

“Creating New Alliances for Emergency Response”
A Report on the Cincinnati Alliance for Response Meeting
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On December 12, 2003, a meeting representing the beginning of a new era in disaster planning and response among cultural heritage institutions took place in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Ohio “Alliance for Response” Forum, one of a series of four such meetings to be held in 2003-2004, brought together emergency first responders from the local, state, and national level with representatives of libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies from Ohio and the surrounding states.

The series, sponsored by Heritage Preservation and funded by the Fidelity Foundation, fulfilled its goal to begin a dialogue between keepers of our cultural heritage and those who keep us, our buildings, and our collections safe.

A History of Cooperation

Stephen Bonadies, Deputy Director of the Cincinnati Art Museum, welcomed the audience to the Museum, one of the city’s cultural treasures. To set the context of the day’s networking opportunities, Michael P. Butler, Executive Director and CEO of OHIONET, discussed the state’s history of leadership in cooperative activities. Through groups as diverse as OHIONET, serving all types of libraries, and as targeted as INFOhio, serving the K-12 community; OPLIN, which provides training to public libraries; the State Library of Ohio, which administers the statewide resource sharing project MORE (Moving Ohio Resources Effectively); and the internationally-known OhioLink, providing reference services and content to academic libraries, Ohio has led the way in serving libraries and librarians so they can better serve their patrons. Butler extended this circle of cooperation to discuss the associations and institutions which serve other types of cultural heritage institutions, and spoke of the “one common goal” of all of these institutions: the provision of “quality information to all citizens,” whether the source is “print materials, artifacts, or preserved materials.”

Recovery from Cataclysm

Jane Long, Director of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force at Heritage Preservation, moved the focus one step closer to preservation and disaster recovery in her opening comments. She cited the survey Heritage Preservation had conducted of loss and damage to “art, artifacts, and archives” following the attacks on September 11, 2001. “Those institutions which were prepared for disasters” protected collections and recovered more quickly from the cataclysmic events. Long also provided key highlights from Alliance for Response meetings held in Boston and Dallas in November 2003, noting the enthusiasm of both the responders and cultural heritage professionals from those locations to band together and develop a more unified response to disasters.

“We’re All Risk Managers”

Wes Boomgaarden, Preservation Officer at the Ohio State University Libraries, spoke of the learning curves which cultural heritage leaders and key responders must address. “We don’t know much about the Stafford Act” (a key piece of legislation enabling emergency responders to take action), he noted, “and responders may not easily be able to handle art and historic artifacts.”

Boomgaarden rightly labeled those professionals charged with preservation as a group that is “paid to worry.” But in that definition, we become more like first responders – “we’re all risk managers of one sort or another,” Boomgaarden said.

In defining what disasters meant in his specific work environment, Boomgaarden noted that it encompassed “damage and destruction of mission-critical functions – research, teaching, loss of access to printed or online material, and threats to or loss of cultural heritage objects.” In Ohio, disasters could mean the decimation of key holdings on the Wright Brothers, on James Thurber, and on popular culture, including a rich collection of comic book history.

“We know disasters from history,” said Boomgaarden, citing the library of Alexandria all the way to modern-day Iraqi library and museum destruction, and he emphasized that we need to learn from past and current disasters because “we must be here to protect” these treasures while we live “in a culture of fear, waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

What Boomgaarden, reverting to his usual well-known insight and humor, called on the attendees to do, then, is to remember Franklin D. Roosevelt’s quote on “nothing to fear but fear itself,” and take connected, concerted action, and reach consensus to expand our definition of risk management.

Boomgaarden spoke of how Ohio State is already doing this. OSU’s library-based risk management team includes library personnel, local first responders, and campus public safety, responding to incidents ranging from mold to thefts, from assaults to noxious fumes. Beefing up security in response to clientele requests has made a difference and reduced the number of incidents, he noted. But Ohio State still has room to expand its plans, building up communications with physical plant and public safety personnel, and meeting the needs of some important “front-line responders” at OSU: the night staff at the library. These new efforts will be extremely helpful as OSU’s Main Library begins a large renovation project in the near future.

Disaster Response Capacity-Building

Building capacity to respond to disasters, and building networks to increase the number of responders were key discussion points from Julie Page, Preservation Officer at the University of California-San Diego Libraries. Page began what was truly a riveting presentation by asking participants to consider “What’s in it for me when we consider

disaster planning activities?” and “Can I handle everything that’s going to be thrown at me in a disaster situation?”

She narrowed her focus to cultural heritage buildings and collections, asking what kind of supplies participants have to “protect large areas quickly,” noting the massive number of books tumbling off library shelves after the Northridge (California) earthquake.

