

# Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 workshops

Final report for NSW Department of  
Premier and Cabinet

# Executive summary

This report gives an overview of the delivery and evaluation of the Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 workshops that were developed in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 Delta variant in New South Wales in mid 2021.

The outbreak placed much of NSW in lockdown for 82 days and led to tighter restrictions in several local government areas across West and South-West Sydney.

Organisations were left grappling with the significant economic, social, physical and mental health effects of the Delta outbreak that also impacted trust, sense of belonging and social cohesion within diverse communities in the affected areas.

The workshops covered psychosocial impacts and strategic communication and were developed and delivered during and after the outbreak.

The Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 project consisted of three workshops which were run repeatedly throughout the period. These were: a three-hour introductory session which introduced new knowledge and built the confidence of participants, and two, three-hour, in-depth learning modules that built on the content of the first workshop.

The first module focused on building understanding of, and responding to, the community-wide psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second module focused on building strategic communication knowledge and the skills of participants.

A total of 35 online workshops – a combination of introductory sessions and in-depth learning modules – were held between September and December 2021. Almost 500 participants from local governments, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, advocacy groups and state government

agencies attended the workshops. The participants represented 95 different organisations, including 35 local councils from across NSW.

Feedback from the workshops was overwhelmingly positive.

## **Demonstrated outcomes included:**

- more than 90 per cent of participants reported that the workshops increased their understanding of the community, psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events (CTEs) and strategic communications
- 84 per cent of participants reported an increase in their knowledge about emergency management processes during CTEs
- 85 per cent of participants agreed that they gained practical ideas to support their communities.

There are several ways to build on the stakeholder connections.

The aim of this report is to provide accurate, transparent, and useful information that can be used by interested local governments, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, advocacy groups and state government agencies to foster social cohesion within communities at times of crisis and when community members may be at their most vulnerable and in greatest need of support.

Here we share details of the challenges that gave rise to the Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 project, the evolution of the workshops and their content, the themes that emerged during the workshops, and the outcomes and opportunities they have presented.

We also outline the lessons learned and resulting opportunities for the future. There is also guidance as to how to optimise and build upon these opportunities.

**Four recommendations outline future strategic communication activities and approaches including:**

1. Focus on key issues during future crises, including mental health impacts
2. Consider specific connections to key populations, including young people
3. Focus on ongoing trauma in West and South-West Sydney
4. Mobilise a response for future disasters.

This report also identifies opportunities to underpin the above opportunities with some defined future strategic communications activities and approaches.



# Introduction

In early 2021, declining COVID-19 case numbers and a sense that NSW had come through the pandemic seemed to correlate with a general sense of optimism in the community.

However, as the year progressed, it became apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic was far from over.

While vaccines began to be available to some sectors of the community, such as frontline healthcare workers, they were not available to the broader population until later in 2021. Many people were still insufficiently vaccinated when the Delta variant emerged.

This led to a major COVID-19 outbreak that placed much of NSW in lockdown for a total of 82 days and led to tighter restrictions in several local government areas across West and South-West Sydney.

At this time, local government and community groups wanted to know what support was available for frontline workers fielding questions from

community members. This community need was also voiced through interagency networks.

The NSW Government recognised a need to design and deliver informative and practical workshops that could support key and trusted community members to help steer their communities through the crisis of COVID-19.

The effectiveness of such workshops had already been demonstrated in 2020 when pilot workshops were developed by the NSW Government for the Safeguarding Community Cohesion project.

These pilot workshops were developed as a response to the terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 that affected community groups not only in New Zealand but across NSW.

Witnessing the ripple effects of this event, the NSW Government formulated a way to provide community leaders with the skills, tools, and networks necessary to support their community should an act of such violent extremism occur in NSW or elsewhere.

## The Safeguarding Community Cohesion workshops were designed to:

Increase the capacity of community leaders and organisations to prepare, respond and recover from a Collective Trauma Event

Increase understanding of the community and psychosocial impacts of these events

Deepen practical skills that can support a community during and in the aftermath of such an event

Strengthen opportunities to collaborate with government and other organisations

Give organisations skills to engage with media and government in the event of a collective trauma event.



Based on the effectiveness of these pilot workshops, this approach was implemented again in the COVID-19 context.

With input from community-facing organisations, in partnership with Multicultural NSW and with the support of Resilience NSW, a series of three Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 workshops were developed and delivered online.

### They were designed to:

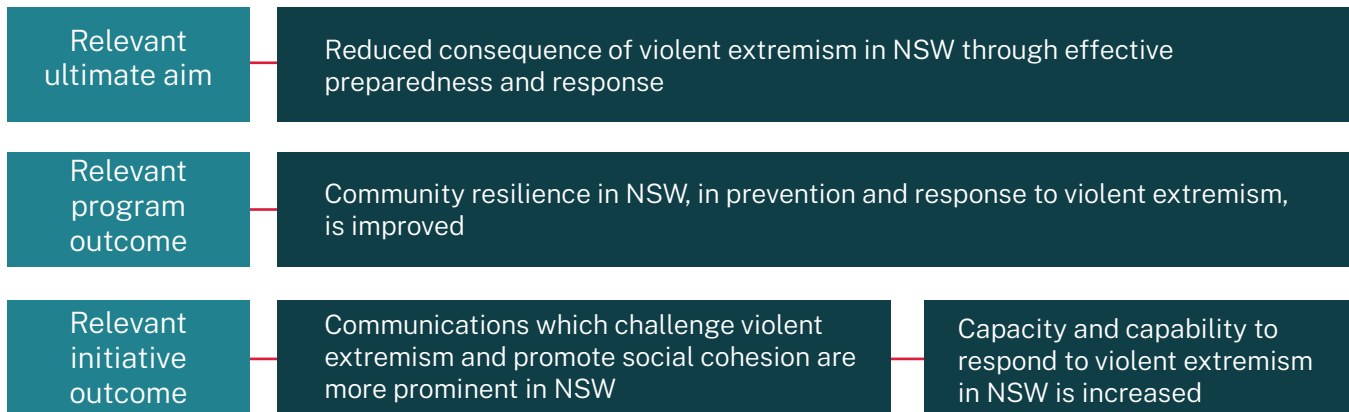
Lift capacity and build resilience to ensure challenges could be tackled at a grassroots level throughout COVID-19

