

A FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARIES

Building Resilient Libraries and Communities

A Framework for Community-First Disaster
Information Services in Libraries



Evidence from a decade of field research, 2015 to 2024

Prepared by Feili Tu-Keefner and the Research Team
2026

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Preface

Public libraries are essential anchors for the communities they serve and their members. They are open to everyone, among the most trusted public-facing institutions in their communities, and present in places of every size. When a flood, hurricane, wildfire, tornado, earthquake, or period of extreme heat disrupts ordinary life, residents turn to their library for reliable information, working technology, and the steady help of librarians who know the community well. This framework was written to honor that responsibility and to make it easier to meet.

The guidance gathered here did not emerge solely from theory. It is the product of a decade of field research conducted between 2015 and 2024 across six situation-specific case studies in South Carolina, Texas, California, and Kentucky. In focus group meetings, a survey, and interviews, librarians, administrators, frontline staff, and community members described what worked, what did not, and what they wished they had prepared in advance. Their experience, read alongside established scholarship on health risk communication, serves as the foundation for every recommendation that follows.

A framework is useful only if library personnel can adapt it. For that reason, the six sections are deliberately portable. A small rural branch and a large urban system face very different constraints, and the guidance is meant to be selected, scaled, and tailored to local risk, capacity, and culture rather than applied as a fixed checklist. Our hope is that this document serves two audiences at once: libraries strengthening their own readiness today, and the researchers and educators building the evidence base for the public value of libraries in times of crisis.

Feili Tu-Keefner, Denise Lyons, and April Hobbs

On behalf of the Research Team

Acknowledgments

This framework reflects the generosity of the many library professionals and community members who shared their time and expertise across a decade of study. The research team is grateful to the administrators, librarians, and frontline staff of the public library systems that participated in this work, including the Richland Library, Houston Public Library, as well as the many library systems and branches across South Carolina, Northern and Southern California, and western and eastern Kentucky that opened their doors during challenging periods of response and recovery.

The initial South Carolina study was supported by the 2015 SC Floods Research Initiative and sponsored by the Office of the Vice President for Research. Across this program of work, the research design was informed by established scholarship on effective health risk communication for vulnerable populations (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009). The development of this framework document was supported by funding from the 2024 Excel Program for Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, sponsored by the Offices of the President, the Vice President for Research, and the Provost at the University of South Carolina, as well as by the 2024 National Leadership Grants for Libraries program of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Finally, the team extends its appreciation to our partners nationwide for their collaboration, which made these services possible, and for their insights, which continue to strengthen the practice of community-first disaster information services.

Glossary

The following terms are used throughout this framework. Definitions are written for practitioners and reflect common usage in library and emergency management practice.

Community-first disaster information services. Library-led or library-partnered information services that are co-designed, planned, and delivered around the assessed needs, languages, vulnerabilities, and local assets of a specific community across the disaster cycle- preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation- with the library serving as a trusted, accessible information hub and connector among residents, emergency managers, government agencies, health and social-service organizations, and community partners.

Misinformation. False, inaccurate, or misleading information that is created, interpreted, or shared without deliberate intent to deceive or cause harm.

Disinformation. False information that is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead.

Malinformation. Information based on fact, used out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.

Prebunking. A proactive, inoculation-based strategy that prepares audiences in advance to recognize and resist misleading claims before they encounter them.

Debunking. A reactive strategy that corrects false or misleading claims after they have circulated, using clear and credible evidence.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC). A physical or virtual facility from which leaders of a jurisdiction or organization coordinate information and resources to support incident management during an emergency, enabling coordination across multiple agencies. Public libraries and librarians may support an EOC, including serving as primary or backup staff.

Disaster Assistance Center. A general term for a one-stop site where residents access recovery services and support after a disaster. Depending on the jurisdiction and declaration status, this may be a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) or a state- or locally operated center, such as a Local Assistance Center (LAC). Public libraries may host or help staff such centers.

Resilience. The capacity of a system, community, or society exposed to a hazard to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform, and recover from the effects of that hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including the preservation and restoration of its essential structures and functions. In the context of disaster and information services, resilience is understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed outcome, encompassing the period before, during, and after an adverse event. Within library and information science, resilience denotes the collective adaptive

capacity of a community, which public libraries strengthen by functioning as trusted information providers, conveners of partnerships, and essential community organizations across all phases of the disaster cycle. See also *community resilience* and *library resilience*, which apply this general capacity to two specific units of analysis: the place-based community and the library as an organization, respectively.