Page emphasized that preservation cannot “operate in a vacuum;” that we must integrate our planning with responders as varied as the Red Cross, County Emergency Management Agencies, and city fire and police staff.

That’s what Page and other librarians, archivists and curators, part of the California Preservation Program, have done in establishing what many regard as “a second-generation model” with a distributed disaster response “network” using lead institutions. Page has cooperatively built a disaster response network for San Diego and Imperial Counties, which provides, in addition to information and assistance, stocked supplies in centrally-located cargo containers throughout the region and a Mutual Aid Agreement signed by its members.

What else can we do to build effective disaster response networks? Positive developments include writing disaster response into job descriptions, working with local Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), providing fire and police officials with tours through institutions so they can see where important collections are stored, and pressing for utilization of lower-volume fire hose nozzles in fires at cultural heritage facilities. Page suggested outreach to police and fire departments and asking your local city response agencies to include your cultural institution in their next regional emergency drill. In smaller communities, where these relationships are even more important, celebrate your new cooperative relationships with a barbeque!

“Like A Bad Case of the Flu”

J.R. Thomas, Director of the Franklin County Emergency Management Agency, began a set of afternoon presentations by emergency responders. He compared a comprehensive emergency management system to fighting the flu, a battle many of the attendees were familiar with due to the Midwest’s early and severe flu season. “Mitigation,” said Thomas, “is similar to getting a flu shot – it’s a preventive measure.” Preparedness is “purchasing the supplies you know you’ll need for the flu – orange juice and fluffy pillows.” Response, according to Thomas, is dealing with the disaster (or the flu) when you have it, and recovery is “the cleanup” after the flu.

Thomas, throughout his presentation, emphasized a wide-ranging planning and networking process for disaster preparedness. Working with emergency responders and risk managers can assist your institution in performing a hazard analysis of your geographic location (are you threatened by floods, earthquakes, or other natural disasters?), determining your infrastructure capabilities (can you strap down computers in

an earthquake, or filter your ventilation system in a smoky fire?). He suggested coordinated responses with fire employees, insurance agents, and custodial staff.

When Thomas said, “Volunteers scare me,” it startled the forum attendees, who may often utilize volunteers in emergency and disaster situations. Thomas stressed that cultural heritage staff must emphasize volunteers’ roles (if any) in the recovery, check any liability issues for utilizing volunteers, and know that “some may not show up” when disaster strikes. Closing his presentation by discussing training opportunities for staff and volunteers alike, Thomas suggested in-house table-top response exercises, community-wide response exercises, and action reports on what went right and wrong with these practice activities.

“The Planning Process: Priceless”

In quoting another great politician and strategist, Greg Keller, Grants Administrator for the Disaster Recovery Branch of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency, kept the audience focused on constant planning and preparation for disasters. “Plans are worthless, but the planning process is priceless,” said Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Keller walked attendees through the processes and activities (mitigation, recovery, technical support, and response) of the State Emergency Management Agency, and emphasized one of their most important roles: serving as the pass-through organization for Federal funding at the time of Presidentially-declared disasters.

Museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions are eligible for disaster funding, through FEMA’s Public Assistance Program, for collections and objects that are damaged, said Keller. In addition, emergency work costs, such as debris removal and emergency measures may be immediately addressed by Public Assistance. When cultural facilities are damaged, Keller noted, because cultural institutions and other private non-profits are considered “non-critical” in comparison to hospitals, city government, and other organizations, we must work first with the Small Business Administration (through the 1-800-621-FEMA number) for a loan to address damages to facilities and contents and, if the institution does not qualify for an SBA loan or the amount of the loan does not address the applicable damages and costs, then the institution is referred back to FEMA Public Assistance.

A Better Understanding

Edward G. Buikema, Director of FEMA Region V, began his in-depth portrait of the work of FEMA as a part of the Department of Homeland Security by highlighting the types of institutions that warrant critical infrastructure protection – food production, hospital, telecommunications, chemical production, and nuclear plants.

Buikema brought some strong imagery to the attendees as he gave case studies of the recovery of the Sharon Woods Stone Bridge and Heiburg Dam in Minnesota. The latter situation had an added concern due to tribal rights issues. He also spoke of the recovery assistance FEMA provided to the library at Colorado State University after it was

devastated by floods. Buikema supported the process of “mission-assigning” federal cultural heritage staff, such as those at the Library of Congress, to provide expert assistance to cultural heritage institutions that have suffered disasters.

Caution: Construction Zone Ahead

The audience responded well to all of the presentations, and took new information and approaches into breakout sessions organized by geographic locations.

