



RESILIENCE WITHIN

# A SHORT GUIDE TO RESILIENCE FOR NGOs

**Resilient**   
**ORGANISATIONS**

A collaboration between research & industry

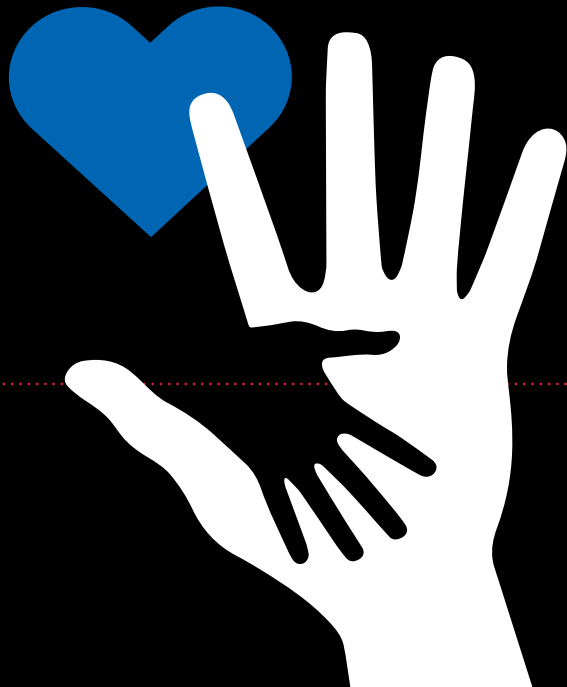
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Understand what it means  
to be resilient, reflect on  
your NGO's resilience, and  
take steps to improve it

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NGOs ARE CRUCIAL TO SOCIETY, SUPPORTING THOSE MOST IN NEED. BUT YOU CAN'T HELP OTHERS UNLESS YOU CAN HELP YOURSELF.

This short guide will help you understand what it means to be resilient, reflect on your NGO's resilience, and take steps to improve it.



## Becoming resilient

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# What is resilience? (It's more than you might think!)

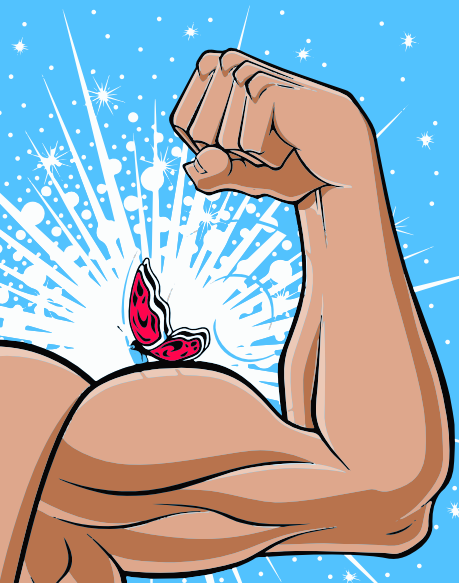
Resilience is not just surviving, but also thriving in an uncertain environment.

Resilient NGOs can be counted on by their clients to **continue** providing their core services during times of adversity. They also have the **foresight** to avoid some potential crises and the abilities to **learn** and capitalize on opportunities for **improvement**.

Organisational resilience is both **planning** to manage the unexpected, as well as **adapting** and reacting to changing circumstances. A resilient organisation has the following characteristics:

- **Leadership and culture:** Strong, aware, and empathetic leadership combined with staff that are empowered, trust each other, and are well looked after.
- **Networks:** Effective external partnerships, well-managed internal resources, and the ability to leverage knowledge across the organisation.
- **Change-Readiness:** A unity of purpose and a proactive posture combined with the regular testing of plans to counter vulnerabilities.

**DO YOU  
HAVE THESE  
ATTRIBUTES?**



## Why resilience?

NGOs encounter both **threats** and **opportunities** on a regular basis.

- funding cuts
- natural disasters
- newly available resources

**Are you ready for them?**

Many people rely on NGOs for crucial services they cannot get anywhere else. If your NGO isn't resilient, you're putting the services it provides at risk and in turn the clients you serve.

