Librarian First Responders: Transforming Public Library Services in the Wake of Natural Disasters

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About Us

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"Regarding the impact of hurricanes and other natural disasters, **readiness is the key to resilience!**"

Dwight McInvaill, Library Director, Georgetown County, South Carolina

Research Locations

Studies from 2015-2024: Focused on People, Partnerships, and Communications

South Carolina (2015-2017) ● **Focus group meetings** ● **Survey**	Flooding, Hurricanes
South Carolina (2015-2017) ● **Survey**	Community members' use of public library disaster information services
Houston, TX (2018-2019) ● **Focus group meetings**	Hurricane Harvey
Northern California (2022) ● **Focus group meetings** ● **Interview** ● **Informal discussions**	Wildfires
Kentucky (2023) ● **Focus group meetings** ● **Interviews** ● **Informal discussions**	Tornadoes (West) | Flooding/Mudslides (East)
Southern California (2024) ● **Focus group meetings** ● **Interviews** ● **Informal discussions**	Multiple disasters including floods, fire, extreme heat, earthquakes, etc.

Library Disaster Preparedness Project

For nearly ten years, the research team of Dr. Feili Tu-Keefner, Denise Lyons, and April Hobbs have been studying libraries during disasters. There have been many examples of how libraries served their communities through response and recovery.

Media
Find videos and photos showcasing key moments from the project.

Resources
Find a curated selection of resources to help organizations and communities prepare for disasters and emergencies. Some

Get in Touch
Please use the following link to get in touch with us.

Building a Culture of Preparedness

"Organizations that fare best during a disaster are those that prepare ahead of time and train all staff members to take action. These organizations also create a culture of preparedness. They encourage shared responsibility and build preparedness activities into regular routines. Preparedness becomes a facet of "business as usual" instead of a singular event or yearly exercise."

Emergency preparedness starts with you
be prepared
make a plan   build a kit   stay informed   ALERT

Basic Required Competencies

Essential Competencies

https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/essential-competencies /

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Disaster/Health Information Services

Technology & Information Literacy

Community Engagement & Outreach

Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery

- Deliver effective disaster health information services in an ethical manner.
- Collaborating with health sciences information professionals to prepare health information resources and deliver these services
- Promoting the utilization of various resources in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to enhance community resilience

Crisis Leadership

1. **Sense Making:** Grasping Crises as They Unfold

2. **Decision Making and Coordinating:** Shaping the Crisis Response

3. **Meaning Making:** Constructing a Crisis Narrative

4. **Ending a Crisis:** Managing Accountability

5. **Learning and Changing:** From Crisis to Reform

Emotional Intelligence at Work

1. **Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others

2. **Self-Regulation:** The ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods, the propensity to suspend judgment- to think before acting

3. **Motivation:** A passion to work for reasons that go beyond money or status, a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence

4. **Empathy:** The ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions

5. **Social Skill:** Proficiency in managing relationships and building networks, an ability to find common ground and build rapport

Boin, A., Hart, P., Stern, E., & Sundelius, B. (2005). *The politics of crisis management: Public leadership under pressure.* New York: Cambridge University Press

Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review 76* (6):93–102.

Articles

Libraries on the Front Lines: The Imperative for Disaster-Ready Information Professionals

Feili Tu-Keefner ✉ iD, April Hobbs iD & Denise Lyons iD

📄 Full Article | 🖼 Figures & data | 📑 References | 66 Citations | 📊 Metrics | 🖨 Reprints & Permissions | **Read this article**

Abstract

Libraries, particularly local public libraries, have evolved into hubs for community-first services, extending beyond traditional roles. Library personnel are now expected to act as first responders and crisis leaders during times such as natural disasters. This report documents the critical crisis leadership qualifications required for library personnel, identified through comprehensive research from 2015 to 2023. Findings from these situation-specific case studies call attention to the community's needs for library services during emergencies, underscoring the requirement for LIS education to include disaster management. Continuing education (CE) is also critical in preparing information professionals for these essential roles.

Keywords:

Public libraries | crisis leadership | disaster preparedness | emotional intelligence at work | natural disasters

Leadership Qualifications: Learning, Changing, and Ending Crises

"… it would be beneficial for us to start looking at ways to be prepared if this should ever happen again. And maybe looking at organizations that we could connect with now, so that if this should ever happen, we are better prepared to provide services and information. …"
(Library Administrator Subject – 2015)

Learning, Changing, and Ending Crises

"… In between [Hurricane] Ike and [Hurricane] Harvey we had started doing Camp STREAM which is our norm now our normal summer day camp offering. So we had more experience with administering and all the logistical stuff that goes into taking care of kids and keeping them engaged for an entire day that we're able to bring to that experience with Harvey that we didn't have that experience when we did this for Ike. …"
(Library Administrator – 2018)

"…Teaching them [community members] little preparedness things like have a list of local numbers and emails, just in general having a plan made beforehand. …"
(Library staff – 2023)

Regarding Advocacy and Community Engagement

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To assist information professionals in developing strategies for community advocacy, engagement, and outreach, please rank the priorities of these ten tips and create a tailored list appropriate for specific information environments. Once completed, the ranked list can be saved as a PDF for download.

Top Ten Tips Regarding Advocacy and Community Engagement:

Provide education, training, and professional development opportunities

Believe that librarians must take a leadership role

Develop plans for disaster preparedness and recovery

Establish partnerships with organizations and agencies

Facilitate building of community capacity and resources

Disseminate trustworthy resources in multiple languages

Strengthening Library Disaster Preparedness and Community Resilience

- **Develop a Comprehensive Natural Disaster Policy**
  - Establish guidelines and protocols for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery
- **Conduct Community Needs Assessments**
  - Create a detailed community profile informing disaster planning and services
- **Integrate Resilience Hub Infrastructure into LIS Programs**
  - Support libraries to serve as resilience hubs and centers for disaster-related community support
- **Provide Staff Training in Emergency Services and Disaster Response**
  - Ensure library personnel are prepared to assist during emergencies through specialized training programs
- **Expand Technology Lending Services**
  - Offer resources such as laptops, hotspots, and other essential technology for community use during disruptions
- **Develop a Disaster Recovery Resource Collection**
  - Collect resources on home rebuilding, wildfire-resistant landscaping, and other recovery-focused topics

Recommendations

Educate the Public on Personal Preparedness
- Encourage practices such as scanning important documents and storing critical information in multiple secure locations
- *"Survivors will tell you to prepare."* (Library Staff, 2022)

Support Ongoing Professional Development for Staff and Managers
- Provide training in areas such as emergency services, de-escalation techniques, human resources, self-care, and technology

Establish Strategic Partnerships Before a Crisis Hits
- Identify systems and structures that offer flexibility and assess available resources to strengthen collaboration during emergencies

Understand the Library's Role Within Broader Context
- For example, understand the library's position in the broader framework to ensure clear communication channels and minimize information duplication

Questions?

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