Strengthen understanding of the impacts of collective trauma on communities and the role of strategic communications during a crisis and in recovery

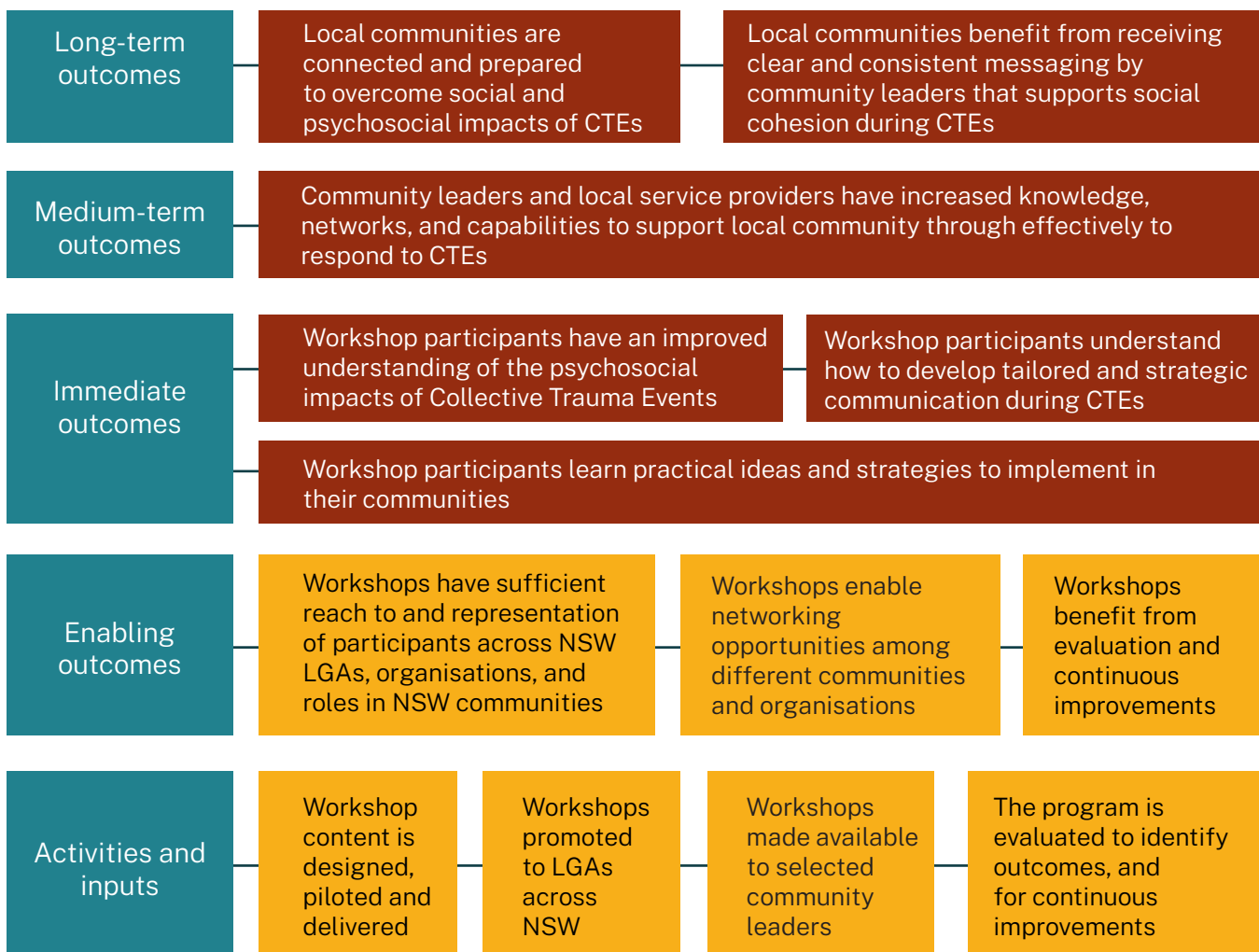
Provide best practice tools and support to help participants prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises including COVID-19

A Program Logic Model depicts how the workshops were designed to support participants to build strong, socially cohesive communities and how they aligned with those of the broader NSW Countering Violent Extremism Program Logic.

## ALIGNMENT TO NSW CVE PROGRAM LOGIC



## Strategic plan and expected results



# The challenge and response

In mid 2021, the NSW Government developed a multi-faceted response to the Delta variant of COVID-19. One component of this response focused on empowering community groups to deliver local services and support during the pandemic.

The NSW Government also recognised that to do this, community groups needed accurate and up-to-date information, a deep understanding of how to maintain social cohesion amid collective trauma, and they needed to know how to deliver information clearly and effectively to their audiences in an equitable and accessible manner.

