

Librarian First Responders:

Transforming Public Services in

the Wake of Natural Disasters

Dr. Feili Tu-Keefner | University of South Carolina


April Hobbs | Network of the National Library of Medicine, Region 2

29 October 2025

About Us



Dr. Feili Tu-Keefner

 **School of Information Science**
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Denise Lyons

 Kentucky Department for
Libraries and Archives



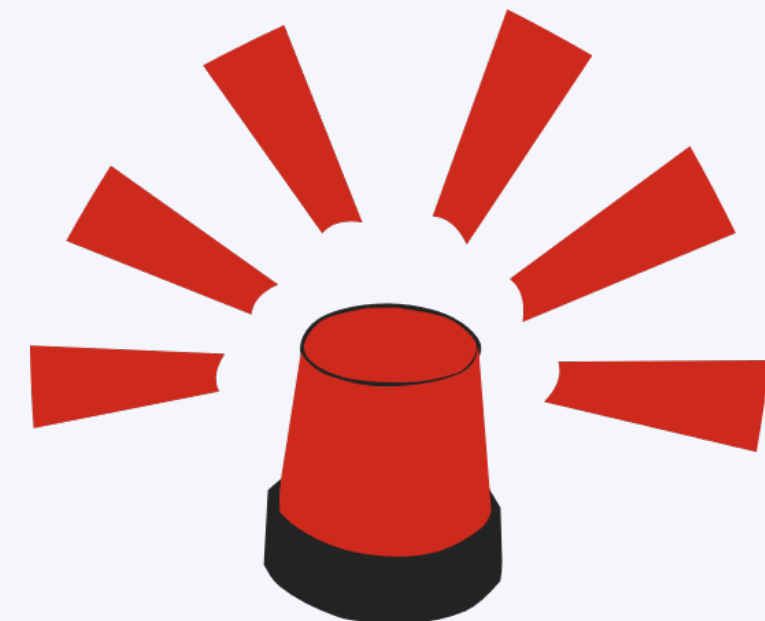
April Hobbs

 **NNLM** Network of the
National Library of Medicine



**“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 “Recovery 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.”



Resource Repository

This website project was made possible with funding from the NNLM
Region 2 Emergency Preparedness Grant.

<https://preparedlibraries.org>



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
- Resources**
Find a curated selection of resources to help organizations
- Get in Touch**
Please use the following link to get in touch with us.

● ● Basic Required Competencies

Presentations Publications **Studies** Media Team States ▾ Resources CONTACT

Essential Competencies

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- Disaster/Health Information Services**
- Technology & Information Literacy
- Community Engagement & Outreach
- Disaster Preparedness, Response, & Recovery
- Communication & Advocacy

- 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

Basic Required Competencies

- **Disaster/Health Information Services**
- **Technology and Information Literacy**
- **Community Engagement and Outreach**
- **Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery**
- **Communication and Advocacy**
- **Library Collaborations with Public and Private Sectors**
- **Leadership and Organizational Development**
- **Team and Staff Development**
- **Infrastructure Risk Management**
- **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.
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“ ... librarian has to do what you always do, which is to pull information together, make sure it's accurate. Get it out there. ...”

ALA Code of Ethics:

<https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>



Technology & Information Literacy



- **Facilitating technology access (including social media)**
- **Promoting information and technology literacies**
- **Developing infodemic management strategies to proactively counter mis/dis/malinformation through prebunking and debunking approaches**





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 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. ...”

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 ...**”

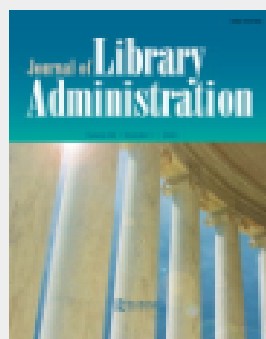


Leadership & Organizational Development

- 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.



[Journal homepage](#)

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>

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Articles

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

Feili Tu-Keefner , April Hobbs & Denise Lyons

Pages 79-99 | Published online: 09 Dec 2024

Cite this article

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2024.2432230>

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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.

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● ● Be The Leader: 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. ...”



