

BEYOND BARRIERS



Anni Fordham
Churchill Fellow

The Bob and June Prickett Churchill Fellowship to investigate the provision of highly accessible information to people impacted by emergencies

This research project explored how we can ensure critical emergency information reaches everyone when it matters most – including people with disabilities, multilingual communities and others with specific communication needs.

The research journey spanned eight weeks across Switzerland, the United States, Japan and New Zealand, exploring best practice and emerging trends through interviews with over 100 experts.

The findings offer a roadmap to improving Australia's emergency information systems and strengthening the delivery of life-saving messages to all community members, regardless of language, ability or circumstance.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Anni Fordham is a Churchill Fellow with extensive experience in communications and emergency management. She has led public information responses during major emergencies across Australia and helped shape best practice through national collaboration. Anni is passionate about ensuring life-saving information is accessible to all, helping people make safe decisions when every second counts.

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Anni is available to present at conferences, workshops and other professional events. Presentations can be tailored to focus on specific aspects of emergency information best practice, including translation strategies, disability access, technology partnerships or international trends.

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WOW!! This is amazing and I can't wait to see how it affects policy and practice internationally. Thank you so much for investing your time, resources, and passion in this important project. We are better because of the work you've done here.

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— Associate Professor
Jeannette Sutton

*Emergency and Risk
Communication Message
Testing Lab, State University
of New York at Albany*



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KEY THEMES

Balance of technology and human connection

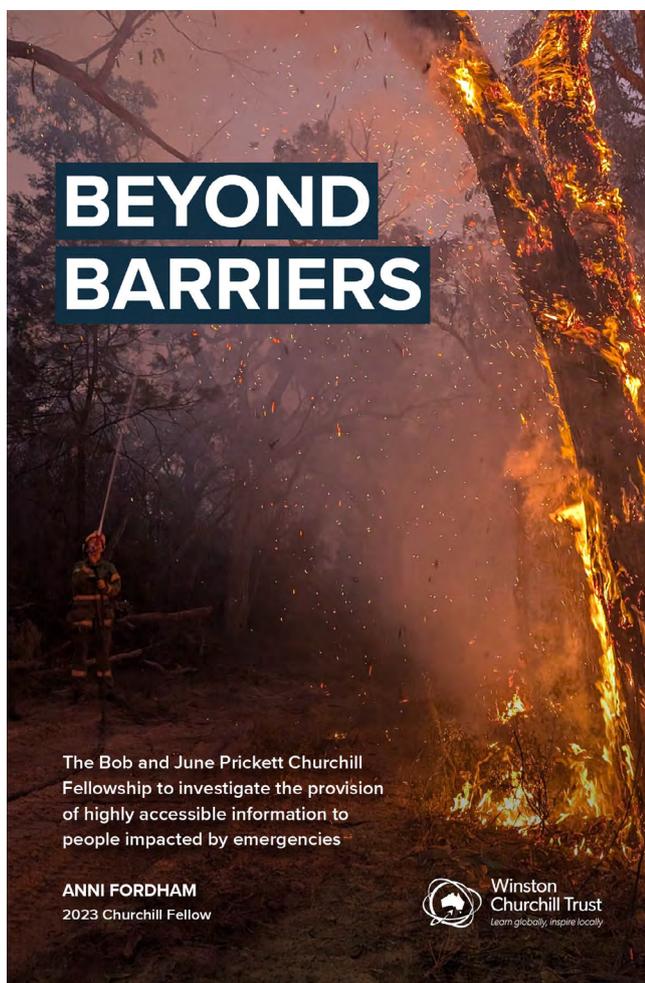
While technological innovation is essential, the most effective emergency warning systems balance advanced technology with strong community networks. Countries demonstrating best practice maintain multiple communication pathways, ensuring critical information gets through even when primary systems fail.

Inclusive community partnerships

The most effective strategies for reaching diverse communities are built on strong relationships with community leaders and cultural organisations. These trusted intermediaries -- or “cultural brokers” -- go beyond translation to tailor information in ways that truly resonate with their communities, ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, language barriers, and cultural differences.

Evidence-based message construction

Research demonstrates that warning effectiveness improves significantly when messages follow consistent, evidence-based frameworks. Standardised approaches to message construction help people understand threats, assess personal relevance and feel confident taking protective action. These frameworks also provide a foundation for accessible translations and adaptations, ensuring consistent quality across multiple formats and languages.



Research as core business

Leading agencies are transforming how they integrate research into practice, embedding it as a standard operational function. This research-driven approach enables agencies to make evidence-based investment decisions and systematically improve warning systems over time.

The growing threat of misinformation

The spread of false information during disasters has become a critical challenge for emergency communicators. The research found examples where misinformation escalated from a communication issue to a safety threat that directly impeded response efforts. This threat is intensifying as social media platforms reduce investment in fact-checking and content moderation.

View the full report:
churchilltrust.com.au

This information is available in alternative formats.

