

Why This Manual Exists

The Manual's own tier structure names its final stage in every chapter: Tier 4, Thriving, a self-sustaining community. Most of the Manual, and most of The Act of Surviving, is about getting a household to that point, then coordinating with a group during one event's aftermath. Neither actually answers what happens next: how a group of households turns into an actual, lasting institution, one that outlives the event that brought it together in the first place.

Where this picks up

Surviving Part 8 covers the start of this: who to approach first, a roster, a weekly check-in, sharing the load so nobody burns out. That's real, and it works for coordinating through one event. This manual picks up once a group is past that point, no longer just getting through something together, but actually trying to become a place people live for years, raise families in, and pass on to a next generation.

That's a different kind of problem. A mutual-aid roster doesn't need a justice system. A weekly check-in doesn't need a plan for what happens when the person who founded the group is gone. A group that's coordinating through a shared emergency doesn't need to decide, in advance, how big it's willing to get before it splits into two. A group trying to last does.

This has a real research base, even if it doesn't feel like one

Every other page on this site cites something like the CDC, FEMA, or a state statute, a single fact with a single clear answer. This manual is different: it draws on real, peer-reviewed and widely cited research, but the research itself is less about a single correct number and more about patterns that hold up across many real cases. Three threads run through most of what follows:

- **Commons governance.** Elinor Ostrom's study of over 800 real cases of groups successfully managing a shared resource, water systems, fisheries, forests, over long periods, found the same eight design principles present again and again in the ones that lasted. Chapter 5 is built around them directly.
- **Intentional-community research.** Real communities have operated continuously for a century or more, Hutterite colonies since 1874, the Israeli kibbutz movement since 1909, and their actual practices are documented, not guessed at. Peer-reviewed survey research on present-day intentional communities has also overturned some common assumptions about what longevity actually requires.

- **Disaster-recovery social capital.** Research comparing real post-disaster recoveries (Tokyo in 1923, Kobe in 1995, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina) found that the depth of a community's actual relationships and trust, not aid money or infrastructure spending, was what predicted whether it recovered.

One chapter is different, and says so

Everything above is sourced to real research about how communities function, regardless of why they came together. Chapter 12 reasons instead about what's structurally different if a group isn't recovering from one event but adapting to a genuinely new, permanent baseline. That's informed reasoning, not settled research, and it's kept in its own clearly labeled chapter rather than blended into the sourced material around it, the same way this site already separates a Northern Utah note from a federal statistic, just at the scale of a whole chapter instead of a paragraph.

Next: Founding

The first real question isn't how to govern a community. It's who you're actually building one with. See Chapter 2: Founding.

Sources

- Elinor Ostrom's design principles for durable commons governance, drawn from a study of 800+ real cases: P2P Foundation; Agrarian Trust
- Intentional-community longevity and decision-making structure research: Sociological Spectrum, "Measuring Success in Intentional Communities"
- Social capital as the strongest predictor of post-disaster recovery, comparing Tokyo, Kobe, Tamil Nadu, and New Orleans: Daniel P. Aldrich, *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery* (University of Chicago Press)