Community resilience. The collective, place-based capacity of a community to prepare for, withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity, including natural disasters, public health emergencies, economic disruption, and other hazards. Community resilience is best understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state, one that links a network of adaptive capacities, such as social connectedness, local knowledge, communication, leadership, economic resources, and preparedness, to successful adaptation following disturbance. Within library and information science, community resilience refers to the collective capacity that public libraries help strengthen by serving as trusted information providers, conveners of partnerships, and essential community organizations across all phases of the disaster cycle. See also *resilience*, of which this is the place-based collective form, and *library resilience*; the library strengthens community resilience precisely because it is itself a resilient, trusted institution capable of sustaining information services through disruption.

Library resilience. The capacity of a library, as an organization, to anticipate, prepare for, withstand, adapt to, and recover from disruptions while sustaining or rapidly restoring its core resources and services. Library resilience encompasses both an inherent dimension, the ability to function well during ordinary conditions, and an adaptive dimension, the flexibility to adjust operations during and after an adverse event. In the context of disaster information services, a resilient library maintains continuity of essential functions, learns from disturbances, and preserves its capacity to serve as a trusted information provider, thereby enabling it to contribute to the resilience of the wider community. See also *resilience*, from which this institutional form derives, and *community resilience*; the library's resilience is the enabling condition for its contribution to the community it serves.

Resilience hub. A trusted, community-serving facility that operates year-round to meet everyday community needs and is also equipped to support residents before, during, and after emergencies by coordinating communication, distributing resources, and providing services and information. Resilience hubs complement rather than replace emergency facilities, and many are enhanced with reliable backup power and communications. Public libraries are well suited to this role.

Citizen science. A form of open collaboration in which members of the public participate voluntarily in the scientific process, from helping formulate research questions to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. Public libraries facilitate citizen science by hosting projects, lending tools and kits, providing meeting space and internet access, and building participants' knowledge and skills. The practice is also called community science or participatory science.

Digital data governance. The policies, roles, and decision-making authority that an organization establishes to manage its digital data as an asset. In the disaster context, governance assigns responsibility and establishes rules to ensure that materials collected before, during, and after a disaster are preserved, organized, secured, and accessible over time.

Readers' advisory. A library service in which staff help users find materials suited to their interests and needs, traditionally for leisure reading and guided by appeal factors, and extended in nonfiction readers' advisory to subject-based guidance. In this framework, readers' advisory lists are used to surface preparedness and recovery resources in the collection.

Community profile. An evidence-based description of a community, including its demographics, languages, information needs, vulnerabilities, and assets, is used to guide planning and service delivery. In library and information science, this work is also called community analysis; in emergency management, it is a standard component of hazard mitigation and preparedness planning.

Resilience. The capacity of a community, institution, or system to prepare for, withstand, adapt to, and recover from the effects of a hazard.

Executive Summary

Public libraries are vital community centers that deliver a wide range of essential services seven days a week. They are among the most trusted public-facing institutions in their communities. When disaster strikes, they are frequently among the first places people turn to for accurate information, working technology, and the help of librarians. This framework sets out, in practical terms, how libraries can meet that responsibility before, during, and after a natural disaster.

This evidence-based framework is the culmination of a decade of field research. Between 2015 and 2024, the research team conducted six situation-specific case studies across the United States: the 2015 South Carolina floods and Hurricane Matthew; Hurricane Harvey in Houston; the Northern California wildfires; tornadoes and mountain flooding in Kentucky; and the compounding floods, fires, earthquakes, and extreme heat events of Southern California. Drawing on focus groups, surveys, and interviews with librarians, administrators, frontline staff, and community members, and grounded in established health risk communication scholarship, these studies converge on a consistent finding: libraries are essential, credible partners in community disaster response, and their effectiveness depends on preparation, community knowledge, and strong local partnerships.

The framework translates the research evidence into six adaptable sections: Community-First Disaster Information Services; Library Operations Before, During, and After a Disaster; Community Engagement and Outreach; Collaborations with Public and Private Sector Partners; Crisis Communication; and Recommendations for Policy and Procedure Development. Each section offers concrete, field-tested guidelines, from countering misinformation and building multilingual collections to staffing an Emergency Operations Center, helping residents file FEMA claims, and documenting lessons learned for the next event.

A defining feature of the framework is its portability. The guidelines are meant to be tailored to a library's type, size, and local risk profile rather than applied as a rigid checklist. The framework serves both as a working tool for libraries strengthening their own preparedness and as a foundation for continued research into the public value of libraries in times of crisis. It will be reviewed and revised as new studies are completed and as subject experts and practitioners validate its content.

The Six Sections of the Framework

Building Resilient Libraries and Communities: A Framework for Community-First Disaster Information Services in Libraries



Figure 1. Overview of the six sections of the community-first disaster information services framework.

Introduction and Background

Public libraries have evolved from primarily serving as repositories of books and materials to becoming vital community centers that deliver a wide range of essential services seven days a week. They are now widely recognized as critical providers of community support and engagement rather than merely as physical spaces for information access (Barrie et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2016; Reid & Howard, 2016; Scott, 2011). Beyond their role as information hubs, libraries increasingly act as catalysts for community engagement and social connection (Norton & Dowdall, 2016). To deliver meaningful and effective services, library staff need a comprehensive understanding of the needs, priorities, and demographics of the communities they serve.