During the Delta outbreak, the rapidly changing environment, increased restrictions, and perceived inequities in the response to the spread of COVID-19 in particular locations created anger and division in communities and threatened the togetherness of NSW.

People felt confused, isolated, and uncertain about how the pandemic would unfold and affect them and their loved ones. They wanted guidance on what they could do to try and stem the pandemic's impacts, and in many situations, this information was most effectively delivered by trusted leaders who were deeply embedded in their communities.

Recognising the potency of well-equipped, well-informed, and well-connected community leaders to help people during times of fear and uncertainty, the NSW Government organised workshops for community leaders that employed a hands-on approach with plenty of opportunity for participants to practice newly acquired skills and knowledge.

The workshops also supported participants to use the latest information and strategies to develop narratives and messages that would be powerful and resonate with their specific communities.



# COVID-19 workshops

The core of the Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 program consisted of a series of three workshops. These were delivered online between September and December 2021 and each workshop was offered multiple times to increase the reach to a broad range of participants.

A three-hour introduction session introduced the latest COVID-19 knowledge to build the confidence of workshop participants and to ensure that everyone had the same level of knowledge and started on a level playing field.

This was followed by two, three-hour deep dive modules.

Each workshop was delivered by experienced professionals with extensive specialist knowledge in their respective fields. Shona Whitton, Danielle O'Hara, and Kate Brady are experts in the areas of post-disaster recovery, psychosocial support, and community resilience. Jodie Wrigley, Darren Behar, Molly Bruce, Craig Badings and Aravin Stickney are strategic communication experts.

The content drew on evidence-based approaches and on key learnings from previous disaster scenarios. Table 1 outlines the objectives and focus of each workshop.

Workshop type	Topics introduced
<i>Introductory workshop</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understanding COVID-19: learning from community-wide impacts of other disasters</li><li>• Understanding emergency management arrangements in NSW</li><li>• Targeting audiences with simple messaging</li><li>• Amplifying communication via stakeholders</li><li>• Tackling misinformation.</li></ul>
<i>Module 1 workshop: Understanding and responding to community-wide impacts of COVID-19</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normalising individual and community responses to crisis</li><li>• Providing best practice psychosocial support: what you can do for your clients, organisations, and communities</li><li>• Collaborating strategically in disasters with stakeholders and communities</li><li>• Looking after yourself so you can look after others: self-care strategies.</li></ul>
<i>Module 2 Workshop: Strategic communication during COVID-19</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understanding your audience, their motivations, needs and the barriers to reaching them</li><li>• Mapping your stakeholders, who they are and who to target to amplify your message</li><li>• Shaping compelling messages that cut through the pandemic noise</li><li>• Developing ways and materials to tackle misinformation</li><li>• Considering recovery communication.</li></ul>

Table 1: Workshop content by workshop type





## Workshop interest and attendance

Table two outlines workshop registrations and attendance. While participants were encouraged to attend all three workshops, they could choose which workshops to attend. In total, 35 workshops were delivered and reached close to 500 participants.

	Sessions	Participants	Registrations
<i>Introductory workshop</i>	13	238	299
<i>Module 1</i>	11	151	256
<i>Module 2</i>	11	108	211
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>766</b>

Table 2: Participants and registrations by workshop type

\* Note that many participants attended multiple sessions, therefore total number of participants is not total unique individuals in attendance.

## About the participants

Workshop participants represented 95 organisations and worked in a variety of roles.

Many participants were community workers who directly supported families, children and young people, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community members.

They were also directors at not-for-profits, faith leaders and council staff working in areas including community, advocacy, and social planning.

While many of the workshop participants were from the eight local government areas in West and South-West Sydney that initially experienced additional lockdown restrictions, all areas of the Greater Sydney region were represented. Attendees also came from the North Coast of NSW, Western NSW, and the South Coast.

Of the 95 organisations represented, 35 were local councils and 41 organisations were from the not-for-profit or community sector. State government agencies and departments, peak bodies, advocacy, faith, and cultural groups also attended.

Participants were contacted via existing connections with Office of the Local Government (OLG), Multicultural NSW, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and through links with faith and community leaders. These organisations helped identify and invite participants who would benefit from taking part in the workshops, and who could take what they learnt back to their communities and spread key information and support.

# Methodology

Ongoing and a final evaluation using a survey method were critical to assess the effectiveness of the Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 project.

Participants were asked to complete a post-workshop survey to assess their understanding of the content and its relevance and impact. Three post-workshop surveys were developed – one for each of the three workshops.

The surveys were short, containing four to eight key questions, specifically designed to assess the impacts of each workshop.

For example, questions included whether each participant had increased their understanding of emergency management processes during a crisis, or their understanding of the community and psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events such as COVID-19, and what they thought would help

strengthen social cohesion for their community in the next 12 months.

120 evaluation survey responses were received for the Introductory workshop with a response rate of 50 per cent.

80 evaluation survey responses were received for the Module 1 workshop with a response rate of 53 per cent.

45 evaluation survey responses were received for the Module 2 workshop with a response rate of 42 per cent.

Survey results were collated, analysed, and used to evaluate which project objectives and outcomes were met, what elements of the project were particularly effective, and to identify areas for improvement and refinement for moving forward.

# The survey results and program outcomes

The assessment of the workshops' impacts drew on questions that considered outcomes against the enabling and immediate outcomes in the Program Logic.

The survey results demonstrated that the workshops were a significant success against the intended outcomes that were envisioned when the NSW Government initiated the project.