The traits of resilience are very similar to those of high performing organisations. There's nothing to lose from building resilience, but there's everything to gain.

**BE RESPONSIBLE.  
BE SMART.  
BE RESILIENT.**



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**ORGANISATIONS  
AREN'T BORN  
RESILIENT. RESILIENCE  
IS BUILT OVER  
TIME THROUGH  
REFLECTION AND  
DELIBERATE EFFORT.**

**IT'S NEVER TOO LATE  
TO START.**

*Remember*

Small actions can reap

**BIG REWARDS**

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## Thumbprint survey

To find out whether your organisation is resilient or not, you need to take a step back and reflect critically about the way you operate.

Here's a quick survey to help you start this process and get the ball rolling. It has a range of questions that relate to the different aspects of organisational resilience. This can be done electronically if you prefer – see <http://resorgs.resilientbusiness.co.nz/>

For each question score your NGO between 0 (completely disagree), and 7 (completely agree). The greater your final score, the greater your resilience.

It's useful to involve a range of people in this process to get a diversity of perspectives. Photocopy the next two pages so your staff can complete the survey too, then discuss the results together.



# Thumbprint survey

For each question score your NGO between 0 (completely disagree), and 7 (completely agree). The greater your final score, the greater your resilience.

1. There would be good leadership from within our organisation if we were struck by a crisis  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
2. People in our organisation are committed to working on a problem until it is resolved  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
3. We proactively monitor our industry to have an early warning of emerging issues  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
4. We can make tough decisions quickly  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
5. We are known for our ability to use knowledge in novel ways  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
6. We build relationships with others we might have to work with in a crisis  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
7. If key people were unavailable, there are always others who could fill their role  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
8. There are few barriers stopping us from working well with other organisations  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
9. Our organisation maintains sufficient resources to absorb unexpected change  
 0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7
10. We have clearly defined priorities

for what is important during and after a crisis

11. We have a focus on being able to respond to the unexpected
12. Given our level of importance, I believe the way we plan for the unexpected is appropriate
13. We believe emergency plans must be practised and tested to be effective

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

0  1  2  3 |  4  5  6  7

0  1  2  3 |  4  5  6  7

0  1  2  3 |  4  5  6  7

0  1  2  3 |  4  5  6  7

TOTAL

**How did you go?** Add up your total score to get an idea of how resilient your organisation might be.

**0 – 55: Low resilience:** Your organisation likely has serious vulnerabilities. Look at ways to address and develop resilience immediately. On which two questions did you score the lowest – make these a priority.

**56 – 67: Medium resilience:** Your organisation likely has some resilience, but should still prioritize building upon and expanding this.

**68 – 91: High resilience:** Your organisation shows signs of being resilient. It's time to look more closely to identify weak-spots and ensure your resilience is sustainable. On which two questions did you score the highest? Think about why you scored high on these and how you could apply that to improve other areas.

# RESILIENCE IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION.

The environment we live and work in is constantly changing, so resilience is an ongoing process of learning and improvement. It's important to make being resilient part of your business-as-usual, not something extra you tack on.

The next couple of pages have some tangible ideas to help you do just this. Building resilience is both achievable and affordable.

- Make the time
- Lead from the front
- Engage your staff
- Become change ready
- Find support
- Connect with others

## Make the time

To become more **RESILIENT**, you have to first make time to work on your NGO, not just in it.

You probably feel that you just don't have the time to work on resilience, **but how are you spending your time?**

It's easy to get caught up spending all your time on the day-to-day work of your NGO, but it's essential for leaders to step back and look at the bigger picture too. If you don't, then who will?

**There's more to leadership than just managing and administrating.** Try setting aside 30% of your time to work on:

1. planning and strategy
2. looking after your staff
3. improving your services

This might require delegating some of your other work, which can seem scary, but it's necessary to free up your time and also a great way to empower your staff with more responsibility.