Research conducted by the research team has consistently demonstrated the ways in which public libraries serve as essential resources for community engagement during crises. Librarians are often among the first responders, providing vital information services in diverse settings, including emergency response and recovery (Liu et al., 2017; Tu-Keefner et al., 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2024). Librarians with advanced training and education are particularly well prepared to contribute to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts while maintaining critical community services throughout all phases of a crisis.

Since 2015, the research team has investigated the evolving role of public libraries in disaster contexts. To guide its research design, a framework of effective health risk communication recommendations for community members and vulnerable populations in times of crisis (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009) was applied. This framework provides a foundation for examining how libraries can effectively communicate critical crisis information, support vulnerable populations, and strengthen community resilience before, during, and after disasters.

Drawing on a public health perspective, the team has identified effective models of collaboration between public libraries and organizations across both the public and private sectors. These collaborations highlight the essential role local libraries play in facilitating coordinated disaster response, sustaining communication networks, and supporting community recovery across a variety of disaster scenarios.

Existing risk communication scholarship, however, does not provide comprehensive, library-specific operational guidelines. To address this gap, the research team developed the set of implementation guidelines presented here, derived from six empirical studies. These guidelines are designed to assist libraries and librarians in planning and delivering essential, community-first disaster information services that promote preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience within their local contexts.

Research Focus: Process, People, Partners

Across the six studies, the team examined the roles and contributions of local libraries and their services before, during, and after disasters through three complementary lenses.

- **Process.** How public librarians utilize multiple channels and technologies to distribute information and deliver services.
- **People.** How libraries adopt community-centered approaches to provide services and disseminate trusted, credible information resources.
- **Partners.** How libraries collaborate with agencies at multiple levels to strengthen community capacity and resources for emergency response and recovery.

Research Focus: Process, People, Partners

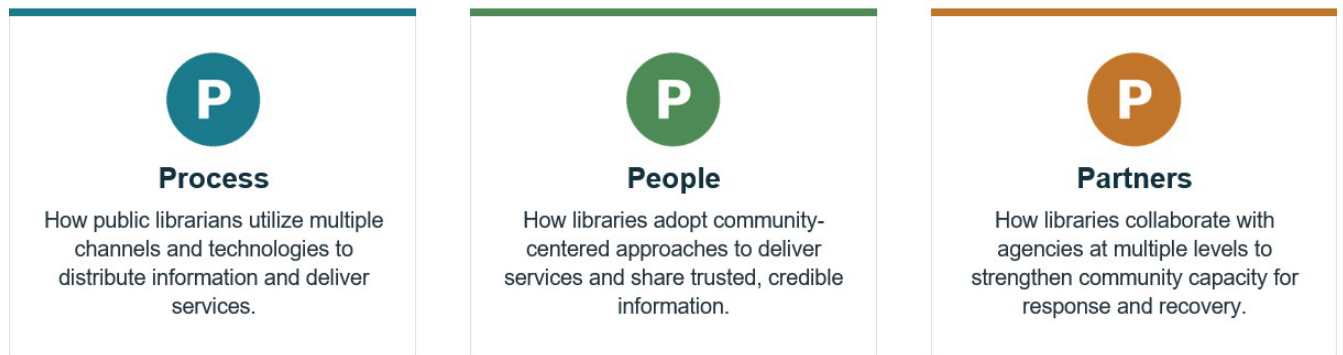


Figure 2. *The three research lenses that framed each case study.*

A Decade of Field Research

The framework draws on six situation-specific case studies conducted between 2015 and 2024 that examined a range of natural disasters across the United States. The studies and the methods used in each are summarized below and shown in Figure 3.

A decade of field research

Six situation-specific case studies of public libraries and natural disasters across the United States, 2015 to 2024



Research lens: Process (channels and technologies), People (community-centered services), Partners (collaboration across sectors).

Figure 3. A decade of field research: six situation-specific case studies across the United States, 2015 to 2024.

Immediately following the 2015 South Carolina Floods, a situation-specific research project—funded by the 2015 SC Floods Research Initiative and sponsored by the Office of the Vice President for Research—examined the value of public libraries in providing critical information services and their legitimacy as partners of public health agencies.

In 2017, a survey study investigated how community members accessed information during two major disasters: the catastrophic flooding in the Midlands of South Carolina in October 2015 and Hurricane Matthew in the coastal zone in October 2016.

A third study, conducted between November 2018 and December 2019, focused on the Houston Public Library system’s main library and its branches affected by Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Data were collected through five focus group sessions held at the Houston Public Library’s main location, involving more than 50 administrators, librarians, and staff members. Findings from this study identified key competencies and leadership qualifications essential for librarians responding to disasters.