From an enabling outcome perspective, the evaluation considered whether the workshops:

- attracted a sufficient representation of participants from across NSW Local Government Areas (LGAs), from different organisations, and people who held different roles within NSW communities
- enabled networking opportunities between participants
- benefitted from a process of continuous improvement and evaluation.

From an immediate outcome perspective, the evaluation considered whether participants:

- improved their understanding of the social and psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events (CTEs)
- learned skills in strategic communication
- learned practical strategies to respond to community-wide COVID-19 impacts
- were better connected to safeguard social cohesion.

The findings outlined in this section of the report draw on the evaluation survey findings and anecdotal observations from each workshop. When assessing understanding and relevance scores, a score above 50 per cent is deemed a satisfactory outcome and a score above 75 per cent is a very good outcome. Any score above 90 per cent is considered excellent in terms of workshop understanding, relevance, content, and impact.

Specifically, the outcomes of each workshop and the progress against them are highlighted below.

---

## Introductory workshop

Survey responses following the Introductory workshop showed almost all participants (97 per cent) had an improved understanding of the psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events. Specifically:



92 per cent increased their understanding of how to develop tailored and strategic communications



66 per cent indicated interest in gaining deeper understanding of the impacts of CTEs



68 per cent of participants expressed interest in learning more practical tips about best practice psychosocial support



84 per cent of participants increased their understanding of emergency management procedures

A total of 120 evaluation survey responses were received for the Introductory workshop, a response rate of 50%. A summary of the responses is outlined in Chart 1.

## Module 1

This workshop focused on two outcomes outlined in the program logic:

1. Workshop participants have an improved understanding of the psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events.
2. Workshops participants learn practical ideas and strategies to implement in their communities.

- 93 per cent of the participants who found the workshop content was helpful in their workplace, and they also improved their understanding of the psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events
- 85 per cent who felt supported with practical ideas and strategies to implement in their communities
- 86 per cent of participants who said they learned practical self-care strategies.

This was evidenced by:

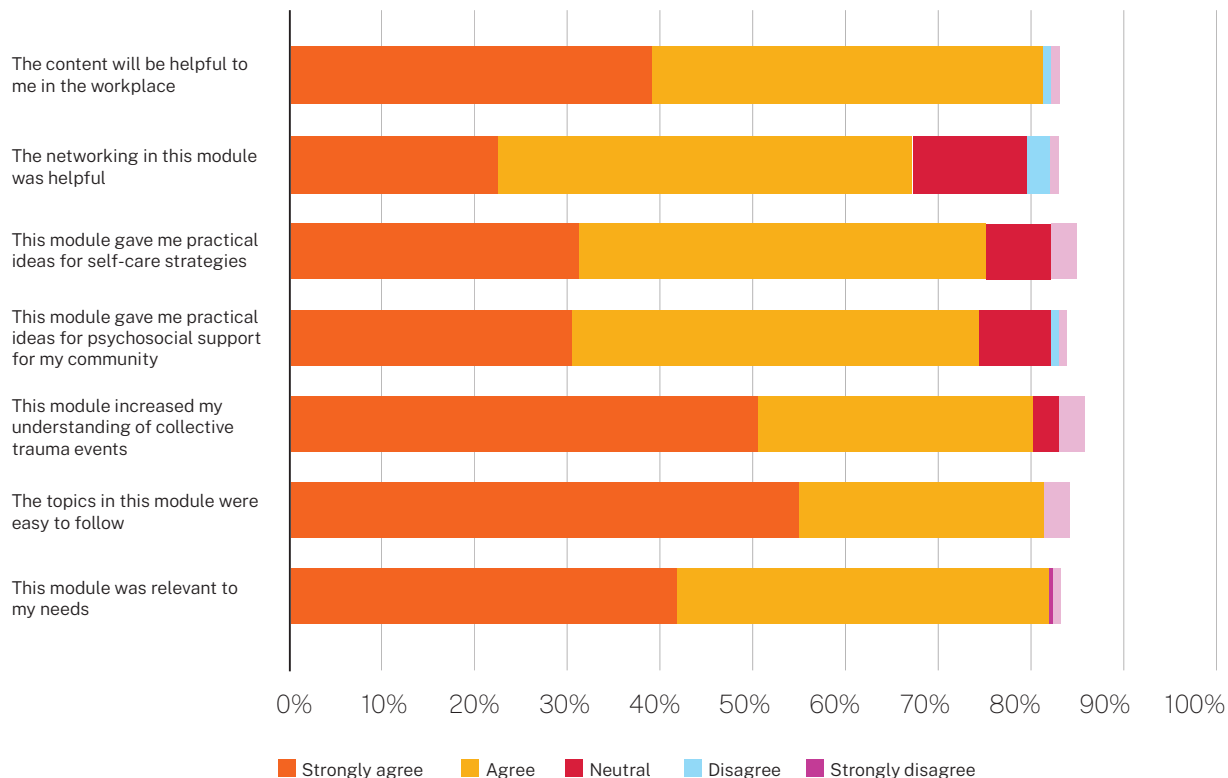
Total evaluation survey responses received for Module 1

80

Reponse rate

53%

**Chart 1: Module 1 evaluation survey responses**



## Module 2

This workshop focused on two outcomes outlined in the program logic:

1. Workshop participants understand how to develop tailored and strategic communication.
2. Workshops participants learn practical ideas and strategies to implement in their communities.

