

IMLS – Connecting to Collections
Statewide Planning Grant
Developing a Statewide Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan for Iowa

Introduction

The Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium and its partners propose to develop a formal, coordinated response plan at the state and local level by surveying institutional preparedness and knowledge of resources, geo-mapping locations of cultural repositories, raising awareness of importance and need for disaster response plans, developing a strategy for marshalling resources to act as "first responders," and developing a simple, broadly applicable disaster response planning tool.

Need and Rationale

In June 2008, a report issued by the U.S. Climate Change Science Program, a joint effort of more than a dozen government agencies concluded that the extreme weather we have been experiencing will become more extreme. This is due to climate change. The report suggested that droughts will get drier, storms will get stormier, and floods will get deeper with a warming climate. The report noted that "currently rare extreme events will become commonplace."¹

Iowa has experienced a series of extreme weather events over the last two years. In 2007, massive ice storms caused widespread power outages and extremely dangerous travel conditions. Conditions became even more challenging in 2008. In May, Parkersburg was decimated by a deadly EF5 tornado. In July, straight-line winds in excess of 90 miles per hour caused extensive damage in the Quad Cities. Nothing was more extreme than the all-time record flooding in June 2008 that caused billions of dollars in damage and impacted more than 300 communities. The Cedar River crested in Cedar Rapids over 31 feet, nearly 20 feet above the flood stage and 12 feet higher than the historic flood of 1993. Nine rivers in Iowa reached all-time record flood levels, and 85 of the state's 99 counties were declared disaster areas.

Iowans now live with the reality that with a changing climate, the past is no longer a reliable predictor for the future and extreme flooding will happen again. So the question is, how are we going to plan and prepare now to minimize the damage from future extreme floods?

Iowa's Governor, Chet Culver, established the Rebuild Iowa Advisory Commission in June 2008 to address that question with the goal of building a stronger, smarter, and safer Iowa. At the outset, the Commission stated that "culture and records as Iowa's identity is important, and that if these items of cultural heritage vanish from Iowa's landscape, the items that Iowans associate with their history, traditions and sense of place also disappears." The task forces

¹ *Weather and Climate Extremes in a Changing Climate: Final Report, Synthesis and Assessment Product 3.3*
<http://www.climate-science.gov/Library/sap/sap3-3/final-report/Brochure-CCSP-3-3.pdf>

appointed to advise the Commission included one on Cultural Heritage and one on Records Retention.

The two Task Forces submitted a combined report with the following recommendations:²

- Encourage cultural entities in Iowa to participate in emergency planning and mitigation internally and in coordination with their communities and counties, [including integration of] culture into ... community and county emergency plans.
- Provide supportive resources for a comprehensive data collection effort, including geo-mapping and other assessment data collection.
- Train ... volunteers, professionals, and staff to respond to disasters and provide damage assessments for cultural and arts institutions and organizations.
- Provide emergency resources for conservation labs, ensuring long-term preservation of records, documents, and collections.
- Train county and municipal emergency management professionals on the need to include records retention in emergency preparedness plans.
- Encourage relationship-building between those responsible for records management and emergency management professionals.

These recommendations complement those made by Heritage Preservation in response to the findings of the Heritage Health Index, in particular the recommendation that collecting institutions develop an emergency plan. This Planning Grant Project is designed to increase the knowledge about the content and conditions of collections; help institutions provide safe conditions for their collections through the development of emergency plans, training, and expert assistance; encourage greater support for protecting cultural collections from state and local governments and from private entities; and strengthen the collaborations among those who bear responsibility for protecting our cultural heritage, including library, museum, and archival staff and volunteers and state and local emergency managers.

For its population size, Iowa has a relatively large number of organizations that bear responsibility for cultural collections. There are 99 counties and 947 municipalities which create and preserve public records, and 667 public and academic libraries which hold 4.6 million titles and 16.5 million items. There are also over 450 local historical organizations, historic sites, and museums which care for an unknown number of collection items.

Many factors place these collections at risk. Of the 450 local organizations, sites, and museums, 69% operate on less than \$25,000 per year and 45% operate on less than \$10,000 per year. The last survey of archival collections in 1997 found that only 17% of repositories had written emergency plans in place.³ While every Iowa county emergency plan has a section reserved for identification and protection of cultural properties, most emergency managers are unsure how and where to begin this identification.

Iowa has the capability of providing “first responder” assistance to cultural entities. The state is home to three paper conservation lab facilities, one objects conservation lab, and several

² <http://www.rio.iowa.gov/records-culture/index.html>

³ Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, *Where History Begins*, p. 23.
<http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/HRRS/hrrsdocs.html>

preservation librarians and conservators. The readiness and capability was evidenced during the response to the June flooding this summer. Seven professionals were at the gate and ready to provide assistance to the African American Museum of Iowa and National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library when officials allowed citizens into the recently flooded areas in Cedar Rapids. Members of the Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium provided advice, guidance, and assistance. Much of the recovery work is being performed by the University of Iowa Conservation Lab.

Although we have the capability, we do not have a formal structure in place to provide “first responder” assistance in a systematic and coordinated way. As a result, assistance to cultural entities was uneven. The Cedar Rapids Public Library lost over 200,000 items from its collection, which is reported to be the single largest loss of a library in U.S. history. Volunteer assistance from a Minnesota conservator to assist with the Usher Ferry Historic Village and the landmark Paramount Theater was turned down by the Mayor of Cedar Rapids, apparently due to concern about liability.