In 2022, the research team explored how public libraries and librarians provided community-first health and disaster information services, as well as their partnerships with public and private sector agencies, during the wildfire disaster that began in Northern California in 2017. The study targeted public libraries in Napa, Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, El Dorado, Nevada, and Placer counties, with additional interviews conducted with library leadership in Tehama and Yolo counties.

At the end of 2023, a fifth study examined public libraries affected by tornadoes in western Kentucky and by mountain flooding in eastern Appalachia over the preceding five years. The research focused on libraries in Marshall, Graves, and Hopkins counties in western Kentucky, and in Perry, Letcher, and Knott counties in eastern Kentucky and the Appalachian Mountains.

In the summer of 2024, the research team extended its work to Southern California, engaging with library systems affected by multiple types of disasters, including earthquakes, floods, wildfires, and extreme heat events.

The Framework

This framework is designed to guide future research on the value of public libraries and to assist libraries in fostering a stronger culture of disaster preparedness and community resilience (Norton & Dowdall, 2016). By providing professional development resources, service guidelines, and practical toolkits, it enables public libraries and librarians to create comprehensive disaster preparedness policies and plans, deliver effective disaster information services, and implement community-centered outreach programs before, during, and after natural disasters.

The framework consists of six evidence-based sections designed to be adaptable to the specific contexts of libraries of varying types and sizes. A key feature is its portability, which allows libraries to tailor the sections to their needs. The foundations of these activities are ideally laid during preparedness and readiness, then sustained through response and recovery, as shown in Figure 4.

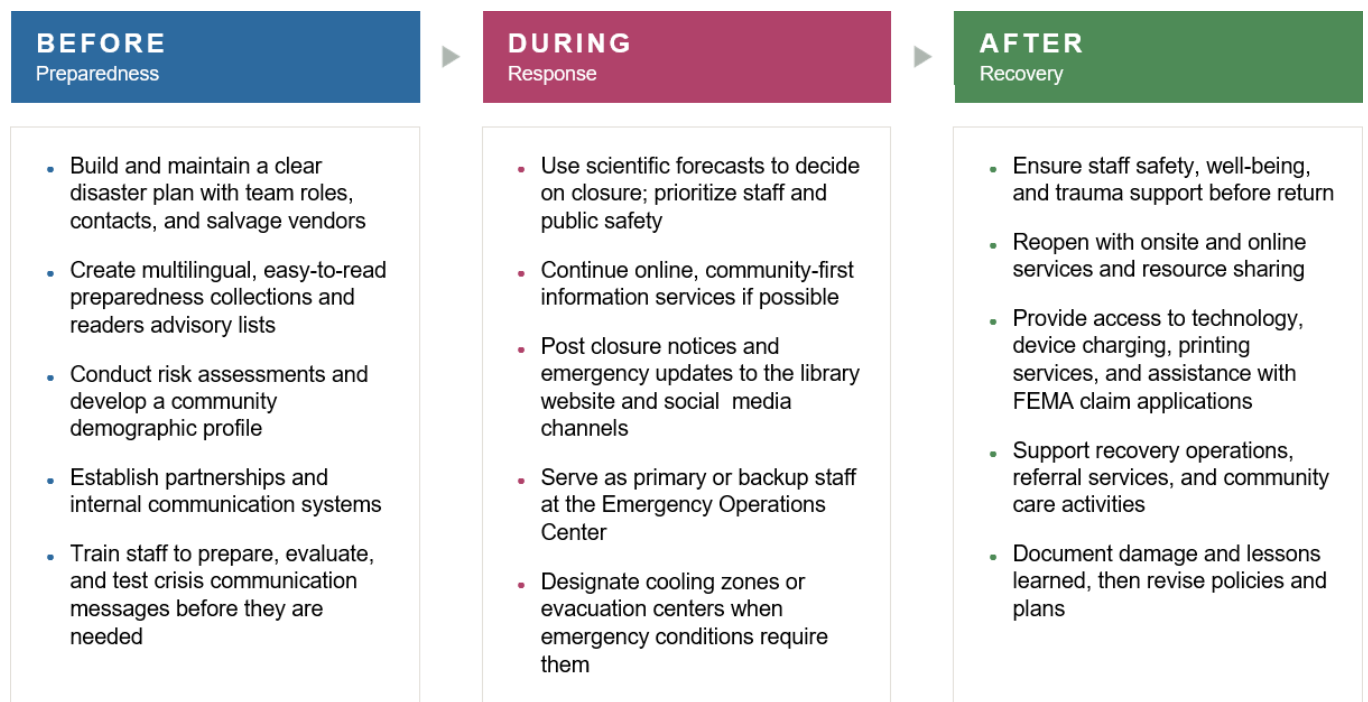


Figure 4. Library actions across the disaster cycle. Foundations laid before a disaster are sustained through response and recovery.

