

NNLM Region 2 Emergency Response and
Preparedness Advisory Committee

PRESENTS

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PANEL

Crisis Leadership for Libraries: Equipping Library Personnel to Be Librarian First Responders

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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**



Building a Culture of Preparedness

Learning from the “Recovering Together” project, NorthNet Library System:
<https://libraryrecovery.org>

“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.”



Research Locations

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

<u>South Carolina (2015-2017)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Survey</u>	Flooding, Hurricanes
<u>South Carolina (2015-2017)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Survey</u>	Community members' use of public library disaster information services
<u>Houston, TX (2018-2019)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>	Hurricane Harvey
<u>Northern California (2022)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interview</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	Wildfires
<u>Kentucky (2023)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	Tornadoes (West) Flooding/Mudslides (East)
<u>Southern California (2024)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● <u>Focus group meetings</u>● <u>Interviews</u>● <u>Informal discussions</u>	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.

Basic Required Competencies



Essential Competencies

Disaster/Health Information Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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
Technology & Information Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitating technology access (including social media)• Promoting information and technology literacies• Developing infodemic management strategies to proactively counter mis/disinformation through prebunking and debunking approaches
Community Engagement & Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing community profiles and assessing local disaster information needs• Advocating for the local communities the libraries serve• Taking a leadership role in community engagement• Demonstrating creativity and flexibility in delivering community-centered information services during and after a disaster
Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating library disaster preparedness policies and plans, including salvaging damaged collections• Demonstrating proficiency in emergency and disaster management, including preparedness and response• Demonstrating the ability to staff it or the ability to train staff to

Essential Competencies

[https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/essential-competencies /](https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/essential-competencies/)

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Disaster/Health Information Services

- Deliver effective disaster health information services in an ethical manner.

Technology & Information Literacy

- Collaborating with health sciences information professionals to prepare health information resources and deliver these services

Community Engagement & Outreach

- Promoting the utilization of various resources in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to enhance community resilience

Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery

Basic Required Competencies

- Disaster/Health Information Services
- Technology & Information Literacy
- Community Engagement & Outreach
- Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery
- Communication & Advocacy
- Library Collaborations with Public and Private Sectors
- Leadership & Organizational Development
- Team & Staff Development
- Infrastructure Risk Messaging
- Information Design for Hazard Response
- Sector-Specific Communication Coordination
- Data Stewardship and Community Archiving for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
- Post-Disaster Analysis and Community Resilience

Disaster/Health Information Services



- 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
- “ ... librarian has to do what you always do, which is to pull information together, make sure it's accurate. Get it out there. ...”
 - “ ... just playing on those skills that we use at work on a daily basis, and then applying them to the [crisis] situation ...”
 - “ ... I found it a challenge just keeping up with the rapid pace of the amount of information that was coming out. ... when I started collecting it on behalf of the library and knowing that we were going to be posting it. ...”

MLA Code of Ethics:

<https://www.mlanet.org/resources/code-of-ethics-for-health-science-librarianship/>

Community Engagement & Outreach



- Developing community profiles and assessing local disaster information needs
 - Advocating for the local communities the libraries serve
 - Taking a leadership role in community engagement
 - Demonstrating creativity and flexibility in delivering community-centered information services during and after a disaster
- “We partner with the Jewish Community Center...They were also devastated, in fact, one of the challenges for us was finding a location to open temporarily. ‘Look this is a win-win situation for us both’ ...”
 - “ ... in a community called Valley center, which is very inland, had such a wildfire. There was evacuation. The Red Cross opened up one of the schools, **but everybody came to the library** and. Why? Because they needed to talk to their friends and family, let them know they’re okay. And they know our Internet, like, it’s a known thing of, like, little library for Internet. ...”
 - “ ... We continue to have the strongest and best relationship with our local county Council on Aging. This was a group that we would work with to share information and resources before, during, and after a disaster. As their mission is more service aligned like ours at the library - working with them seems to be a good fit. We have a good relationship with the appropriate folks at the county and city level - but more of their focus is usually on safety and infrastructure. ...”

Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery

- Creating library disaster preparedness policies and plans, including salvaging damaged collections
- Demonstrating proficiency in emergency and disaster management, including preparedness and response
- Demonstrating the ability to staff it or the ability to train staff to serve in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC)
- Being able to de-escalate situations and provide support during a crisis
- Regularly promoting knowledge of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to strengthen community resilience

Communication & Advocacy



- Advocate for the sustainability of the library, including adequate funding
- Facilitating crisis communications, which includes public relations and public speaking
- “... when I need money to build the next library, part of my message is you're not building just the library. You're building a potential **local assistance center**. And look how well it got used there. So we're not shy about sending pictures. ... **the library is the perfect place because it's a resource. All reality, it's a resource center ...**”
- “ ... When we had that flood and spring Valley was determined [to create a] **local assistance center**, ...**36 hours or something like that**, you were ready to go. ...”



Library Collaborations with Public and Private Sectors

- Building and sustaining partnerships with public health government agencies and local government officials
- Understanding community needs, including socio-economic factors, within the surrounding environment to foster more effective collaboration
- Working with public health government agencies and local government officials
 - “... In California, library staff can be called upon to serve in the emergency operations center. Several administrators noted they worked with the Public Health Department, the State Parks Department, the Red Cross, and Cal Fire. ...”
 - “ ... the county, altogether, we have more than 40 departments, and we’re all arranged into one of four business groups. So we belong to a business group called the Land Use and Environment Group. ... when these emergencies happen, we’re working directly with emergency response. ...”



Leadership & Organizational Development

- Identifying and cultivating qualified candidates for crisis leadership development
- Promoting crisis leadership competencies among library staff

Team & Staff Development

- Facilitating team-building activities
- Providing professional development opportunities and training for library staff





Tu-Keefner, F., Hobbs, A., & Lyons, D. (2025) Libraries on the front lines: The imperative for disaster-ready information professionals. *Journal Library Administration*, 65(1), 79-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2024.2432230>

Articles


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

Feili Tu-Keefner , April Hobbs  & Denise Lyons 

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 Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2024.2432230>




 Full Article

 Figures & data

 References

 Citations

 Metrics

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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

Infrastructure Risk Messaging

- Conveying technical information about power, healthcare, and emergency systems during hazard events using clear, audience-appropriate language
- Developing informational materials that align hazard forecasts with local facility operations and planning needs
- Collaborating with professionals across sectors to align forecast data with service readiness and coordination



Information Design for Hazard Response



- Creating visual and text-based alerts to clarify complex information and enhance utility for public-facing professionals, with a focus on environmental conditions to support timely response
- Testing and refining message formats to ensure clarity and improve comprehension of the content
- Using multiple formats and frequencies of updates to support time-sensitive decision-making

Sector-Specific Communication Coordination

- Collaborating with local professionals in health, safety, and emergency management to tailor information delivery and ensure that library services are aligned with first responders' operational needs and support their critical functions
- Partnering with other libraries and professional associations to develop training resources that enhance understanding of basic technical forecast information and its practical applications
- Supporting internal organizational workflows with timely updates and interpretation of hazard-related information



Data Stewardship and Community Archiving for Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

- Developing or adapting a digital data governance plan to ensure the preservation of digital objects collected before, during, and after a disaster event
- Establishing or partnering with local community organizations to develop and maintain a community archive that preserves materials and resources collected from the local community



Post-Disaster Analysis and Community Resilience

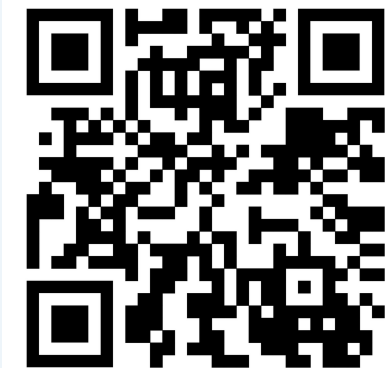
- Documenting specific experiences related to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery during each crisis event to inform and improve future disaster policies and plans
- Assessing the performance of library personnel during a disaster to guide improvements in staff training
- Evaluating the library operations during a disaster to strengthen future disaster policies and plans
- Integrating lessons from each disaster and post-disaster evaluations to implement meaningful changes in library services and community outreach programs, thereby strengthening resilience
- Supporting community healing and the rebuilding of local capacity following each disaster incident



Regarding Advocacy and Community Engagement



<https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/top-ten-tips-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

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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