

Discussion Group #3
Community Roles in Emergency Preparedness and Response

We want to encourage libraries to have a community role in emergency preparedness planning and response.

Please discuss and answer the following questions with your group.

Before you start, please identify a volunteer who will present a summary of the group's feedback for general discussion at 11 a.m.

1. What do libraries bring to the table that is beneficial to community emergency preparedness planning?
2. What are the assets at your library that might be needed or useful after an emergency (e.g. computers with Internet access, etc.)?
3. What agencies are logical partners for assisting with regional emergency preparedness planning efforts?
4. What are some example types of special projects or awards that the RML could consider funding to encourage emergency preparedness activities by libraries for their organizations and their communities?

DISCUSSION NOTES

1. What do librarians bring to the table that is beneficial to community emergency preparedness planning?

It is important to consider what assets libraries have to offer communities, ranging from physical space to computer systems and information access. The emergency plans of cities, counties and the regional area could be stored in repositories at the library and shared with others for ideas and other communities to develop similar plans in addition to information about best practices. Librarians receive hundreds of calls about every topic and are experienced in dealing with the public's behavior, public libraries should therefore hold emergency preparedness workshops for the community. Librarians are well experienced in planning due to our library and information science background and training and should be consulted as part of strategic planning, referral sources and to be part of teams. The question was raised of how capable are librarians of doing this emergency preparedness work in addition to existing workloads? A discussion was held with the conclusion that the attempt needs to be made, as it is unknown if the community even has considered emergency preparedness as a formal plan. Libraries and librarians are not always thought of as community resources, and it is our responsibility to offer ourselves as them for use by our communities.

2. What are assets at your library that might be needed or useful after an emergency (e.g. computers with Internet access, etc.)?

Libraries and librarians need to be looked at to do things after an emergency that we wouldn't normally do. Computer access could be made available for the public seeking to email family members to let them know they are OK. Librarians could serve as front line workers, data people who are able to work shifts to coordinate logistics, information needs, what organizations need to be involved, and ask questions since librarians are trained to think things through logically. Librarians can coordinate, collect data, critically analyze and organize information afterwards as needed. Medical librarians have knowledge of HAZMAT and toxicology terminology with access to information and resources about these emergency needs. Librarians can serve as the public face in an emergency since they are used to dealing with both the public and information access sources simultaneously. It is important to remember in an emergency that the first priority is human life and safety above all else. Librarians can be people who work with first responders since they have good interpersonal skills. There is a set timeline sequence of when prevention, emergency and response techniques are engaged: prevention, response, recovery are the stages of disaster management. The type of library considered to assist in emergency preparedness would also partially determine its response. The public would not necessarily come to a health sciences library in an emergency but may consider a public library.

From Gary's UW campus perspective, every emergency and facility is different, CERT teams would want to remain in their assigned areas on campus. County and city wide emergency preparedness plans need coordination with the community to determine how librarians can be a part of it. We need to be familiar with existing plans; lower Boat Street is an emergency command center even though it is likely to collapse from liquefaction in the event of a strong earthquake. Public health officials, first responders, city and county planners all contribute to emergency management and develop campus plans. It is important to stay within the context of being a part of the community at large but not lose site of the facility plan. Public health officials consider vulnerable populations such as the elderly, poor, children, those with addictions or who are institutionalized, etc. and plot those community populations on a map since they are likely to be disproportionately affected by a disaster.

Continuing the previous discussion, librarians need to be focused on community based public health needs and assist with access to translators and interpreters. The CO poisoning problems in the wake of the 2006 winter storms in the Pacific Northwest also happened seven years ago but the information, resources and lessons learned were not retained. It is essential to get information to the public in a variety of media channels such as what to have in a car for survival, prevention measures, and how to develop a family emergency plan. Gary was asked if librarians should be considered as first responders, and his reply was that it depends on the context of the library with space and communication structure, that smaller libraries are at a disadvantage to serve depending on the type of disaster and the situation and size of the library. Disaster planning at UW does not incorporate evacuation plans since that is already covered, but may need to be included in other disaster plans. There is no single right answer to disaster planning, although information templates, population locations and access to medical databases could be valuable to the communities. Gary's response to the

concern raised about negative perceptions by the community after a disaster if a library was used in a nontraditional way, such as a morgue, was that in a disaster it doesn't matter because you do what needs to be done.

3. What agencies are logical partners for assisting with regional emergency preparedness planning efforts?

Proposed groups were faith-based organizations, law enforcement, the media, CCS, Red Cross, Evergreen Safety Council and related safety groups. Libraries could have a directory of groups that are related to draw on for specific support needs such as a computer support groups, education groups, and teacher/education groups. In northern Idaho, the schools are where people congregate in an emergency since their children are likely to be there and the facilities are equipped with backup power and water supplies as hospitals are. The state Department of Transportation should determine emergency access routes, New Orleans did not reverse the direction of highways to be exit only lanes for evacuation from Katrina.

4. What are some example types of special projects or awards that the RML could consider funding to encourage emergency preparedness activities by libraries for their organizations and their communities?

There should be collaboration between NLM GoLocal projects and 211 as Go Local disaster information is mandatory regardless of if they're currently live. We should fund travel grants for people to attend disaster planning workshops in other areas if their own area doesn't have them available. Consideration should be given to the recent floods in Texas and Oklahoma, how are those being handled? Did they do prevention work to close the information gap from management of Katrina? Fund a retrospective study of lessons learned from the 2006 winter storms in the Pacific Northwest and develop best practices from them. We could fund material supplies for libraries such as rolls of plastic, black garbage bags, duct tape. We could also fund translators for health information about disaster supplies in other languages similar to immunization sheets in Bozeman. A refugee health information network, creating emergency preparedness brochures, and asking high schools to develop community health coaches as knowledgeable citizens who know what to do in an emergency were proposed in addition to funding a special collection of disaster planning books to develop a display in the library with others available via ILL.

Facilitators:

Gail Kouame (Lead)
Consumer Health Outreach Coordinator
NN/LM PNR

Roy Sahali
Community Resources Coordinator
NN/LM PNR

Participants:

Heidi Sue Adams
Medical Librarian
Kalispell Regional Medical Center Library
Kalispell, MT

Nikki Dettmar
MLIS student
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Jeanne Farnworth
Librarian
Portneuf District Library
Chubbuck, ID

Ann Glusker
iSchool Student
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Marcia Horner
Professional Grant Consultant
Greenbank, WA

Gary Menges
Preservation Administrator
Library Collections Security Officer
University of Washington Libraries
Seattle, WA