

ALLIANCE ACTIVITY GUIDE

Disaster Preparedness Activity

A good disaster plan, well conceived and familiar to all staff, is a museum's best risk management tool for the protection and recovery of collections in the case of natural or man-made disasters. These plans also help protect museum staff and visitors and assist the museum in recovering crucial business and operational records. This activity assesses response readiness to emergency situations that affect collections. It can help identify weak links in an existing disaster preparedness plan, or help start the process of creating a plan.

Museum Assessment Program

Since 1981, the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) has helped museums strengthen operations, plan for the future and meet national standards through self-study and peer review. Supported through a cooperative agreement between the Alliance and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, MAP helps museums do one or more of the following: prioritize goals; plan for the future; strengthen communications between staff, board and other constituents; and build credibility with potential funders and donors.

Part of the MAP process includes a self-study questionnaire, which uses questions and activities to provoke exploration. The activities provide museums with the opportunity to assess the knowledge about its operations in action. The activities are designed to be conducted as group exercises in order to stimulate dialogue about issues and challenges that the museum faces. MAP participants assemble an assessment team to work through all of the activities and self-study questions. Museums not participating in MAP may find it helpful to create a team of appropriate participants for each activity.

This activity is one of many designed by MAP as part of the self-study process. It ranks highly with program participants and has been used in over 2,000 assessments.

Materials

- » Copies of your organization’s disaster plan (if you have one)
- » Copies of the “Emergency Supplies and Information” checklist included in this activity guide

Participants

Suggested participants include the director and a cross-section of functional areas—collections, building and grounds, security, conservation and public relations. As a disaster plan protects the whole museum, and helps to get it up and running again as soon as possible, it is beneficial for all functional areas of the museum to be represented.

Part 1: Check Supplies and Information

Have the participants use the attached “Emergency Supplies and Information” checklist to assess the adequacy of your supplies and information in case of an emergency. This will be used in the next part (for organizations with a disaster plan), and in the summary discussions.

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Part 2: Simulate a Disaster

For museums with a disaster preparedness plan, choose one person to serve as the “Disaster Master” (DM). Have the DM (working with others, if appropriate) craft a disaster scenario for something likely to happen at your institution. This could be a regional disaster, such as a flood, hurricane, tornado, or earthquake, or a localized incident, such as a burst water pipe. Identify the people who would need to be involved in a response to the chosen incident. (Include a representative of frontline or maintenance staff likely to be the first to discover a localized problem.) We recommend scheduling at least two hours for this group to run through the exercise.

When the group convenes, explain the simulation rules:

- » They will read the introductory scenario, and role-play their response as the disaster response proceeds
- » The DM gets to specify all variables that are “fictional” in the scenario (e.g., whose phone line is knocked out? Where, exactly, is the water coming in?)
- » Where you can, check whether a given step in the process will really work. You can refer to the completed Emergency Supplies checklist from Part 1 to assess the availability of supplies and information. Other kinds of things you can test with this group: do people know where the shut off-

valve is for the gas? For water? If your phone system depends on electricity, where is the nearest pay phone or cell phone you can use if the power is out?

Proceed with the simulation until you have stabilized the situation. During the simulation, and in the wrap-up discussion, evaluate the following points:

- » Was it clear who was in charge during the response?
- » Were participants familiar with the contents of your disaster plan?
- » Is the plan current, and did it help you deal with the simulated disaster?
- » Were there materials or information you did not have available, or procedures you needed that were not included in the plan?
- » How did you determine priorities for rescuing or salvaging collections material, records, and equipment?
- » Was it clear who would communicate with the press, and what information would be released?

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Summary

Have the participants write a summary of the activity findings, simulation, and discussion. Address the following points:

- » Was staff familiar with the contents of your disaster plan?
- » Did they know where to find it?
- » Did each person know what he or she should do in this situation, or did they have to stop and figure it out?
- » Was it clear who was in charge?
- » Did they find the equipment and information they needed to respond effectively?
- » Did you discover any weak points in your preparedness, and did you come to any conclusions about how to address them?



Emergency Supply and Information Checklist

Which of the following supplies and information can you find at your facility? As you inventory, consider: are they easy to find? Stored in one place or in scattered locations? Do you need a key to get to the necessary supplies? Could you find/retrieve them if the power were out?