The survey results show:

- 91 per cent of the participants stated that the workshop increased their understanding of their audiences and stakeholders
- 93 per cent of the participants stated that the workshop increased their knowledge of how to

create powerful messages

- 89 per cent of the participants stated that the workshop increased their knowledge and ability to tackle misinformation
- 91 per cent of participants reported they could now easily relay information they had learned to their colleagues.

In summary, most participants appreciated the opportunities provided by the workshops, felt the information provided was valuable and relevant, and also felt the workshops were structured and facilitated effectively.

Total evaluation survey responses received for Module 2

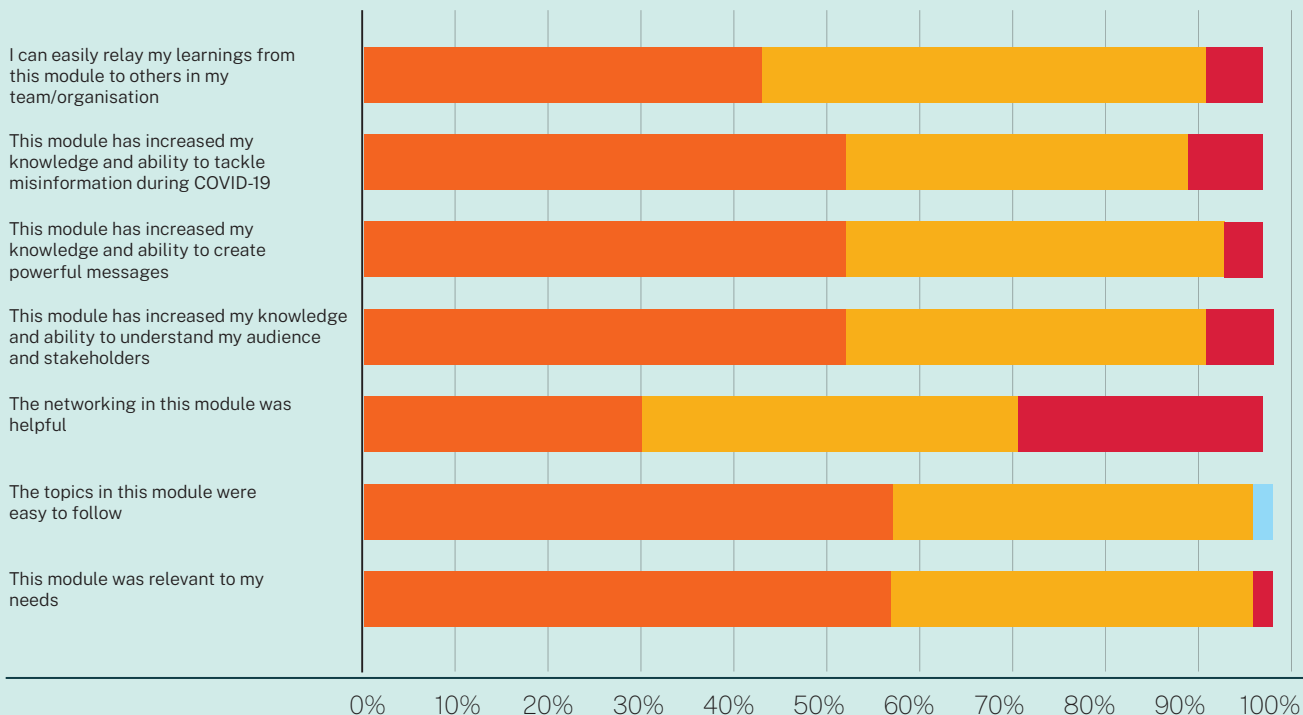
45

Reponse rate

42%

This decreased response rate is unsurprising, given it is the third evaluation form participants were asked to complete.

**Chart 2: Module 2 evaluation survey responses**



# Lessons learned

The critical role that community connectedness and support can play in dealing with CTEs has come to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those in positions of trust and authority, for example community leaders, and who are well regarded and connected to their communities, can be lynchpins in helping to allay community fears, extinguishing misinformation, and providing effective support and guidance to communities that may sometimes be hard for the NSW Government to reach and engage with. These people understand local populations, their specific challenges and what works from a support and communication perspective.

These figures may range from community leaders, faith leaders and people who hold a high profile in cultural groups and sporting communities, to those who are respected businesspeople and who have a groundswell of local support and goodwill behind them.

Those who could be called upon to work with NSW Government to support social cohesion during CTEs would have the trust, ears and eyes of their communities and be able to clearly convey accurate information in a way that resonates with their audience.

Importantly, due to the credibility of the figure conveying the information, the community feels sufficiently compelled to act accordingly.

Connecting with these people as key stakeholders in social cohesion, and providing them with up-to-date information, evidence-based strategies, and data, as well as building their confidence and expertise to be a supportive and informed leader in the COVID-19 context can have powerful and positive outcomes for communities.

While many of these key community figures may hold positions of authority, either formally and/or informally, they may require support and specific training to enable them to be a local source of information related to COVID-19 and its impacts,

challenges, and the actions required to keep communities safe.

They may require information updates and explanations, and practical tools and techniques, to help them deliver information to their communities. Those in more informal positions of leadership and authority may also require support to build their leadership skills and capacity.

Key themes noted below emerged during the workshop series that informed and continue to inform the community COVID-19 experience in NSW. These themes and resulting insights will also be a valuable resource in informing recovery efforts and future responses to crises beyond the pandemic.

All these themes were carefully noted and responded to by the experts delivering the workshops.

