Collaboration as Preparation: Keeping Interest and Commitment to the Cycle of Disaster Preparedness



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What does disaster preparation mean?

Preparing for disasters requires more than simply assembling materials for recovery, or even writing down a step-by-step plan. It involves constant practice, evaluation and re-evaluation, and a commitment from stakeholders across the entire breadth of an organization. At the Folger Shakespeare Library, we have spent the last year completely re-evaluating and reforming our commitment to disaster preparedness. Following one or two small, near-disaster situations, it became clear that commitment and collaboration from all staff members to both simple and complex disaster preparations is vital to our future success in facing situations large or small. Achieving buy-in and maintaining interest from staff are both difficult and crucial in the long-term when other, more pressing daily issues consistently assert themselves, but preparedness must become a key part of daily workflow. The Folger's Collections Disaster Preparedness Committee, comprising key members of our Security team, Facilities team, Acquisitions team, Conservation team, and Curatorial staff, is central to this goal.



Test your plan by holding scheduled and semi-unscheduled exercises

• Allow hands-on experience and inthe-moment decision making

• Clear any disaster simulations with management, security, and facilities teams

• Be creative!

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In the following months, we hope to move forward with creative exercises to test both the knowledge and confidence of our staff before returning once more to evaluate our plan and institutional readiness.

Review the existing plan regularly, ideally annually. Your team should ask:

• What has changed in our organization that might impact this plan?

• Does it fit in with the reality of our workflow?

memory?

• Do staff members know basic responses by

Evaluation at the Folger began in 2014. Although we had a comprehensive plan, our staff was unsure of what immediate action to take upon discovering a potential or neardisaster situation.

Taking your evaluation into account, begin to formulate a new plan:

•Search for or read new studies or literature Physically survey the building and collection areas

> Incorporate what has changed and what you have learned into a new plan, or update the old one.

> > Over the past two years, we

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have examined relevant literature and standards as well as plans and experiential knowledge from other repositories to revise our extended immediate response plans, as well as to add new ideas.

Our staff is the best first defense in the event of disaster.

enabling staff confidence.

The greatest challenge institutions face is

Disaster



Complete training and re-training regularly: annually or bi-annually.

Train

• First, review the overall plan, highlighting any changes.

> • Conduct tours & offer webinars and presentations from outside sources

• Hold demonstrations and hands-on skills training as necessary

Training began for us with a general introduction to disasters and disaster preparedness, as well as simple tours of our building. By coordinating with the Facilities and Security Team staff who lead these tours, we began building confidence and knowledge regarding what indicators they might watch out for as preceding a potential disaster, and where they might spot them first. Although staff work in a building every day, they may not know how water flows through the building, or how it connects. We plan to continue with training in book handling, dry and wet packing, scavenger hunts, and proper fire extinguisher use in the near future.



Staff working in collections areas will be the first to notice any issues. Our plan hinges on their ability to recognize disaster or the potential for disaster, and to contact senior library and conservation staff members. We have implemented several tools to aid in this, including laminated disaster guides attached to phones, and walletsized cards with crucial phone numbers. Senior staff ensure that at least one of them is available at al times by taking an emergency phone on a rotating schedule.

Organize

The re-evaluated plan may require new supplies or participation.

Secure funding and purchase supplies

Talk to colleagues

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Schedule presentations and training

Place supplies in strategic locations





Generating awareness and buy-in to disaster preparedness awareness among our staff has not been difficult. They already feel connected to the materials with which they work daily. Our main job has been to convince them that senior staff members will not be "bothered" or "annoyed" by alerts that end up as false alarms. We hope to build confidence and approachability by including them in organizing supplies such as bins filled with paper towels, tarps, sponges, and rubber gloves, and our bright orange "disaster bags" containing items useful for documenting and first response.



The disaster preparedness cycle image used here was modeled after materials developed by FEMA. The authors would like to thank the Library of Congress and countless other institutions for discussion, advice, and sample materials crucial to the development of our programs. Thanks to Emily Wahl and Emily J. Rollinson for advice and assistance with the poster design.