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1. Community-First Disaster Information Services

Community-first disaster information services rest on a shared set of principles and values. These principles guide every section of the framework and are summarized in Figure 5.

Principles and values for community-first disaster information services



VALUES Trusted • Inclusive • Prepared • Responsive • Equitable • Community-centered • Collaborative • Compassionate

Figure 5. Principles and values for community-first disaster information services.

The items in this section guide libraries and librarians in planning, developing, and delivering critical, community-first information services that align with community needs before, during, and after natural disasters. These guidelines emphasize the library's role as an essential information hub, ensuring that accurate, timely, and accessible information is available to the public throughout all phases of a disaster. They also assist in formulating comprehensive disaster preparedness plans, policies, and procedures.

- Provide disaster health information that is accurate, ethical, and culturally respectful.

- Fact-check all information you collect and share to make sure it is reliable.
- Work with local health, safety, and emergency management professionals to make sure the information you deliver meets community needs.
- Create strategies to counter misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.
 - Use prebunking and debunking techniques and weave these practices into everyday library services.
 - Regularly track what people are saying in your community, both online and in person, by partnering with a social media analytics lab (such as the USC/CIC Social Media Insights Lab: https://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/cic/initiatives/social_media_insights_lab/index.php) when possible, or by keeping track of questions that library users ask at the reference desk.

Recommendation. If your library cannot run research studies on its own, team up with other libraries (like state libraries), LIS programs, or other relevant organizations to get the work done.

- Work with health information specialists to identify, review, and organize trustworthy, multilingual digital resources on disaster topics that are easy to read and understand.
- Pull together materials from the Red Cross, the CDC, the National Library of Medicine, local and federal government agencies, and community organizations to support your information services.

Recommendation. Make it easy for users to find your digital collection by placing a clear link on your library's homepage.

- Promote the use of a variety of reliable resources on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Partner with health sciences information professionals to deliver essential disaster and health information services, including real-time online support.
- Work with local experts to develop and deliver ongoing, community-focused citizen science programs in multiple formats that cover the natural disasters most likely to affect your area.
 - These programs should cover preparedness, response, and recovery.

Recommendation. Offer programs in both in-person and online formats. Short video clips posted to your library's website can also make these resources more accessible.

- Develop and provide information and technology literacy programs to help your community build knowledge and practical skills.
- Build and update a collection of resources that supports your library staff's ongoing professional growth.

- Encourage and support library staff participation in professional development, continuing education, and in-service training.

2. Library Operations Before, During, and After a Disaster

This section outlines recommended library operations and associated actions to strengthen library preparedness, response, and recovery capabilities. The content is organized into three categories: before, during, and after a natural disaster. Each category provides detailed guidelines that libraries and librarians can adapt to their own practices.

Before a Disaster

- Develop and maintain easy-to-read resources in a variety of formats and languages on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
 - Include topics such as home construction, wildfire-resistant landscaping, and other recovery-related subjects.

Recommendation. Create readers' advisory lists so users can easily identify what is available in your collection.

- Create and regularly review a clear, comprehensive disaster plan that covers preparedness, response, and recovery.
 - The plan should spell out team roles, assign specific responsibilities, include up-to-date contact information, and list approved vendors for salvaging and restoring library materials.
- Establish and regularly review policies for closing the library before, during, and after a disaster. Include guidance on when to reopen, even if that means offering limited services while repairs are still underway.
- Create or adapt a digital data governance plan to ensure that materials collected before, during, and after a disaster are properly preserved, organized, and easily accessible.
- Establish a clear forgiveness policy for overdue library materials during natural disasters so that everyone in the community can still access resources.
- Develop policies for curbside checkout and drive-through services so the library can continue serving the community even when facilities are closed.
- Build partnerships with public and private sector agencies and organizations to strengthen your library's service delivery.
- Regularly conduct risk assessments and stress tests to evaluate your library's preparedness for a natural disaster.
- Use evidence-based practices and data to develop a comprehensive community profile through library and community risk assessments.

Recommendation. If your library cannot run research studies independently, partner with other libraries, LIS programs, or relevant organizations to complete these tasks.

- Create and disseminate printed informational materials about upcoming disasters in multiple languages so that everyone in your community stays informed.
- Collaborate with local community organizations to set up and maintain a community archive that preserves locally collected materials for the long term.

Recommendation. If your library cannot take this on independently, reach out to state libraries, LIS programs, or other partners for support.