They provide a rich and valuable resource that can be drawn on as the pandemic continues and should new crisis situations emerge in the future. They highlight the real and tangible concerns that are likely to arise in a crisis or emergency situation and shine a light on the common feelings and issues that are of the deepest concern to diverse communities.

# Key themes

<b>COVID-19 impacted psychosocial wellbeing.</b>	People experienced and observed the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 and worried for future recovery. This was felt by a cross section of the NSW community.
<b>Vaccine misinformation caused (and continues to cause) disruption and division.</b>	This was one of the strongest and most consistent communication themes across all cohorts. There was particular concern around the impact on different cultural and Indigenous communities. Misinformation in these communities proved hardest to combat, given language, media, and sources of the misinformation. Trust in government within these communities also makes it harder to tackle misinformation.
<b>Creative approaches were used to connect and support communities.</b>	Organisations found creative solutions to connect with and support communities during the lockdown. Examples of this include a community service working with older people and writing handwritten notes, filming exercises onto DVDs, and bundling up crosswords with other activities and delivering them to the elderly.
<b>Trust in government was under pressure</b>	Trust in government and institutions was cited most frequently as having been eroded for a range of reasons, including the extended lockdowns and perception of poor communication. But many participants said that leaders and community groups were also facing loss of trust.
<b>The 'tsunami' of information during lockdowns caused stress and confusion.</b>	Community-facing groups were leaned on to take key roles in delivering large volumes of COVID-19 related information to their communities but often were not in communication roles or they were not experienced communicators.
<b>There was resistance to thinking about recovery.</b>	Many were burnt out or exhausted and could only think about the short-term (days/weeks); the next 12 months were too overwhelming.
<b>Optimism was low.</b>	Many were preparing for the next wave as opposed to easing restrictions. This created fatigue, uncertainty and added to the need for support.
<b>There were calls for a change of approach.</b>	From lockdowns to communications, many participants were focused on what could have been done differently by the government to lessen the impact of COVID-19.



# Themes identified in workshops held after reopening

A notable shift in tone emerged in workshops held after the lockdown: key themes

<b>People in the community were disengaging and isolating themselves.</b>	Many were disengaging from mainstream media, institutions, community groups, friends and family. This was problematic as connectedness promotes recovery.
<b>Communities were divided.</b>	Vaccination, targeted lockdowns or allocation of vaccines divided the state. This was both due to anti-vax sentiment and a perceived inequitable distribution of vaccines.
<b>Inequalities were exacerbated.</b>	Structural inequality, poverty, previous experiences of systemic individual and collective violence, and digital literacy made the impact of COVID-19 more pronounced for some populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and some CALD groups.
<b>People were having different experiences.</b>	People's experiences were 'diverging' based on their lives before lockdown, during lockdown and after reopening.
<b>There was great concern for young people.</b>	They were disconnecting from school, and there was some evidence of young people running away from home. Communication had mixed impact given the less traditional channels by which they hear and see information.
<b>There was anxiety about reopening.</b>	For example, returning to familiar activities such as visiting the GP. Participants wanted to support communities to feel safe again.
<b>The broad-based trust deficit across institutions allowed misinformation to flourish.</b>	'Trusted experts' meant many different things to different people and groups continued to struggle to tackle the issue.
<b>People wanted to be listened to and understood.</b>	People wanted their individual experiences to be heard and acknowledged.
<b>Many were reflecting on the role they play in their community.</b>	While initially looking to the government, many were looking to the role that they can play in recovery. Some were starting to look beyond the days/weeks ahead and allowing some optimism to prevail.
<b>The full mental health impact began to emerge.</b>	The impact was becoming clearer but the stigma of asking for help was a barrier.
<b>Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint.</b>	There were high levels of ongoing stress and exhaustion among those actively involved in supporting their communities.

<b>Connectedness is crucial to recovery.</b>	Participants saw face-to-face connection between individuals, communities, and organisations as key to recovery.
<b>People were responding to Omicron in different ways.</b>	The Omicron variant emerged during the last two weeks of workshops, and reactions ranged from distress to intentional disregard. For many, the shift in mindset quickly changed back to 'crisis mode' where concern, distrust and confusion was heightened.

Examining some of these key themes more closely illustrates how the project's objectives and anticipated outcomes have been aligned and achieved.

For example, one theme that emerged was that participants felt they were being deluged with a 'tsunami' of information during lockdowns and this was causing stress and confusion. Community groups were being leaned on to take key roles to provide information and guidance and to allay the stress and confusion in their community, but often they were not experienced communicators. The Module 2 workshop specifically dealt with this theme.

Similarly, the psychosocial wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 were of serious concern with people experiencing and witnessing these impacts and being worried about the potential for future recovery. The first two workshops provided insights, expertise and strategies that bolstered participants' knowledge and confidence in this area of concern.

Further, themes such as people disengaging and isolating themselves, community division, anxiety about the re-opening of communities and returning to familiar activities, the mental health impacts of COVID-19 and lockdowns, and connectedness being crucial to recovery, were also highlighted in workshops held after reopening.

"I really enjoyed the [workshop]; extremely relatable and practical given the current climate. It was great having the breakout rooms and different speakers"

"Very good structure. Very good active listening, reinforcing experiences and not re-traumatising"

"I really liked the workshop - well-presented and organised and had great instructions so I always knew what was coming and how to navigate the process"

"Thank you, this will be helpful in framing discussions with my peers who work in operations, and for ongoing strategy development and contributions to the discussions around recovery. Really well facilitated"

However, there is always room for learnings and improvement, and participants were asked for their thoughts on how the workshops could be improved in the future.

