

Libraries as Partners for Emergency Preparedness and Response in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

Multi-type libraries have proven themselves as providers to their communities during many emergencies, from wildfires and hurricanes to pandemics, mental health crises, and more.

Despite libraries' history of work during crises, groups such as the fire service, emergency medical services, health departments and others may not be aware of the role that libraries can take on as partners in emergency preparation, response, and recovery.

This presentation describes an ongoing project funded through an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant which investigates libraries' role during emergencies especially as partners to emergency response groups.

The project's major activities include a case study survey of Illinois libraries and two national-level Community Engagement Roundtable discussions.

It will serve as a preliminary investigation to lay the groundwork for future research and begin to increase libraries and emergency responders' understanding of how they can collaborate for increased community safety and resiliency.

Project Description

- A 2-year **planning type project**: August 1, 2023 – July 31, 2025
- A preliminary investigation into library community partnerships during public crises, focused in **3 key areas**:
 - Emergencies
 - Scope and Nature of Partnership
 - Role of Libraries in Partnership
- **Project will fill a research gap** in understanding the extent of library-community partnerships during emergencies and begin laying the groundwork for future research in this area.

Project Goals

1. To **co-define** with community service stakeholder partners what “partnership” means between libraries and community partners;
2. To **make visible** the scope and nature of library-community partnerships;
3. To **develop a baseline framework** and **identify areas of further study** to prepare for future collaborative research projects that will examine in-depth the practices, lessons learned, gaps in service to marginalized communities, and emergency management educational programs and training for collaboration with community partners; and,
4. To develop a widely disseminated **report of findings in the three key areas** and with the previous three goals that can help libraries and community partners begin to understand the potential roles of libraries during emergencies and paths of future work which build on this preliminary investigation.

State Advisory Committee and National Advisory Board

State Advisory Committee

- Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE)
- Carle Foundation Hospital
- Champaign-Urbana Public Health District
- Chicago Public Library
- Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA)
- Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS)
- Illinois Library Association (ILA)
- Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM)
- Reaching Across Illinois Library System (RAILS)
- Special Libraries Association (SLA), Illinois Community
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Division of Public Safety
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI)

National Advisory Board

- American Library Association
- Association of Research Libraries (ARL)
- Florida Virtual Campus Library Services (FLVC)
- Joint Council of Librarians of Color (JCLC)
- National Library of Medicine (NLM), National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- Public Library Association (PLA)
- Special Libraries Association (SLA)
- University of Texas-Austin: Moody College of Communication, School of Journalism and Media
- Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC)

Year 1: August 1, 2023 – July 31, 2024

Case Study Survey of Illinois Libraries

- Online survey using the platform **Qualtrics** targeting multi-type Illinois libraries
- Illinois libraries will serve as a **case study and microcosm of the larger library-community at the national level** and their work with community partners.
- **State advisors are key to disseminating the survey** to the library communities in Illinois that they represent.
- Year 1 survey **will generate a fundamental understanding** of the emergencies that libraries respond to, the scope and nature of library partnerships during emergencies, and the role of libraries in these partnerships.

Year 1 Continued

- Survey was developed to include **4 sections, corresponding to the project's 3 key focus areas:**
 - About You (background and context on respondents)
 - Emergencies
 - Scope and Nature of Partnership
 - Role of Libraries in Partnership
- Was **distributed through the social media, newsletters, list serves, and other methods of state advisors** as well as through **direct emails to Illinois libraries** using their public contact information from a public directory.
- As of this presentation, **the survey has received 568 responses (as of 2/12/2024)** and will close on February 29, 2024.

Year 2: August 1, 2024 – July 31, 2025

Community Engagement Roundtables (CERs)

- **Survey results will directly contribute to the development of two virtual Community Engagement Roundtables (CERs) in January and February 2025**
- CERs will **raise the conversation to the national level** and include expert panelists from the library/information science and emergency response/management fields.
- **Participants from across the nation will be invited** to join the conversations.
- CERs will include both **panel discussions** which participants will spectate, and **small group discussions** between participants. Online polls will also be used to collect participant ideas.

Intended Results

- Intended results correspond to the project's 3 key areas:

Area	Intended Result
Area 1: Emergencies	<p><i>Identification of the types of emergencies that libraries have responded to in the past, are currently responding to, or have created plans to respond to.</i></p> <p>This result will inform understanding of the scope and extent of library-community partnerships, as partnerships may vary depending on the specific challenges and needs related to emergency type.</p>
Area 2: Scope and Nature of Partnership	<p><i>Clarification of the scope and extent of library-community partnership during emergencies.</i></p> <p>This result will inform understanding of if or if not library-community partnerships during emergencies exist; if not, why they do not exist, and if so, what is the nature of the partnerships, and how have they been developed and maintained?</p>
Area 3: Role of Libraries in Partnership	<p><i>Description of the past, current, and future role that libraries play in partnerships with community partners during emergencies, and suggestions for the future role of libraries in partnership during emergencies.</i></p> <p>This result will inform both libraries and community partners of how libraries can play an equal part in emergency preparation, response, and recovery, help to develop initial recommendations for libraries to follow for successful partnerships, and provide further paths of future exploration on libraries' role as emergency partners.</p>

Next Steps After 2025

- After completion of the CERs, a **project white paper** will be developed and published to disseminate **findings and initial thoughts on best practices** for partnership between libraries and community emergency response groups.
- Application for a longer, more **in-depth research grant** will be prepared to continue to build on the findings of this initial project.
- **Overall, this project will deepen the bond and strength of community networks, increasing libraries' capacity for constituency support during crises, and improve the safety and resiliency of libraries' communities.**

Questions?

Thank you!

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