Cincinnati/Southwestern Ohio

Some discussion group participants related where they are now as far as disaster planning. Miami University (Ohio) is participating in institution-wide disaster planning, especially focusing on prioritizing materials for recovery and relocating services for resumption after disasters. The University of Cincinnati has been working on Disaster Planning as well; five departments have plans for specific buildings. The library members of the group discussed using OhioLink for distributed services. Overall, the group supported working with existing disaster response organizations in the region; establishing a Listserv for the regional cultural heritage community, and committing to check-up in a year – what we’ve done, what we wish we’d done.

Central and Northern Ohio

For these participants, disaster recovery priorities are dictated by institutional mission. Some of the museums in the group discussed development of lists of priorities for salvage. There was interest in the group to get involved in business resumption plans, make plans for backups, and strategize on how to mobilize people. The group feels it has a great deal of access to expertise, especially with the State of Ohio Emergency Management Agency located in Columbus. Another resource for information about computer backups, etc., is the Ohio Supercomputer Center at The Ohio State University.

Surrounding States

Early discussion with members of this breakout group, which included representatives from Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Georgia, and Pennsylvania -- centered on the economics of developing disaster preparedness and recovery programs at institutions. Part of moving forward depends on finances – where responders are staying when they are onsite, who is paying for their car and other travel, etc.

Julie Page described writing a one-paragraph memo to her Library Director to consider forming a disaster recovery network. She had funding and approval to start it within a week. She said the main priority for these institutions should be to get administrative buy-in. Another suggestion was to model an individual library or disaster network plan on the larger plan from the university, historical society, or museum’s next higher entity – city, county, or university.

Members of this discussion group were intrigued with Page's discussion of Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs), but felt they may have to get upper management permission to work with these groups. She asked participants to consider this work an extension of their reference library role, and said her involvement was done as part of her regional disaster network role.

For funding of statewide or regional disaster recovery activities, Claeson suggested that participants look at State Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding. LSTA will fund preservation and/or disaster assessments in many states. Next, states can apply for training money if they want to train constituent institutions in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Another funding suggestion was to approach State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs). Claeson noted that the estimated worth of collections will astound cultural resource professionals and their managers.

On discussion of training, the group was interested in the National Endowment for the Humanities-funded Train-the-Trainer program coordinated by the American Institute for Conservation in 2000-2001. They suggested that some entity, possibly Heritage Preservation, bring this type of training back and add more to the curriculum. Similar efforts could help to build and get response initiatives sustainable as it has with the California Preservation Program, where one teacher trained eight others in the state on preparedness and response, and now they all provide training statewide. Participants also briefly discussed state Illness, Injury and Prevention programs, which mandate that Public Libraries train staff.

Page and Claeson urged participants to get past "what's in it for me?" and think of these activities as part of their institution's service orientation. FEMA staff suggested that participants "think outside" of their normal box. There are mandates for communities to develop disaster plans and money to do it – so networks and consortia can concentrate on developing recovery resources at the local and county levels first. In addition, it was suggested that disaster recovery networks should try to attach themselves to existing groups such as local consortia, library or museum state and regional associations, and other professional groups.

To close, Page urged the group to build success stories in planning and recovery that are of interest to their administration. These stories should explain why disaster preparedness, response, and recovery are a feather in an institution's cap, not a hole in its pocket. For example, university libraries hold a great deal of the capital assets of their institutions, and in many cases, they may already be providing response for other departments on campus.

Next Steps

Long closed the day, giving the attendees a call to action, and talking about some of the ideas generated at the Dallas and Boston sessions. She recommended some simple steps to take – from reviewing your insurance policy to "taking a firefighter to lunch" – and pledged that Heritage Preservation will publish a report on the Forum series and explore

ways to help sustain local and regional disaster networks. Long urged attendees to consider their roles in building a local, state, and regional “safety net” for cultural heritage institutions by working with the most expert resources existing – the first responders. In Massachusetts and Texas, this work has already begun. A primary goal of the forums has been to establish viable local networks, and already two were launched in February 2004: START (State of Texas Alliance for Response Team) and in Boston, CEMT (Cultural Emergency Management Team).

A meeting of the Cincinnati Alliance for Response Planning Committee was held in early February, 2004, and the group is looking at development of local and regional disaster response networks in the Cincinnati and Southwestern Ohio, Columbus and Central Ohio, Southeastern Ohio, Northern Ohio, and providing assistance to interested groups in surrounding states. For more information on the next steps resulting from the Cincinnati Alliance for Response meeting, please contact Tom Clareson, Manager, Education and Planning, Digital Collection & Preservation Services Division, OCLC, at 800/848-5878, ext. 6071 or e-mail to Tom.Clareson@oclc.org.