---

**The key comments were:**

- Providing more time for discussion and networking, organising face-to-face workshops rather than Zoom, and providing more case studies as examples for participants to learn from
- Staying focused on the central theme of maintaining social cohesion across all workshops
- Tailoring workshops according to roles, for example, providing specific information for people in direct client service provision roles
- Providing more information about the accumulation of trauma and strategies for intervention/support for affected communities.

These insights, like those of the themes illustrated above, will be used to adjust the format and content of future workshops.

# Opportunities for the future

Community groups, local councils and other organisations and bodies delivering vital local support and services continue to play a much needed and respected role in pandemic response and recovery.

They are a central piece of the puzzle in bringing their communities together to maintain social cohesion. When offered timely, well-designed, well-delivered and relevant information and support, they are often willing and able to work with the NSW Government in the interests of safeguarding their communities.

The Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 project was designed and successfully delivered on this basis. It supported and enabled organisations to offer vital community support during some of the worst periods of the pandemic so far.

Looking ahead, the structure, operation, roll-out and outcomes of the project provide insights that can be used to deliver further targeted support to strengthen community resilience and cohesion.

This applies to the ongoing pandemic challenges and is equally relevant in the face of other crises that threaten to impact and disrupt community cohesion.



## Four key opportunities for future activity and direction are:

1

Focus on key issues during future crises, including mental health impacts

Key topics of greatest concern voiced by workshop participants were mental health impacts, the need for psychosocial support, ensuring connectedness and cohesion, managing divergent pandemic experiences, the appearance, and effects of community divisions and how to counteract misinformation.

2

Consider specific connections to key populations, including young people

Workshop feedback indicated that younger people were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Once face-to-face engagement was removed connections were more challenging to make. Empowering community groups, particularly those focused on younger people, to develop youth-focused crisis communication plans could help them quickly and effectively reach their audiences in times of need. Consideration of audience-specific workshop groups could be given for future training opportunities.

3

Focus on ongoing trauma in West and South-West Sydney

The impacts of lockdowns in West and South-West Sydney were extensive, as evidenced by the growing lack of trust in government as well as a sense of divide and disconnect from the rest of NSW.

Rebuilding community cohesion within these regions and with the rest of NSW is a critical aspect of maintaining connectedness across the state.

It is recommended that further deep dive modules be created to extend the learning experience. This will help continue to support specific recovery capabilities, including strategies for responding to collective trauma over the longer term and strategic communication. These remain essential to maintaining social cohesion in the continued pandemic phase and beyond.

Modules could cover topics including: the development of alternative narratives, how to develop communication campaigns and crisis preparedness specific to organisation types or locations and responding to the stages of collective trauma. An ongoing assessment of need would also prove valuable. With this in mind, it is suggested that needs assessments are conducted at regular intervals to guide responsive policy and programming. This could include assessment of humanitarian and psychosocial needs in certain target groups of community and/or local government sectors more widely.

Increasing awareness and understanding around misinformation is highly encouraged to prevent or stem the future spread and impact of misinformation and conspiracies.

Reconnecting with, and staying connected to participants, will maintain relationships and reinforce informal networks and learning opportunities.

An option is to formalise a training program, including the option of an online learning platform, to continue to build the capabilities that have proven so critical during the pandemic.

The establishment of an evidence-based approach to build grassroots movements that support reuniting communities is encouraged.

This could incorporate using data and insights to understand the current environment before co-creating a local response to specific challenges and to support recovery, resilience, and social cohesion.

## 4

### Mobile a response for future disasters

The formation of an interagency group or network to focus on social cohesion and COVID-19 will assist in continuing the collaboration and networking opportunities formed in the workshops. This is reflected in the benefits participants found in connecting with each other, with experts and with those from NSW Government.

This could provide a platform to continue engagement in relation to new and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in the community, and on community and local government sectors. Such a network or interagency structure will support frontline workers to continue to collaborate, bolster one another, and share learnings specific to COVID-19 impacts on their work and communities.

Alongside this, an advisory group could be formed to include key stakeholders with the purpose of guiding and informing the ongoing development of the Safeguarding Community and Social Cohesion project.

Membership should represent the diverse groups with which NSW Government engages through Safeguarding Community Cohesion initiatives and include members with relevant technical expertise or ability to feed into policy and practice decision making.

This group would also further build on engagement between the NSW Government and participants, and between the participants themselves. Opportunities should also be established for participants to learn from one another and external experts.

An advisory group could be used to understand long-term and evolving community needs, to provide frank and transparent feedback on project ideas and plans, and to co-design and steer future initiatives.

Forming a Crisis Communication Hub community of practice is an option. Representatives of each community hub will form a state-level communication community of practice that can share insights, build capability and, in times of crisis, provide the formal conduit to government for information.

A community of practice, or similar group, could enhance future responses to crises and develop shared approaches and narratives. There is also potential to provide opportunities for collaboration in response to key topics and issues of greatest community concern, such as reaching young people and mental health.

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Workshop schedule Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19

### SEPTEMBER 2021

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>6</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop — 1:30pm (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>20</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 1pm (3hr) Comms module	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b> 1pm (3hr) Comms module	<b>30</b> 1pm (3hr) Collective Trauma module			

### OCTOBER 2021

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>18</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	

Key: Introductory workshop Collective Trauma module Communications module

# Appendix A: Workshop schedule

## Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19

### NOVEMBER 2021

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>4</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>5</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>9</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>10</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>11</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>15</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>18</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>24</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>25</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>30</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop					

### DECEMBER 2021

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>3</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>9</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>10</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> 9:30am (3hr) Intro workshop	<b>15</b> 9:30am (3hr) Collective Trauma module	<b>16</b> 9:30am (3hr) Comms module	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>

**Key:** Introductory workshop Collective Trauma module Communications module



## Appendix B: Invite

**SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL COHESION DURING COVID-19** | a series of free online workshops for people supporting their communities through the pandemic.