Develop a Comprehensive Natural Disaster Policy

- Establish guidelines and protocols for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery

Conduct Community Needs Assessment

- 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

Best Practices ●●



Expand 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 building, 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."*

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

● ● Recommendations

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



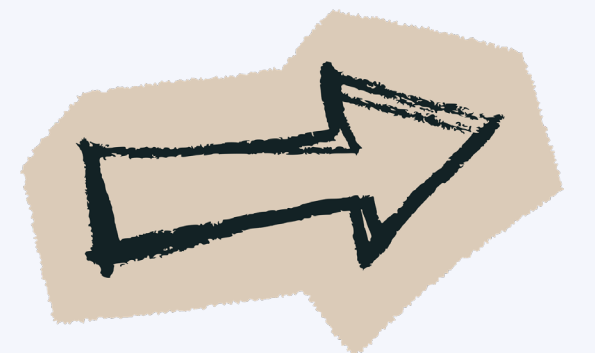
● ● **Featured Resource: dPlan**

- **What is it?**
 - **It is an online, emergency preparedness and response tool for arts and cultural organizations, regardless of size, scope, or discipline.**
 - **Using dPlan can help you to:**
 - **prevent or mitigate disasters**
 - **prepare for the most likely emergencies**
 - **respond quickly to minimize damage**
 - **recover effectively while continuing to provide services to your community**
- **How to create an account:**
 - **Select a Plan – Pocket Response Resource (FREE) OR Annual Plan (Paid)**
 - **Fill out the information**
 - **Organization, full name, email, job title, etc.**
 - **Confirm your email.**

Pocket Response Resource (PRR)

- You will download the PRR instructions.
 - **TRICK TO PRR: Less is more!**
 - **Fill out a separate PRR for each of your buildings and locations.**
 - **Consider the security of your document... where will you store it?**
- **What if my organization has multiple facilities/buildings on a campus/complex?**
 - **Staff from each facility must work together to complete items that are common across the organization**
 - **i.e., institutional contacts and responses**
 - **Tailor the remainder to specific locations**

NOW TO THE DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE PRR






Side A: Communications

Break It Down

- Institutional Contacts: ED, etc.
- Response Team: Team Leader, etc.
- Building Contacts: Facilities, etc.
- First Responders: Emergency Management, etc.
- Mutual Aid Partners
- Other Contacts
- Emergency Recovery Services: Freezer Storage, etc.

Template for Pocket Response Resource, released 6/30/2022, revised 4/29/2024.
SIDE A (Communications). Use this side for phone numbers for the individuals and organizations you are most likely to need to talk to in the first minutes and hours after an emergency occurs.

[Organization Name]	RESPONSE TEAM	BUILDING CONTACTS	FIRST RESPONDERS	EMERGENCY RECOVERY SERVICES
Pocket Response Resource Date revised: <hr/> INSTITUTIONAL CONTACTS [link to your online ArtsReady or dPlan account] Main Emergency Management Office (if you have a parent organization) [office phone] / [email] / Executive Director [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Director of [department] [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Communications and Public Relations Officer [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Financial Services / Accountant [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] House Manager [name] [company name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Add contact information for additional departments such as collections, environmental/health services, IT, resident companies, tenants or long-term renters, visiting performers, etc.	Team Leader [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Members [name] [Response Team role] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] [name] [Response Team role] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] FREE SPACE <i>Use this space for additional instructions for immediate emergency response. This might include a staff phone tree; contact information for student and volunteer employees, frequent contractors, renters, etc.; or overflow from other columns.</i>	Facilities / Building Manager [street address of building] [name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] <i>Add additional buildings and separate facilities (including rentals) as needed. Include street address to reference when calling emergency services.</i> Electric [phone] Elevators [phone] Fire Suppression [phone] Gas [phone] Janitorial Services [name] [company name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] Plumber [phone] Security [name] [company name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] Telephone [phone] Water – Fire Sprinklers [phone] Water – Potable [phone] Windows/Glass [phone]	Emergency 9-1-1 Ambulance / Emergency Medical [phone] City Emergency Management [phone] County Emergency Management [phone] Fire Department [phone] Health Department [phone] Police Department / Law Enforcement [phone] Red Cross [phone] State Office of Emergency Services [phone] <hr/> MUTUAL AID PARTNERS (“BATTLE BUDDIES”) Alternate facility(ies) for operations [name] [organization] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] <hr/> OTHER CONTACTS Arts Council (local and/or state) Trade/professional associations Performing Arts Readiness Project www.performingartsreadiness.org ; PAR@lyrasis.org NCAPER www.ncaper.org ; mquinlanhayes@ncaper.org dPlan dplan.org ; help@dplan.org National Heritage Responders 1-202-661-8068	Building Recovery – Local company [name] [phone] Building Recovery – National company [name] [phone] Collections Conservator [name] [phone] Data Recovery Service [name] [phone] Exterminator / Pest Control Service [name] [phone] FEMA Disaster Assistance 800-621-FEMA Freezer Storage [name] [phone] Insurance Contact / Agent [name] [company name] [office phone] / [home phone] / [cell] / [email] / [home email] Structural Architect / Building Engineer [name] [phone] Temporary Storage [name] [phone] Add additional contact information for other needs related to your primary services.