Making time is often the hardest part of building resilience. You're unlikely be able to address every single issue, but even making 2 or 3 changes to boost your resilience makes a difference and your clients will thank you for it.



## Lead from the front

### **PLAN WHERE YOUR NGO IS GOING.**

What's happening next week? Next month? Next year? Set aside a couple hours each week to make planning part of your 'business as usual'. It saves time and money in the long run and ensures your NGO stays on the right track. Involve your staff; try having a 1-2 hour planning session with your team once a month.

### **DEVELOP YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS.**

The better leader you are, the better your NGO can fulfil its mission and handle adversity.

Ask around to find a mentor, join a group like Rotary or Toastmasters, or enrol in a leadership development course.

### **PROMOTE YOUR ORGANISATION'S VISION AND MISSION.**

If bought into, they can act as vital touchstones that focus your work and rally your team during times of adversity. Your team follows your lead, so create a positive work culture around these by visibly modelling the behaviour you're looking for.

### *Remember...*

FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL!



A GOOD LEADER ALWAYS TRIES TO IMPROVE THEMSELVES AND THEIR STAFF.



YOU'RE A CULTURE-SETTER.

## Engage your staff

### **FOSTER GOOD RELATIONSHIPS AND REGULAR COMMUNICATION AMONGST STAFF.**

Your NGO will be better prepared to handle adversity and share learnings and good practices. Try organizing a social event for staff to get to know each other outside of the workplace.

**EMPOWER YOUR STAFF** so they feel valued and see your NGO as more than just where they go to work. This is especially important if you work with volunteers. Actively recognize and reward hard work, and, where possible, involve staff in decision-making processes.

**SUPPORT YOUR STAFF AND TREAT THEM AS INDIVIDUALS.** Let them work autonomously, but if something goes wrong, professionally or personally, they must be supported.

A resilient NGO needs resilient staff, and a supportive workplace goes a long way to achieving this.

### *Remember...*

MAKE IT PERSONAL!



RECOGNISE AND REWARD.



A RESILIENT NGO NEEDS RESILIENT STAFF.



## Connect with your community

**BUILD YOUR NETWORKS.** Positive relationships with other organisations in your sector and community can provide valuable support during crises. They can also be great sources for inspiration and new ideas. Paying a visit to your local volunteer centre or NGO network is a great way to get started.

**COLLABORATE WITH RELEVANT PARTNERS.** From simply sharing resources on occasion to a full-fledged partnership, there's a range of ways organisations can achieve more with less through cooperation. When the chips are down during a crisis, those who work together tend to come out better off.

**UPDATE YOURSELF ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN YOUR SECTOR.** Having an external focus is important for being a resilient organisation. By regularly looking out into your broader operating environment for threats and opportunities you'll be giving your NGO the best chance to adapt, change, and succeed in our uncertain world.

*Remember...*

DON'T GET  
STUCK  
IN YOUR  
BUBBLE



TWO HEADS  
ARE BETTER  
THAN ONE



KEEP AN  
EYE OUT!

## Become change-ready

**ENSURE YOUR CORE SERVICES** by planning alternate ways to deliver them and backing up key resources where possible. Cross-train staff so they could fill in if others become unavailable, and check to see that you're properly insured.

**TALK ABOUT RESILIENCE** with your staff. It will help you get more ideas for building resilience and is a great way to engage your staff. Try discussing resilience over morning tea once a week. Ask staff "what's going to stop us doing our job, and what could we do about it?"

**TEST BOTH YOUR FORMAL PLANS AND ADAPTIVE RESILIENCE REGULARLY.** Rehearse plans or drills but also try creative scenarios such as operating for a day without your landline or your computer. This not only prepares you for such situations but also encourages innovation and creative problem solving.