The State Library and the Department of Cultural Affairs (which includes the State Historical Society of Iowa) stepped up to assume the responsibility for collecting information on the impact of flooding and need for assistance. Because there was no formal system in place ahead of time, however,, the reporting was sporadic and inconsistent, relying on reporters out in the field to answer email requests for information. Staff augmented their information by working various professional networks, phoning colleagues, and monitoring news reports.

The Project: The Planning Process

1) Document the locations and characteristics of cultural collections statewide

- a. **Conduct a survey of institutional emergency preparedness and knowledge of recovery resources.** Repositories will be identified by unifying lists of organizations identified in previous surveys by ICPC, IHRAB, SHSI, State Library, Associations of County Recorders, and the League of Cities. These repositories will be contacted to obtain new survey information. An on-line survey will be made available for response using the University of Iowa survey software.

Related activities: The Iowa Historical Records Advisory Board is currently (October-November 2008) conducting a series of public meetings to assess the present and future needs of archives in Iowa. In each of these meetings, participants are being asked about their emergency preparedness plans and receive input on training needs. The results will be integrated with the survey data collected during the grant.

- b. **Geocode locations of cultural repositories throughout the state.** From the survey data, the State Historical Society of Iowa GIS specialist will create maps locating each collection repository with coordinates. The maps will be supplied to the Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division and each county emergency management director.

- 2) **Raise awareness about the importance of and increase the implementation of plans for protecting cultural collections from disasters**
 - a. **Integrate cultural collections into county and city emergency plans.** The project team will convene a plenary meeting with the Association of County Emergency Managers and the Coordinating Committee and Advisory Committee to identify what must be done to broaden the coverage of county emergency plans to include the identification and protection of cultural resources. This effort will include the development of training materials and presentations to raise awareness about cultural collections among emergency managers.
 - b. **Host “mini-disaster preparedness and response” sessions** throughout Iowa designed to (a) encourage institutions to respond to the survey, and (b) introduce them to the need to develop emergency plans, introduce them to available protection and recovery resources and coordinate plans with local emergency management officials.
 - c. **Convene a statewide conference on disaster preparedness and response for cultural collections**, to announce the statewide plan, encourage use of resources, and achieve consensus on the structure and channels of communication needed for future planning and response efforts.
- 3) **Develop a strategy for marshalling resources to act as “first responders.”** The Coordinating Committee will convene a series of meetings to identify resources, define roles, and determine communication needs among those in the cultural community who can provide assistance and training. Emergency managers and state and local officials will be engaged in the discussions so they understand what resources are available for training and response and can help the Coordinating Committee optimize how the resources are offered so that county managers will use them.
- 4) **Develop a simple and broadly applicable model plan.** The Coordinating Committee will consult with the Gerald Ford Conservation Center on resources for simple reliable plan development for diverse organizations with varied experience in collections care who care for many types of collections.

Project Resources

The Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium will serve as fiscal agent and will partner with the State Historical Society of Iowa, the State Library of Iowa, and the Iowa Museum Association. ICPC and its partners will serve as the Coordinating Committee.

The Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center will serve as a planning consultant. Staff at the Ford Center has direct experience with the development of disaster recovery plans for small institutions. Several of their staff are members of the American Institute of Conservation’s CERT teams for disaster recovery and have responded to local emergencies in Iowa, Nebraska, and even hurricane Hugo.

Nancy E Kraft and Jerome Thompson will serve as the Co Project Directors. Kraft is Head of the University of Iowa Preservation Department and advisor to the ICPC Board. She coordinated the

disaster response effort for the African American Museum of Iowa and the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library after the June 2008 flood. Thompson is the State Curator at the State Historical Society of Iowa. He travels the state to provide technical and professional advice to museums and historical organizations of every size and degree of experience. Thompson identified needs and marshaled resources for several of the museums damaged by flood waters this summer. He serves as his agency point of contact with Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management for Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government planning. Thompson serves on the board of the Iowa Museum Association and the Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium.

Cynthia Sweet, IMA Executive Director, and Lucy David, ICPC Administrative Assistant, will act as project assistants collecting, coordinating, gathering of lists organizations; drafting the survey instrument, and assisting with meetings and conference planning.

Our Advisory Committee which includes staff from Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division, Rebuild Iowa Office, Council of State Archivists, Iowa Historical Records Advisory Board will assist in our planning efforts and in providing strategies for implementation and sustainability of a statewide disaster response plan. A number of volunteers who participated in the Rebuild Iowa Cultural Resource Task Force have stepped forward to offer their assistance in this process. Additionally the advisory committee will draw from the boards of the Iowa Museum Association and Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium. The boards represent a variety of institutions from all over the state. Each of the board members can assist in the survey, encourage participation at workshops from organizations within their areas and help with local arrangements for meetings.

There is an acknowledged need for this type of a planning effort in Iowa and broad support evidenced by the number of state-wide organizations who have signed on to be partners in this effort.

The project budget reflects the institutional time commitment of the University of Iowa Libraries and the State Historical Society of Iowa to permit Kraft and Thompson to serve as co-project directors.