**NSW GOVERNMENT**

**INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP: SAFEGUARDING SOCIAL COHESION DURING COVID-19**

This session introduces evidence-based approaches and learnings that can help support clients, communities and staff.

- Understanding COVID-19: learning from community-wide impacts of other disasters.
- Understanding emergency management arrangements in NSW.
- How to target your audience with simple messages.
- Amplifying communication via stakeholders.
- Tackling misinformation.

It will introduce new knowledge and build confidence as a precursor to two deep dive modules.

**DEEP DIVE MODULES**

Practical and interactive sessions to develop actionable material that you can use in your daily role immediately.

**MODULE 1: Understanding and responding to community wide impacts of COVID-19**

- Normalising individual and community responses to crisis.
- Best practice psychosocial support: what you can do for your clients, organisations and communities.
- Collaborating strategically in disasters with stakeholders and communities.
- Self-care strategies: look after yourself so you can look after others.

**MODULE 2: Strategic communication during COVID-19**

- How to understand your audience, their motivations, needs and the barriers to reaching them.
- Mapping your stakeholders, who they are and who to target to amplify your message.
- Shaping compelling messages that cut through the pandemic noise.
- Developing ways and materials to tackle misinformation.

For more information, or to register for a session contact Mona Hawa on [mona.hawa@dcj.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mona.hawa@dcj.nsw.gov.au)

---

## Appendix C: Follow up resources

The below resources were provided to participants in follow up emails:

- 
- **Best practice guidelines: Supporting communities before, during and after Collective Trauma events**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **Communicating in Recovery**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **Psychological First Aid**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **Helping Children and Young People Cope with Crisis**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **COVID Collective podcast**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **Wellbeing Toolkit**  
Australian Red Cross
  - **10 Years Beyond Bushfires**  
University of Melbourne
  - **Dealing with the Disruption of COVID-19 – Digital cards**  
Hummingly
  - **After the Disaster**  
ABC podcast
  - **Hobfoll paper**
  - **PrepTalks: Dr. Daniel Aldrich “Social Capital in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery”**  
YouTube
  - **Daniel Aldrich: Article**  
The Conversation

---

## Appendix D: Evaluation forms Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 – Intro Survey

---

### Q1. Your service type:

- Direct service delivery
- Advocacy
- Peak Body
- Research
- Faith-based organisation
- Local Government
- Other (please specify)

### Q2. This workshop has increased my understanding of the community and psychosocial impacts of Collective Trauma Events, such as COVID-19.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### Q3. This workshop has increased my understanding of Emergency Management processes during a crisis.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### Q4. This workshop has increased my understanding of strategic communication and the role it can play in supporting the community during COVID-19.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

### Q5. I would be interested in learning more practical tips about the following topics: (choose as many as needed)

- The impacts of collective trauma events
- Best practice psychosocial support
- Collaborating in disasters
- Self-care
- Strategic Communication Fundamentals
- Creating Powerful Messaging
- Managing Misinformation
- Crisis Communication
- Other (please specify)

### Q6. Any additional comments or feedback:

---

---

---

---

### Q7. Your email address (for follow up additional training)

---

---

### Q8. We are looking for stories of extraordinary people in our community, to help recognise their efforts and inspire others with their stories during these challenging times. Do you have a story to share? Please summarise and include who we can contact about the story.

---

---

---

---

---

# Appendix D: Evaluation forms

## Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 – Module 1 Survey

### Module 1: Understanding and responding to Community wide impacts of COVID-19

**Q1. Your service type:**

- Direct service delivery
- Advocacy
- Peak Body
- Research
- Faith-based organisation
- Local Government
- Other (please specify)

**Q2. Having completed this module, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This module was relevant to my needs					
The topics in this module were easy to follow					
This module increased my understanding of collective trauma events					
This module gave me practical ideas for psychosocial support for my community					
This module gave me practical ideas for self-care strategies					
The networking in this module was helpful					
The content will be helpful to me in the workplace					

**Q3. What, if anything, would you like to change about this module?** (All responses will be helpful in improving this workshop)

**Q4. What will help strengthen social cohesion for your community in the next 12 months?**

**Q5. During the Safeguarding workshops we have heard some wonderful examples of community strength and togetherness.** Feel free to share an example of community strength or unity:

# Appendix D: Evaluation forms

## Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 – Module 2 Survey

### Module 2: Strategic Communications

#### Q1. Your service type:

- Direct service delivery
- Advocacy
- Peak Body
- Research
- Faith-based organisation
- Local Government
- Other (please specify)

#### Q2. Having completed this module, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This module was relevant to my needs					
The topics in this module were easy to follow					
The networking in this module was helpful					
This module has increased my knowledge and ability to understand my audience and stakeholders					
This module has increased my knowledge and ability to create powerful messages					
This module has increased my knowledge and ability to tackle misinformation during COVID-19					
I can easily relay my learnings from this module to others in my team/organisation					

#### Q3. What, if anything, would you improve about this module? (All responses will be helpful in improving this workshop).

#### Q4. Do you have a particular communication challenge which you would like further support on?

(Please summarise the challenge, what support you need and provide your contact details, so we can get back to you.)