- Establish clear team structures among your library staff and ensure that everyone understands their specific roles and responsibilities.
- Create internal communication systems that support good teamwork and information sharing.
- Post emergency and disaster updates on the library's website and social media channels, and keep them up to date.
- Offer online, community-centered information services that address local needs.
- Provide translation services so that all community members, regardless of language, can access library resources.
- Use scientific forecasts to decide when to close the library before a disaster hits, prioritizing the safety of staff and the public.
- Put logistical measures in place before a disaster to make sure the library is operationally ready.
- Support emergency services training for your library staff.

During a Disaster

- If a closure decision has not been made before a natural disaster, assess conditions and determine whether to close the library as circumstances require.
- When possible, offer online, community-first information services to stay connected with your community.
- When possible, post library closure notices and emergency announcements on the library's website and social media channels, and keep all information accurate and up to date.
- Follow evacuation procedures as needed, including during earthquakes, to keep library staff and users safe.
- Serve as primary or backup staff at the local Emergency Operations Center to help with coordinated emergency response.
- Designate library spaces as cooling zones or evacuation centers during extreme heat or wildfire events to keep community members safe.

After a Disaster

- Before library staff return to work, verify transportation barriers and deployment limitations to make sure the return is safe and well organized.
- Ensure library staff safety and well-being by providing necessary resources and a supportive work environment.
- Provide staff support for disaster response and recovery efforts and, when possible, include provisions for disaster relief funding and trauma assistance to aid affected individuals and communities.
- Make logistical adjustments after the disaster to restore operations, ensure resources are available, and support community recovery.
- If the library is partially or completely damaged, salvage any recoverable materials and seek a temporary location for library operations.
 - If no temporary space is available, direct community members to nearby libraries.

Recommendation. Work with partner agencies and organizations across the public and private sectors to find and secure a temporary location.

- Once the library reopens, even with limited hours, provide onsite community-first disaster and health information services and facilitate resource sharing.
- Continue delivering online, community-centered information services under all operating conditions if possible.
- Provide equitable access to technology and digital tools, including Internet, computers, laptops, Chromebooks, Wi-Fi hotspots, and mobile device charging stations, to support digital inclusion.
- Set up charging stations so community members can recharge their phones and other devices during emergencies.
- Provide printing, copying, scanning, and faxing services to help community members complete and submit FEMA claims and other disaster-related documents.
- Help community members fill out and submit FEMA claims.
- Assist community members with downloading and using disaster response apps, such as FEMA and Social Security.
- Provide easy library card registration so community members can quickly access resources and programs.
- Open library spaces to support disaster recovery efforts, such as FEMA operations areas or meeting rooms for emergency response teams.
- Join in collaborative disaster response efforts by working closely with relevant agencies and community partners.

- When possible, provide community support services, such as food assistance and the distribution of toiletries, cleaning supplies, and bottled water, at local gathering places such as laundromats, parks, and retail store parking lots.
- When possible, organize community disaster relief efforts when the library reopens, even with limited hours.

Recommendation. Consider bringing an emotional support animal into the library to help promote community healing.

- Post and regularly update library closure notices, emergency announcements, and reopening details on the library's website and social media channels.
- Develop and deliver specialized programs for community members and first responders, including off-site book drops, extended story times, youth activities, and pop-up events.
- Follow evacuation procedures as needed, including during aftershocks, to ensure the safety of library staff and users.
- Offer translation services so community members with limited English proficiency can fully access information and resources.
- Provide referral services to connect community members with the appropriate resources, agencies, and support organizations based on their specific needs.
- Coordinate traffic management around library facilities to ensure safe and efficient access during regular operations and emergencies.
- Serve as primary or backup staff at the local Disaster Assistance Center to support coordinated response and recovery efforts.
- Open library facilities to support emergency operations, whether as coordination hubs, information centers, or temporary shelters.
- Offer curbside checkout services so the community can continue accessing library materials even when the building is closed.
- Where possible, designate library facilities as cooling zones or evacuation centers after wildfire events.
- When possible, offer community care facilities with public showers, laundry services, and delivery programs for essential items such as food, water, clothing, and cleaning supplies.
- When required or feasible, designate library spaces as evacuation centers or emergency shelters and help coordinate evacuation services.
- Thoroughly document and archive all damage to the library after the disaster to support recovery and to work with insurance providers.
- Document and reflect on lessons learned from each disaster to improve your preparedness, response, and recovery policies.

- Assess how library staff perform during natural disasters to find what works, address weaknesses, and improve training and emergency planning.
- Use the results of post-disaster assessments to revise your disaster policies and procedures, ensuring that lessons learned shape future improvements.
- Support community healing and the rebuilding of local capacity after each disaster through inclusive programs, strong partnerships, and well-coordinated resources.

3. Community Engagement and Outreach

The guidelines in this section support decision-making and strategic planning. In addition to informing daily operational practices, they can serve as elements for developing or revising library policies and procedures.