*Tips...*

MAKE SURE ALL  
YOUR BOXES  
ARE TICKED! ✓

MAKE  
RESILIENCE  
A WEEKLY  
PRIORITY. 📅

TRY GETTING  
CREATIVE WITH  
YOUR TEST  
SCENARIOS ⚡

~~UNPREPARED~~

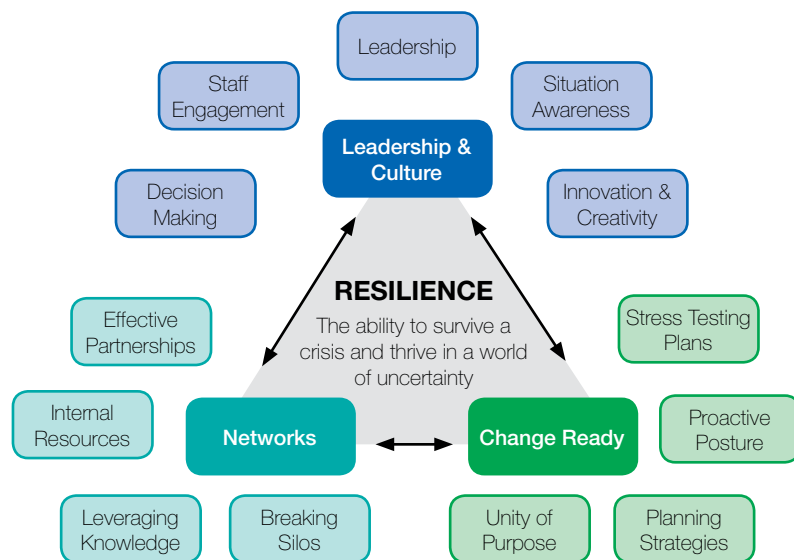




# MORE about Resilience

What is it that makes some organisations able to not only survive, but also to thrive in the face of adversity?

## RESILIENCE INDICATORS



For further info: [www.resorgs.org.nz/Content/what-is-organisational-resilience.html](http://www.resorgs.org.nz/Content/what-is-organisational-resilience.html)

# Find further support



## MORE ON ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

[www.resorgs.org.nz](http://www.resorgs.org.nz)

[www.resilientbusiness.co.nz](http://www.resilientbusiness.co.nz)

## CHARITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION SUPPORT

[www.charities.govt.nz/strengthening-your-charity](http://www.charities.govt.nz/strengthening-your-charity)

[www.volunteeringnz.org.nz](http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz)

[www.msdc.govt.nz/about-msdc-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-services-for-outcomes/organisational-capability-self-assessment-tool.html](http://www.msdc.govt.nz/about-msdc-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-services-for-outcomes/organisational-capability-self-assessment-tool.html)

## NGO NETWORKING

[www.angoa.org.nz](http://www.angoa.org.nz)

[www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/contact-vnz/regional-volunteer-centres](http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/contact-vnz/regional-volunteer-centres)

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT

[www.wheaton.edu/HDI](http://www.wheaton.edu/HDI)

<http://toolkit.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au/chapter/18/92>

## LEADERSHIP

[www.toastmasters.org.nz](http://www.toastmasters.org.nz)

[www.rotary.org.nz](http://www.rotary.org.nz)

[http://soar.ucsc.edu/forms/developing\\_leadership.pdf](http://soar.ucsc.edu/forms/developing_leadership.pdf)

[www.sideroad.com/Leadership/index.html](http://www.sideroad.com/Leadership/index.html)

Most services set up for business are also more than happy to help NGOs. Pay a visit to your local chamber of commerce or business network as they can offer fantastic support.

# My notes

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**This guide was developed by Resilient Organisations – a public good research programme based in New Zealand. We have been researching what makes organisations resilient to crises since 2004.**

Resilient Organisations is a collaboration between top New Zealand research universities, particularly the University of Canterbury and University of Auckland. We are funded by the Natural Hazards Platform and supported by a diverse group of industry partners and advisors. We are a multi-disciplinary team of over 20 researchers, representing a synthesis of engineering, science and business leadership aimed at transforming organisations into those that both survive major events and thrive in the aftermath.

See [www.resorgs.org.nz](http://www.resorgs.org.nz) for further information

# Resilient ORGANISATIONS

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