Side B: Actions

Break It Down

SIDE B (Actions). Use this side to provide step-by-step instructions for staff and affiliated personnel who will respond to a disaster affecting your own institution. Ideally, steps should already be defined in the organization/library/museum disaster plan. This abbreviated document is NOT intended to be a substitute for a comprehensive emergency plan. Instead, it should distill the most important actions to be taken in the first minutes and hours after an event occurs that affects collections, especially those that occur when staff members are away from their offices.

<p>Immediate Response and Checklist for Recovery</p> <hr/> <p>SITUATION REPORT</p> <p>Know these answers when speaking with First Responders and Insurance Agents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- Closest cross-streets to emergency site -- Who is in charge? -- What is the safety status? -- What has happened and the cause? -- Are people injured? -- What are the hazards? -- Who discovered and reported the damage? -- What has been done so far? -- Can the staff handle the situation initially? -- Who is handling the media? <p>Notes:</p> <hr/> <p>DESIGNATED ASSEMBLY AREA: <i>Describe where people should go following an evacuation.</i></p> <hr/> <p>AREAS OF REFUGE: <i>Describe where people should go to shelter-in-place.</i></p>	<p>STEP 1: IMMEDIATE RESPONSE</p> <p>Notification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If appropriate, make Public Announcement for evacuation <i>Insert text for public announcement for (1) when an emergency interrupts your operations and patrons must leave and (2) when shelter-in-place is required.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> First Responders (contact info on other side) <input type="checkbox"/> Response Team Leader (contact info on other side) <p>Human Safety & Building Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Address personal or medical emergencies <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that all staff and visitors are safe and accounted for <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain security of building and property <p>Additional Notifications, as appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Contacts <input type="checkbox"/> Building Contacts & Utilities <input type="checkbox"/> If shared facility, contact neighbors, renters, landlord, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff phone tree <input type="checkbox"/> Management/contact of guest artist or company 	<p>STEP 2: COMMUNICATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Activate the Readiness/Disaster Plan's emergency response actions <input type="checkbox"/> Establish communication with appropriate local & regional emergency management <input type="checkbox"/> Contact your Communications and Public Relations Officer, if not already done <input type="checkbox"/> Post emergency information and instructions on the institutional website and through social media <p>ASSESSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure through proper authorities that all hazards are cleared before entering building <input type="checkbox"/> Follow the instructions of your Response Team <input type="checkbox"/> Document damage with photos, videos, and notes <input type="checkbox"/> Assess damage to collections and assets, buildings, offices, and information systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What areas affected, in what way, and to what degree? <input type="checkbox"/> What types of materials are damaged? <input type="checkbox"/> Are critical information systems functional / safe? <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain security of assets <input type="checkbox"/> Stabilize the temperature and humidity at your facility <input type="checkbox"/> Complete the Incident Report form in your Readiness/Disaster Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Gather emergency response supplies <input type="checkbox"/> Supply locations 	<p>OTHER</p> <p><i>Use this section for information about security alarm codes, locations of keys, utility shutoffs, access to loading docks, etc., or paste in additional instructions, e.g. for response to an active shooter, disruptive person, or earthquake. You may also list basic policies such as those addressing smoking/vaping, alcohol, firearms, recording/photography.</i></p> <p>FLOORPLAN</p> <p><i>You may want to insert your venue's floorplan here with the locations of emergency exits, emergency equipment, shelter-in-place area, audience and staff evacuation muster areas, and emergency shutoffs.</i></p>	<p>ASSETS PRIORITIES</p> <p><i>Using the full list in your ArtsReady/dPlan Readiness Plan, summarize here your priority collections and assets so that they will be taken care of and salvaged first. These may be according to format (photographs), use (costumes for a current production; critical office files), value (rare violin; computer server), etc. Include special instructions for handling and access.</i></p> <p>First priority:</p> <p>Second priority:</p>
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- Situation Report
- Designated Assembly Area
- Areas of Refuge
- Step 1: Immediate Response
 - Notification
 - Human Safety, etc.
- Step 2: Communication
- Assessment
- Floorplan
- Assets Priorities
 - First Priority, etc.

Top Ten Tips



<https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/top-ten-tips-regarding-advocacy-and-community-engagement/>

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



Top 10 Tips Activity



<https://preparedlibraries.org/studies/top-ten-tips-regarding-advocacy-and-community-engagement/>

Get in a group of 3-4 people.

Use the QR code or URL to the left to access the Top 10 Tips page.

Rank the tips according to what you perceive is the most important to the least important.

Discuss among your group why you ranked them the way you did.



Thank you

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To request a copy of the PPT Slides:



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