

FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

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, Denise Lyons, April Hobbs,
and the Research Team

2026

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Background

Public libraries are essential community hubs that provide trusted information, services, and social support, especially during crises. Research shows that libraries play a critical role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery by maintaining access to information, supporting vulnerable populations, and strengthening community resilience.

Since 2015, this research has examined libraries' roles across multiple disaster contexts. Drawing on six U.S.-based studies, this framework translates evidence into practical, library-specific guidance. It emphasizes community-first services, cross-sector collaboration, and adaptable strategies that support libraries of all types and sizes.

The framework at a glance

Five connected areas of practice that move from everyday services to long-term policy

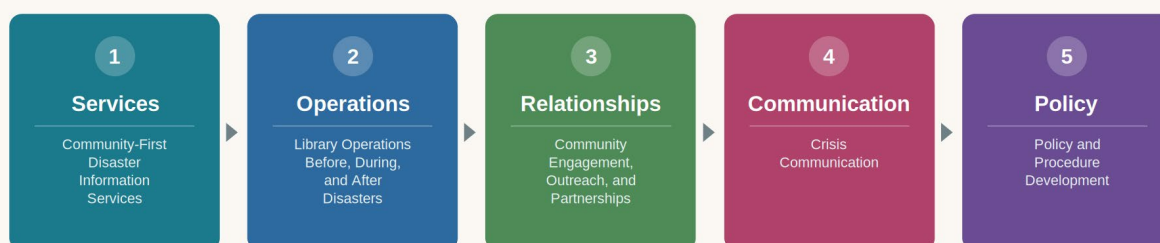


Figure 1. The framework at a glance. Five connected areas of practice that move from everyday services to long-term policy.

What Is a Framework?

A framework is a practical guide made up of key ideas and recommended actions. Libraries can adapt the guidance drawn from this research to help them plan, provide, and improve disaster-

related information services in their communities. Each section is designed to support both day-to-day operations and crisis conditions.

1 Community-First Disaster Information Services

Focus. Delivering accurate, accessible, and community-centered information.

- Provide timely, reliable, and culturally responsive information in multiple formats and languages
- Curate and promote trusted resources, such as health agencies and government sources
- Actively counter misinformation using prebunking and debunking strategies
- Partner with health, safety, and emergency professionals to align messaging
- Monitor community information needs and adapt services accordingly
- Offer digital and information literacy programs related to disaster preparedness and response
- Support staff training and continuous learning in disaster information services

Principles and values for community-first disaster information services



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

Figure 2. Principles and values for community-first disaster information services.

2 Library Operations Before, During, and After Disasters

Focus. Maintaining continuity of services and operational readiness.

Before

- Develop and regularly update disaster plans, policies, and roles
- Conduct risk assessments and maintain community profiles
- Prepare multilingual resources and communication systems
- Establish flexible service models, such as digital access and curbside services
- Build staff capacity through training and preparedness exercises

During

- Adjust operations based on safety conditions and community needs
- Maintain clear, consistent communication through multiple channels
- Provide continuous access to critical information and services when possible
- Support emergency response efforts in coordination with partners

After

- Restore services and prioritize staff well-being
- Provide access to technology, information, and recovery resources
- Assist with applications, referrals, and community support services
- Document impacts and integrate lessons learned into future planning

Library actions across the disaster cycle

Foundations laid before a disaster are sustained through response and recovery

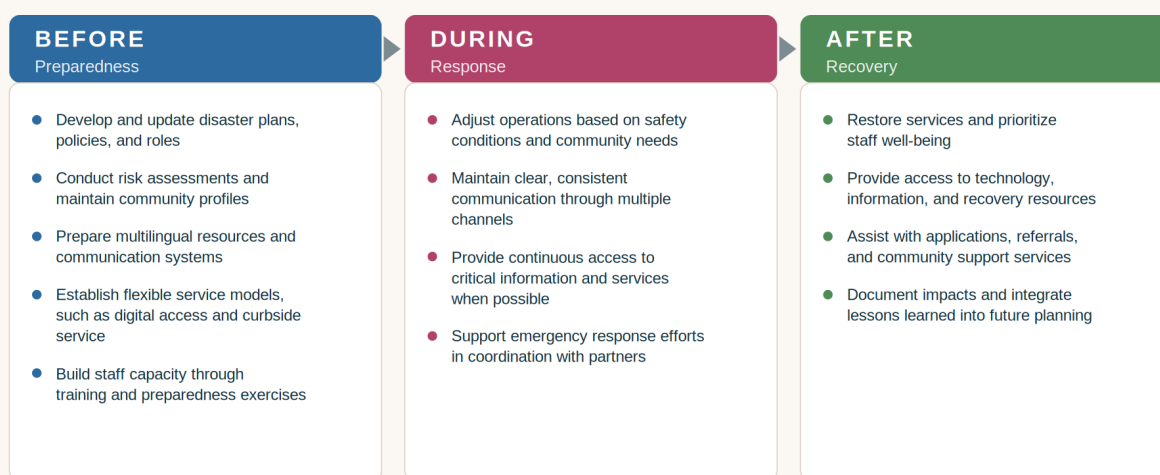


Figure 3. Library actions across the disaster cycle. Foundations laid before a disaster are sustained through response and recovery.

3 Community Engagement, Outreach, and Partnerships

Focus. Building relationships and coordinated community response.

- Build and sustain relationships with community members and cross-sector partners
- Develop flexible, community-centered outreach programs across all disaster phases
- Engage underserved and vulnerable populations through inclusive practices
- Maintain current community demographic and needs assessments
- Conduct environmental scans to inform services and partnerships
- Collaborate with first responders and agencies to align services with response efforts
- Use diverse communication channels to strengthen engagement and information sharing
- Designate staff roles, such as a community liaison, to support partnerships and communication
- Empower staff to lead engagement and advocacy efforts
- Co-create programs and services with community partners
- Advocate for community needs and library sustainability

4 Crisis Communication

Focus. Delivering clear, coordinated, and actionable information.

Before

- Develop and test crisis communication plans and messaging
- Establish relationships with media and communication networks
- Prepare accessible, multilingual materials
- Train staff in communication protocols and public messaging

During

- Share timely, accurate, and easy-to-understand information
- Use multiple platforms and formats to reach diverse audiences
- Coordinate messaging with emergency management and partners

After

- Continue communicating recovery resources and updates
- Partner with media and community networks to extend reach
- Evaluate communication effectiveness and refine strategies

5 Policy and Procedure Development

Focus. Strengthening institutional readiness and long-term resilience.

- Develop and maintain comprehensive disaster policies and protocols
- Position libraries as resilience hubs and community resource centers
- Invest in staff training, leadership development, and well-being

- Establish data governance practices for preserving and accessing information
- Implement evaluation processes to assess performance and outcomes
- Document experiences and integrate lessons learned into continuous improvement
- Build organizational capacity through partnerships and shared resources

Conclusion

Grounded in a decade of research across a variety of states in the United States, this framework provides practical, adaptable guidance for libraries serving communities before, during, and after disasters. Its strength lies in its flexibility, evidence base, and emphasis on community-centered service.

Ongoing research and practitioner input will continue to refine and strengthen the framework, ensuring its relevance in an evolving disaster landscape. Additional resources will be placed online at preparedlibraries.org.