- Advocate effectively for the needs and interests of the communities your library serves.
- Advocate for your library's long-term sustainability, including securing adequate funding and resources.
- Design and implement flexible, creative, community-focused outreach programs that support residents before, during, and after natural disasters.
- Provide education, training, and professional development opportunities to build a skilled, diverse workforce that advocates effectively for libraries and the people they serve.
- Establish strategic partnerships before a crisis hits by assessing available resources and strengthening collaboration during emergencies.
- Empower librarians to take on leadership roles in community advocacy and engagement by integrating these practices into everyday library work.
- Proactively build and maintain strong, long-term relationships with organizations and government agencies across the public and private sectors.
- Facilitate the development of community capacity and resources to strengthen emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.
- Develop and distribute trustworthy, multilingual resources that meet the needs of a diverse community.
- Use a variety of formal and informal communication channels, including local newspapers, radio stations, and social media, to strengthen community engagement.
- Develop, maintain, and regularly update a clear community demographic profile to guide effective advocacy and outreach to diverse populations.
- When possible, designate a community liaison to serve as a bridge between the library and the community, supporting the development of community-first disaster information services.
- Foster inclusive collaboration with community leaders and members, especially those from underserved and at-risk populations, to co-create and sustain community-centered disaster information services that strengthen preparedness and resilience.

4. Collaborations with Public and Private Sector Partners

The items in this section provide guidelines to strengthen library operations. They are designed to facilitate decision-making and strategic planning, particularly across the public and private sectors. Beyond their use in daily operations, these items can serve as key references for developing or revising library policies and standard operating procedures.

- Build and maintain working relationships with public agencies such as schools, public health departments, and parks and recreation departments, as well as with government officials at the city, county, state, and federal levels.
- Build and maintain working relationships with private-sector agencies, institutions, organizations, and their staff.
- Conduct a thorough environmental scan to understand community conditions, including socioeconomic factors, that can inform and strengthen collaborative efforts.
- Collaborate with first responders and representatives from public and private sector organizations to support effective disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Partner with local health, safety, and emergency management professionals to ensure that the information and services the library delivers complement and align with first responder operations.

5. Crisis Communication

Similar to the “Library Operations Before, During, and After a Disaster” section, the guidelines in this section are organized into three categories: **before, during, and after** a natural disaster. Each category is further divided into specific items designed to support both **internal** and **external** communication. Beyond the applications in daily operations, these items serve as key references for developing or revising institutional policies and standard operating procedures.

Crisis communication at a glance

Internal and external messaging across every phase of a disaster

	BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Internal	Prepare and test messages, develop crisis communication policies, train staff, and keep the library website and social channels up to date.	Use text messaging and phone trees to strengthen processes for quickly sharing and evaluating hazard-related information.	Continue phone trees and text messaging to sustain strong internal communication and support staff.
External	Designate a communication officer or team, clarify the library's role in emergency management, build media relationships, and offer multilingual and sign-language support.	Translate technical information for all audiences, use multiple formats and update schedules, and align with emergency response operations.	Share recovery resources such as shelters, FEMA sites, and food banks through the website and social media, and partner with local media.

Figure 6. *Crisis communication at a glance: internal and external messaging across every phase of a disaster.*

Before a Disaster

Internal communication

- Prepare and test crisis and risk communication messages so they are ready to go before, during, and after a natural disaster.
- Post and regularly update emergency and disaster information on the library's website and social media channels.
- If required to share public announcements from government agencies, ensure the library promptly relays accurate, up-to-date information through its website and social media channels.
- Develop comprehensive crisis communication policies and procedures that include public relations and public speaking components, and provide training so library staff is well prepared to implement them.

- Build strong relationships with both formal and informal communication channels, including local newspapers, radio stations, and social media platforms.
- Create clear, multilingual informational materials that connect hazard forecasts to local facility operations and planning requirements.
- Collaborate with professionals across sectors to incorporate forecast data into risk communication and preparedness planning.
- Collaborate with local experts to produce clear, multilingual visual and text-based alerts that turn complex information into practical guidance and actionable insights for both staff and the public.
- Evaluate and refine risk communication messages and formats to ensure clarity, effectiveness, and improved public comprehension during natural disasters.

External communication

- When possible, designate a communication officer or team to manage multilingual communication across all phases of a disaster, ensuring consistent, accurate public messaging.
- When possible, take the lead in or facilitate crisis communication to support transparency, protect your library's reputation, and ensure the public receives clear information.
- Clarify your library's role within the broader emergency management structure to support effective communication and avoid duplication of information.

According to American Library Association guidelines, although not legally required, libraries are encouraged to provide multilingual services and materials and to employ multilingual staff in order to effectively serve diverse communities (ALA, 1996-2025; Deets, 2025). While no state legally mandates that public librarians be multilingual, several states require public agencies, including libraries, to offer language assistance to individuals with limited English proficiency when a substantial percentage of the community speaks a language other than English. These laws aim to ensure equitable access to public services; however, the specific requirements, such as the percentage of residents speaking a particular language, vary by state.