Protection for People

- First-aid kits (check contents)
- Gloves (rubber and leather)
- Rubber boots and aprons
- Safety glasses
- Hard hats

Phone Numbers/Communication

- Staff, volunteers and key board members
- Phone tree (who will call whom?)
- Police/fire/emergency
- Contractors/services
- Insurance representative
- Radio/TV stations
- Conservation services
- Walkie-talkies or cell phone(s)

Basic Cleaning Supplies

- Plastic trash bags
- Plastic buckets and trash cans
- Rolls of paper towels
- Sponges/rags
- Mop
- Broom

Business Supplies

- Blank checks and purchase orders
- Stationary and blank forms
- Duplicates of essential office records off-site (paper &/or electronic)

Facilities Repair and Access

- Flashlights
- Batteries
- Plywood to cover broken windows
- Basic tool kit (hammer, screwdrivers, nails, screws, saw)

Water and Humidity Control

- Plastic sheeting
- Scissors
- Tape (masking and duct)
- Dehumidifier
- Hygrometer
- Extension cords (long, grounded)
- Portable electric fans
- Wet/dry vacuum

Recovery Materials

- Written collections recovery procedures
- Duplicate records off-site
- Clipboards
- Indelible marking pens
- Laptop computer
- Camera and films
- Carts
- Plastic crates
- Plastic wrap
- Zip-lock baggies or equivalent
- Blank newsprint
- Freezer/wax paper

Core Documents Verification

The [Core Documents Verification](#) program verifies that an institution has an educational mission and policies and procedures in place that reflect standard practices of professional museums, as articulated in *National Standards and Best Practice for U.S. Museums* and used in the Accreditation program. A disaster preparedness/emergency response plan is one of five core documents that are fundamental for basic professional museum operations. Use this Alliance activity guide to help your museum develop or strengthen its plan and its understanding of disaster planning. For more on disaster planning and preparedness, please see the Alliance’s reference guide on this topic.

Standards

The Alliance’s standards address “big picture” issues about how museums operate. For the most part, they define broad outcomes that can be achieved in many different ways and are flexible enough to accommodate a diverse museum field. These standards can be achieved in tandem with standards issued by other organizations that address aspects of museum operations or the museum profession.

Adhering to standards is achievable by all types of museums.

Standards provide a common language that enables museums to self-regulate, demonstrate professionalism and increase accountability. Policy-makers, media, philanthropic organizations, donors and members of the public use standards to assess a museum’s performance and evaluate its worthiness to receive public support and trust. Simply stated by Elizabeth Merritt in *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, “Standards are fundamental to being a good museum, a responsible nonprofit and a well-run business.”

Having a strong disaster preparedness/emergency response plan helps museums adhere to standards. For more on standards, visit the Alliance’s website at www.aam-us.org.

Where to Find Out More

The [Museum Assessment Program](#) (MAP) helps small and mid-sized museums strengthen operations, plan for the future and meet national standards through self-study and a site visit from a peer reviewer. IMLS-funded MAP grants are non-competitive and provide \$4,000 worth of consultative resources and services to participating museums. For more information, visit www.aam-us.org.

- » [National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums](#), edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2008)

This guide is an essential reference work for the museum community, presenting the ideals that should be upheld by every museum striving to maintain excellence in its operations. It includes a full outline of the standards, including the overarching Characteristics of Excellence for U.S. Museums and the seven areas of performance they address. Throughout the book is commentary by Elizabeth E. Merritt, director of the Alliance's Center for the Future of Museums. This publication is available as a [free PDF to all museum members](#).

- » [Covering Your Assets: Facilities and Risk Management in Museums](#), edited by Elizabeth E. Merritt (AAM Press, 2005)

This publication offers data on how professionals around the country operate their facilities, manage space and risk and prepare for emergencies. Data is broken out by museum discipline, governance type, and parent organization. It also includes insightful essays on best practices from outside experts and leading professionals in the field.

- » [Sample Documents](#)

The Information Center's sample document collection is a unique and valuable resource for Tier 3 member museums. The collection contains more than 1,000 samples of policies, plans and forms from museums of all types and sizes, most of which were written by accredited museums. Tier 3 members can request sample documents from the Information Center in order to stimulate a conversation about issues and challenges facing the museum and to explore how different museums approach different issues. Using the sample documents should not replace the process of joining staff, governing authority and stakeholders in fruitful and thoughtful planning and policy-making.