combat and proven across industries, we use our Team of Teams® framework to **transform how your people, processes, and technology work together** so you can optimize the organization on your terms.

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