- When possible, develop a staff team capable of effectively communicating with community members with limited English proficiency or English as a second language.
- When possible, identify or train a library staff member, or work with local experts, to provide sign language interpretation during regular library operations and emergency communications.

During a Disaster

Internal communication

- Use text messaging and phone trees to stay in consistent contact with staff.

- Strengthen your internal processes for quickly and effectively sharing and evaluating hazard-related information during a disaster.

External communication

- Communicate technical information about power, healthcare, and emergency systems in a way that all audiences can easily understand during hazard events.
- Use multiple communication formats and update schedules to support timely, data-informed decisions during disaster events.
- Strengthen partnerships with local health, safety, and emergency management professionals so your library's communications and services align with emergency response operations.

After a Disaster

Internal communication

- Continue using phone trees and text messaging systems to strengthen internal communication and support staff.

External communication

- Ensure the library continues to share accurate and reliable information about response and recovery resources, including government public announcements, shelters, supply distribution sites, FEMA locations, meal services, and food banks, through the library's website and social media platforms to support community recovery efforts.
- Collaborate with local media outlets, such as newspapers and radio stations, to ensure essential emergency response and recovery information reaches the community in a timely manner.

6. Recommendations for Policy and Procedure Development

Unlike the other sections, the guidelines presented here focus specifically on supporting the development, implementation, and revision of library policies and procedures. Libraries can use the Library Operations section as a practical reference when reviewing or enhancing their operational strategies.

- Establish clear, comprehensive guidelines and protocols for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to support coordinated action and build community and institutional resilience.
- Develop a comprehensive community profile to guide disaster planning and service delivery, and ensure your efforts are tailored to the community's specific needs and vulnerabilities.
- Position libraries as resilience hubs and disaster assistance centers that provide essential services, information, and resources to support communities before, during, and after natural disasters.
- Ensure library personnel are adequately prepared to assist during and after emergencies by implementing specialized training programs focused on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery operations.
- Educate the public on personal preparedness by promoting practices such as scanning important documents and securely storing critical information in multiple locations to ensure accessibility during disasters.
- Invest in ongoing professional development for library staff and managers, covering essential areas such as emergency response, de-escalation techniques, human resources management, self-care, and technology.
- Promote the use of diverse resources in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to strengthen community resilience and support effective mitigation and recovery.
- Develop strategies to de-escalate tense situations and provide emotional and practical support to community members before, during, and after natural disasters.
- Identify and develop candidates for library crisis leadership roles to build institutional capacity and strengthen leadership in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Support the development of crisis leadership skills among library staff to improve organizational readiness and decision-making during emergencies.

- Promote crisis leadership competencies among library staff to enhance organizational readiness, decision-making, and effectiveness during emergencies.
- Facilitate team-building initiatives to strengthen collaboration, communication, and engagement among staff, fostering a cohesive and resilient organizational culture.
- Partner with other libraries and professional associations to develop training resources that strengthen staff understanding of basic technical forecast information and its application in disaster preparedness and response.
- Create or adapt a digital data governance plan to ensure that materials collected before, during, and after a disaster are properly preserved, organized, secured, and accessible.
- Document and reflect on the experiences of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts to drive continuous improvement and strengthen future disaster policies and plans.
- Assess the performance of library personnel during disasters to identify lessons learned and inform continuous improvements in staff training, capacity building, and overall emergency preparedness.
- Establish a clear evaluation process to assess staff performance during disasters, supporting ongoing improvement in policy development, training, and emergency preparedness.
- Develop a structured assessment protocol to evaluate library performance during natural disasters, capture lessons learned, and use them to improve future policies and planning.
- Integrate lessons learned from each disaster and post-disaster evaluation to continuously improve library services and community outreach programs, strengthening both institutional capacity and community resilience.

Conclusion

This framework was developed from a series of research projects conducted over a decade. Its contents are grounded in the findings of six situation-specific case studies, each examining distinct contexts and challenges that libraries face in responding to natural disasters and related emergencies. Collectively, these studies provide an evidence base that supports the structure, recommendations, and practical applications presented here.

The research team continues to design and conduct new studies that address different types of natural disasters, emerging issues, and changing community needs. As new data and insights become available, the framework and its accompanying guidelines will be reviewed and revised to reflect the most current research findings and best practices.

Subject experts and practitioners from relevant fields will also be engaged to review, evaluate, and validate the framework's content. Their professional input will support continuous revision and ensure that the framework remains evidence-based, contextually relevant, and aligned with evolving best practices. This ongoing validation process will help maintain the framework's effectiveness and applicability across the full range of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, as well as in the broader context of library operations.

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