

Philadelphia Alliance for Response
Meeting Summary for April 20, 2009
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The Philadelphia Alliance for Response held its Spring meeting at the Lyrasis (formerly PALINET) offices on April 20, 2009

Because the Philadelphia group has been interested in both local and national initiatives in Disaster Response, the agenda for the meeting provided a review of activities in Southeastern Pennsylvania and across the country.

Current National Disaster Response Initiatives

The first part of the meeting was devoted to national reports. Representatives of local organizations including the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region Office, and the Philadelphia Commissioner of Records Office discussed their planning activities for MayDay 2009.

This annual event, which began in 2006, has attracted many institutions in the Philadelphia area to undertake disaster planning initiatives each May. The MayDay concept is that any cultural heritage institution or staff member can do something quick and easy each May 1 that will have a large impact on their individual or institutional ability to respond in times of disaster. For example, in Spring 2009, the National Archives Regional Office was planning to test their Continuity of Operations Plan, moving their key activities to an alternate site. Other organizations were planning to review their Emergency Response plans, or look at specific issues in the care of vital records.

While the Philadelphia group agreed that there was not time to mobilize a city-wide or regional "MayDay" initiative for 2009, there was a great degree of interest and support in planning a large-scale activity for MayDay 2010. The group will meet in late 2009 or early 2010 to begin planning a large-scale MayDay event. The Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management showed a great deal of interest in working with the cultural heritage community on MayDay and many other disaster response initiatives in the future.

In the area of general training on disaster response, representatives of the city's Office of Emergency Management mentioned that they provide four Business Continuity Workshops per year, and are going to explore working with the Alliance for Response to make sure AFR members are included in an upcoming workshop.

Laura McHale of the National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region discussed the national IPER (Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records) effort, where each state is

developing “tailor-made” training for the protection and recovery of the state’s vital records. Pennsylvania is developing a training plan, and further information about the effort should be available in early 2010.

McHale also mentioned the CoSTEP (Coordinated State Emergency Planning) initiative, which is a grant-funded project to develop models for statewide emergency planning. Currently, the program is being piloted in Massachusetts and New Mexico.

Laura Hartz-Stanton of CCAHA (the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts) reported on the Heritage Emergency National Task Force which she had attended in mid-April in Washington, DC. These meetings, coordinated by Heritage Preservation (the National Institute for Conservation), bring together representatives of 50 leading cultural heritage organizations to discuss the latest developments in emergency planning for collections materials. The focus for the group’s April meeting was to learn about mapping disaster trends, especially hurricanes, and flooding, through systems developed by the National Hurricane Center and other groups.

Because there was so much interest in these allied efforts, there was a discussion of working with CCAHA and Heritage Preservation to provide Philadelphia Alliance for Response members with links to a variety of emergency resources on the Web.

Local Efforts in Collaborative Disaster Response

At the Philadelphia Alliance for Response Autumn 2008 meeting, there was a great deal of interest expressed in development of a shared cache of disaster supplies, available for institutions to use when disasters strike, and then replenish so the supplies are available for other organizations. A Task Force of AFR members, including representatives of the BELFOR Disaster Response organization, met via phone to discuss a number of issues related to the cache, including what supplies it should contain, and where it should be located. The group is going to continue working, in tandem with the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management, to plan for the placement of a disaster cache in the region.

Hartz Stanton of CCAHA reminded the group that a shared cache is an important “intermediate step,” allowing institutions to have some supplies to mitigate disasters as or soon after they happen, but these shared kits do not negate the need for individual cultural heritage institutions to have their own disaster supplies on hand. She told the group that CCAHA has a “crash cart” of disaster supplies which can be accessed after a disaster; CCAHA also has a disaster response hotline which is monitored via answering machine over the weekend.

Joan Decker, Philadelphia Commissioner of Records, discussed the city’s Emergency Pre-Credentialing program, which allows staff early access back into their institutions if a disaster occurs, so that you can begin recovery of your vital records and critical materials. The CEAS (Corporate Emergency Access System) was initially developed for businesses, but is now able to be used by cultural heritage institutions for a low cost on a

sliding scale based on number of employees, which will appeal to non-profit organizations.

The other major local presentation for the meeting was from Philadelphia Fire Lieutenant Michael Grant, a “veteran presenter” to the Alliance for Response group. Lt. Grant spoke about two programs which can benefit our organizations. First, a Fire Safety Inspection Report, which should be completed annually for our buildings in conjunction with an inspection by a local fire platoon, will make sure facilities are up to code, and allow us to learn about areas we can improve fire safety. A Vital Building Information Report allows Fire Department personnel to learn about construction features, fire protection systems, and hazardous materials in our facilities, allowing them to respond more safely and specifically to our emergencies.

The meeting also included brief presentations and discussions by newly-formed committees of the Philadelphia Alliance for Response. These include a Disaster Response Team/Disaster Cache Committee (led by Laura Hertz Stanton of CCAHA), a Liaison Committee for outreach to local and state emergency response efforts (Laura McHale, National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region), a communications committee (Laura Blanchard, PACSCL) , and a Program/Education Committee (Tom Claeson, Lyrasis). Among these, the Disaster Response/Cache group had actions to report after their brief committee meeting:

Disaster Cache/Disaster Response Team Committee

At Table: Carmen Vendelin, La Salle University; Donald Azuma, Wagner Free Institute of Science; Nancy Taylor, Presbyterian Historical Society; Lois Fisher Black, Lehigh University; Jo McKinley, NJ Division of Archives and Records Management; Samantha Slade, La Salle University.

The discussion at the table surrounded some of the topics, ideas, and projects that could be tackled by a disaster cache and disaster response team committee, as well as some of the challenges faced in getting these projects off the ground.

Disaster Response Teams

The group began the discussion of how the response teams would be formed and sustained. The logistical issues of matching and training teams were touched upon but no decisions were made. It was also discussed that teams might not be the most effective operational model. Rather, there might be sets of people trained to respond to a particular type of emergency who would then be dispatched by members of the committee as necessary. There could also be people designated as “runners” that would be interested in helping by going to get supplies and other things as necessary. The group also briefly discussed what types of training would be necessary for partner institutions, including behind the scenes tours of collections areas.

Action Items: Guidelines for how the teams will work and necessary training need to be developed by the committee prior to launching a program of this nature. There also needs to be some type of waiver/agreement when working in an outside institution. Need 4-5 committee members to participate and be willing to assist in implementation.

Disaster Supply Cache

At the roundtable to group discussed the logistics involved in getting the cache started including accessibility of the location and who would have accessibility. Also, how would initial supplies be purchased and replenished, if used. Due to the diversity of sites and locations of Philadelphia-area institutions the group thought it necessary to have multiple locations, perhaps 1-2 in the City and 1-2 in suburban areas.

Action Item: Before this program can effectively move forward, a committee of 3-4 people is needed to establish guidelines for operation and determine optimal cache location(s). Once the guidelines and locations have been established the committee could then effectively approach vendors and funders for donations to establish the cache.