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

<http://www.hurricanes.ii.fsu.edu/>

Purpose. Public libraries provide a broad range of useful hurricane and disaster preparation and recovery services to their communities, but their individual efforts are often isolated and unavailable to other public library managers. 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. This project will reduce overall community risk by raising the capacity of all public libraries to meet the challenges posed by these catastrophes by doing the following:

- Identify and organize relevant public library hurricane-related information resources, services, roles, and successful individual public library best practices;
- Develop model plans, standards, guidelines and recommendations – which will be made available via print and through an interactive web portal;
- Offer strategies to assist state, regional, and local public library directors and staff, as well as government officials, with disaster coordination and organization responsibilities;
- Disseminate to public libraries, agencies, and other organizations – through a variety of means – resources, services, experiences, best practices, plans and guidelines to coordinate public library managers and government partners to better prepare for and respond to hurricanes; and,
- Offer workshops on how public libraries can assist their communities to better prepare for and respond to hurricanes.

Dr. Charles R. McClure, the project's Principal Investigator, stated that "this project offers a great opportunity for public libraries to better demonstrate the range of services and responses they can provide during such disasters." The project has been featured in a 3 minute WFSU [radio interview](#) with McClure and a [LibraryJournal.com article](#), and more information is available on the project web portal at <http://www.hurricanes.ii.fsu.edu>.

Background. The [Information Use Management & Policy Institute](#) (Information Institute) directed by Charles R. McClure, PhD, Francis Eppes Professor at the College of Communication & 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 through August 6, 2010. 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 web portal (<http://www.hurricanes.ii.fsu.edu/>) that identifies key service roles, best practices, tools, and resources that enable better utilization of the public library in community hurricane preparation and recovery.

Findings. Findings from the study suggest that public libraries play the following key roles that aid community and evacuee hurricane responses:

- **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 to provide hope, re-establish a local government presence, reduce stress, return normalcy, and offer recreation and distraction before and after the storm;
- **Disaster Recovery Center (DRC):** The public library offers the community a DRC, whether 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;
- **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, chargers, as well as 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, and a disaster recovery center; and
- **Improvise:** 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 underutilized community assets in disaster response, and the following are ways public libraries can help improve community hurricane preparedness and response:

- **Emphasize effort to aid the community:** Shift public library management emphasis from an internal focus on preservation and restoration of public library facilities and collection to an external focus on how the public library, as part of a team of emergency responders, can aid in its community's hurricane response;
- **Increase awareness:**
 - *Among public librarians:* Encourage public library managers to better understand the roles, best practices, tools, and resources available to them as they shape their libraries' efforts to aid their communities' hurricane response and to aid the roles of their fellow responders, particularly emergency management, local government leadership, and other agencies;
 - *Among fellow emergency responders:* Educate other responders such as emergency management, local government leadership and agencies, non profits and businesses about the roles public libraries may play, as part of a team, to aid in community hurricane preparation and recovery; and
 - *Among residents and evacuees:* Communicate to residents what hurricane preparation and recovery services they can count on from their public library;
- **Pre-coordinate, partner, integrate:** Better organize and integrate public libraries' responsibilities as part of the team of emergency management, local government leadership, and other agencies that aids the community to respond to disasters;
- **Increase local and regional disaster planning among libraries and other cultural institutions:** Prior planning and coordination of regional library response can speed restoration efforts in the wake of a disaster; and
- **Share what works (and doesn't):** Encourage hurricane experienced librarians to share what they have learned regarding individual public library hurricane best practices, tools and experiences, in such forums as the project web portal, workshops, and other means.

Next Steps. The Information Institute will continue to provide training, as well as to refine and expand the project website and its content at <http://www.hurricanes.ii.fsu.edu/> through the end of the project funding period (August 6, 2010). The Institute is seeking additional funding and partnerships to continue to update and expand the web portal and to develop additional modules, with particular emphasis on modules that assist public library managers to cultivate relationships with local Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs), regional disaster recovery agencies, and other emergency management and government responders.

Contact Us. For further information, or to share experiences, please contact Charles R. McClure, PhD, Principal Investigator, at the Information Institute: cmclure@lis.fsu.edu.