

HURRICANE/DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE BY UTILIZING FLORIDA PUBLIC LIBRARIES: UPDATE

Purpose: Florida's individual public libraries provide a range of useful hurricane and disaster preparation and recovery services to their communities but their individual efforts are often isolated and unavailable to the rest of the library community. There has been no systematic effort to identify the roles, best practices, activities, tools and resources developed by local public libraries for their communities and to make them available to the larger library profession. All public library managers could help their communities respond better if they had the benefit of some portion of their fellow library managers' disaster experience. This project will reduce the state's overall risk by raising the capacity of all the state's public libraries to meet the challenges posed by these catastrophes. The project, through a web portal <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/> and other means, will:

- Identify, and then organize, relevant public library hurricane related information resources, services, roles, and best practices;
- Identify, aggregate, assess, and organize successful individual Florida public library best practices related to hurricane preparedness and response;
- Develop model plans, standards, guidelines and recommendations – which will be made available via print and through an interactive website;
- Offer strategies to assist state and regional public library, as well as government officials with disaster coordination and organization responsibilities;
- Disseminate to Florida's public libraries, agencies, and other organizations - through a variety of means - resources, services, experiences, best practices, plans and guidelines to coordinate Florida's public library managers and government partners to better prepare for and respond to hurricanes; and
- Offer workshops during the month of April 2009, throughout Florida, on the roles, best practices, tools and resources now available to public library managers, due to the project's findings, regarding how public libraries can assist their communities to better prepare for, and recover from, hurricanes.

Charles R. McClure, the project's Principal Investigator, stated that "this project offers a great opportunity for Florida public libraries to better demonstrate the range of services and responses they can provide during such disasters." Listen to a 3 minute WFSU [radio interview](#) with McClure about the project, read a [LibraryJournal.com article](#) about the project, or visit the project website at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>

Background. The [Information Use Management & Policy Institute](#) (Information Institute) directed by Charles R. McClure, PhD., Francis Eppes Professor at the College of Information, Florida State University (FSU) has been awarded a \$311,440 grant to assist public libraries and local communities better plan for, and respond to, hurricanes. The [Florida Catastrophic Storm Risk Management Center](#), at Florida State University's College of Business, awarded the grant to the Information Institute for the period August 8, 2008 thru December 31, 2009. The Institute has partnered with the [State Library and Archives of Florida](#), directed by Judith Ring, LYRASIS (formerly SOLINET), directed by Kate Nevins, Florida's [Multitype Library Cooperatives](#) and public libraries throughout the region, as well as federal, state, local and community agencies concerned with Florida hurricane preparedness and recovery. The project has resulted in a website <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/> that identifies key service roles, best practices, tools and resources that enable better utilization of the public library in community hurricane preparation and recovery.

Preliminary Findings. Preliminary findings from the study suggest that public libraries play several key roles that aid community and evacuee hurricane response. Before and after a storm, public libraries may provide:

- **Safe Haven:** The public library is the community's living room and study before and after a storm, with safe, secure buildings, relaxing space, light, air conditioning, bathrooms and comfortable chairs.

- **Normal Service:** The community counts on normal library service before and after the storm, be it book, DVD, Internet use, reference or family programming. Normal library service provides hope, re-establishes a local government presence, reduces stress, returns normalcy, and offers recreation and distraction.
- **Disaster Recovery Center (DRC):** The public library offers the community a DRC, whether it's a FEMA designated DRC; a place to prepare residents for a DRC visit; a Point Of Distribution (POD) or a local neighborhood place to make sense of the disaster that has just occurred.
- **Information Hub:** The community counts on the library, before and after a storm, to be a communication hub (offering copiers, phones, fax, computers, WiFi, Internet access rechargers), as well as to offer hurricane preparation and recovery information and assistance.
- **Cultural Organizations Liaison:** The public library may serve as a liaison between emergency management and the community's tourist attractions and cultural institutions.
- **Evacuee Resource:** Evacuees turn to the nearest public library for safe haven, normal service, emergency information hub services and as a disaster recovery center.
- **Improvisation:** The community counts on the public library during a disaster to improvise and do whatever is needed as directed by emergency management and local government.

Key Issues. Many public libraries are an underutilized community asset in disaster response. How can public libraries be better utilized to improve community hurricane preparedness and response?

- **Emphasize effort to aid the community:** Shift public library management emphasis from an internal focus (preservation and restoration of public library facilities and collection) to an external one (How can the public library, as part of a team of responders, aid in its community's hurricane response?);
- **Increase awareness:**
 - **Among public librarians:** about the roles, best practices, tools and resources available to them, as they shape their library's efforts to aid their community's hurricane response. Encourage public library managers to better understand and aid the roles of their fellow responders, particularly emergency management local government leadership and other agencies;
 - **Among fellow responders:** about the roles public libraries may play, as part of a team, to aid in community hurricane preparation and recovery. Responders include: emergency management, local government leadership and agencies, non profits and businesses.
 - **Among residents and evacuees:** by communicating to residents what hurricane preparation and recovery services they can count on from their public library.
- **Pre-coordinate, partner, integrate:** Better pre-coordinate and integrate public libraries' responsibilities, as part of a team of responders aiding the community to respond to disasters.
- **Increase local and regional disaster planning among libraries and other cultural institutions:** Regional library response may be needed if local library capacity is overwhelmed by a disaster. Prior planning and coordination can speed restoration efforts. Currently, local cultural and other community organizations may also be underutilized in your communities' disaster response efforts. The library could take the lead, or be a partner, in remedying this situation.
- **Share what works (and doesn't):** Individual public library hurricane best practices, tools and experiences will remain in isolation and underutilized until hurricane experienced librarians share what they have learned, in such forums as the project web site, workshops and via other means.

Next Steps. The Information Institute will continue to provide training, as well as refine and expand the project website and its content at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>. Be sure to check the "[to do](#)" list of quick and practical actions that librarians can take NOW in preparation for the 2009 hurricane season: <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/docs/NextSteps/HurricaneToDo3.31.09.doc>. During the summer and fall of 2009, continued enhancements will be made to the website, so continue to monitor the website throughout the coming hurricane season.

Contact Us. For further information, or to share experiences, please contact Joe Ryan, Project Manager jzryan@earthlink.net or Charles R. McClure, Principal Investigator at the Information Institute cmclure@lis.fsu.edu.