

University of South Carolina Crisis Leadership Training Programs for Libraries

Introduction: The School of Information Science at the University of South Carolina (iSchool/USC) requests \$249,420 for a three-year National Leadership Grant--Implementation to create and implement comprehensive training programs for library staff at various levels, including templates, service guidelines, and toolkits. Broad topics may include **Information First Responders; Building Community Engagement and Partnership; Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response for Libraries** per IMLS goals (IMLS Goal 1, Objectives 1.1, 1.2, & 1.3; IMLS Goal 4, Objectives 4.1). These training programs will be essential to cultivate crisis leadership in library personnel; assist library staff in providing critical community-first information services before, during, and after natural disasters; and support libraries to serve as community catalysts. The programs also cover disaster management plans, with examples libraries can adapt and implement, and the use of technology/multiple channels to disseminate critical disaster information. These topics will help libraries build a better culture of disaster preparedness and strengthen community resilience. Evidence-based training programs will be created using the findings from four completed studies by the research team from 2015-2022. Those studies examined public libraries and their community engagement in times of disaster (e.g., **floods, hurricanes, wildfires**) in South Carolina, Texas, and Northern California. A current study in Kentucky (i.e., tornadoes) will also be included. Training will also emphasize community crisis communication, covering risk perception, assessment, immediate response, and preparedness, and will incorporate the use of FEMA disaster lifecycle phases, providing ample practice in communicating with the communities served.

To ensure that the training programs serve both public and academic library personnel and provide broad coverage of natural disasters, the project begins with two additional research pieces examining: 1) how public libraries serve their community in times of **extreme heat in South Carolina and earthquakes in California** (areas not yet examined); and 2) a survey of a sample of academic libraries where natural disasters have occurred. The research design will use focus groups and follow the protocol used in the previously completed studies based on effective health risk communication preparedness and implementation (Vaughan and Tinker 2009). Published case studies suggest that similar crisis leadership competencies are essential in the academic library setting, as these institutions also experience emergencies and natural disasters. To further test the utility of the proposed training program for academic librarians, the research team will survey U.S. academic library members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), focusing on those respondents whose libraries have experienced a natural disaster-related emergency since 2000. The proposed training modules, toolkits, and related documentation will be available on an open-access website funded by the Network of National Library of Medicine Region 2, allowing all resources to be accessed freely. The resource site will be permanently hosted under the College of Information and Communication (CIC/USC) for consistency and sustainability. A multi-disciplinary research team comprised of educators/researchers, librarians, library administrators, and others in lead administrative, communications, and library and information science positions will anchor the project with an advisory board to represent the diverse audiences this project aims to support.

Project Justification: Climate crises have affected many areas nationwide; therefore, broadening the scope to additional disasters (e.g., extreme heat in South Carolina and earthquakes in California) that are becoming more common will help inform the types of resources needed to address those disasters that have yet been studied. Research findings show that libraries serve as community outreach centers and sources of credible information at difficult times (Tu-Keefner et al., 2017, 2019, 2020). The research team will again document the libraries' experiences and share the findings with other information institutions to assist them in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to serve as community catalysts to strengthen community resilience. The previous studies identified librarians' basic required competencies. They showed that many libraries and librarians in our study were unprepared to locate, gather, distribute, and promote disaster information services, especially in the real-time online format. Therefore, providing professional development training for library personnel is essential. However, this year, the Medical Library Association's Disaster Information Specialization program was retired (Medical Library Association, 2023). Several similar professional resources are available, such as the workbook and guidebooks created by New Jersey, the Recovering Together grant program by the NorthNet Library System in California, and even NEDCC. However, they have limitations, e.g., some focus on specific types of disasters or salvaging damaged library collections. This project will create a comprehensive place for resources, research, and professional development to assist public and academic libraries before the next disaster strikes.

Project Work Plan: In **Phase 1 (August 1, 2024-the End of 2025)**, the team members will review the professional literature and the research protocol used to conduct the previous studies, which includes focus group questions and a survey questionnaire. The survey instrument for studying academic libraries will be developed. An advisory board will be created. From census data on USGS.gov, approximately five locations for site visits in South Carolina for five focus group meetings and ten in California for ten focus group meetings will be identified. The research team will document these libraries' experiences and share the findings with other libraries to assist them in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery to serve as community catalysts to strengthen community resilience (IMLS, 2016). The focus groups' responses answer the following questions: 1) did libraries' collaboration with multi-level agencies facilitate emergency response and recovery?; 2) did librarians use multiple channels and technology for information distribution and service?; 3) did community members use disaster information sources and evaluate the information's credibility before, during, and after a disaster? The research team will finalize the project's research protocol and begin data collection, including traveling to the

locations identified to conduct focus group meetings and interviews and surveying ARL member libraries. Data collection will begin, including traveling to the areas identified to conduct focus group meetings and interviews. The survey will be sent via email using the list for the Association of Research Libraries (ARL.) The research protocol and the survey questionnaire to be used will be pre-tested and then revised; the survey research will be administered afterward. The survey study results will guide the team to what should be included in the training offerings. Focus group meetings with advisory board members will help determine the effectiveness of the research design by learning the following: 1) does the data collection process support answering research questions outlined for the project?; 2) do the data analytical procedures effectively generate findings?; 3) do the results of the literature review enhance the knowledge of the proposed project?

In **Phase 2 – (Beginning of 2025-July 31, 2027)**, the research team will wrap up the data collection and begin to organize and analyze data. The results will be used to develop the training programs, including interactive learning modules in multiple formats. Afterward, the research team will begin preparing summaries of the findings and the literature review, which will be posted on the website. The team members will work with the advisory board members to develop toolkits and templates with guidance. Several advisory board members may be selected as instructors or subject experts to review the training modules created. Librarians from different levels and organizations will be recruited to review the training program prototypes and provide feedback for revision. The research team's evaluations address the following questions: 1) do the findings aid in developing training programs? 2) do the advisory members essentially support the development of training programs? The research team will hold focus group meetings with the program reviewers and then select several of them for one-on-one interviews to further understand how to improve the contents of the program. Focus group meetings may also be held with advisory members.

The final part of the work plan wraps up data collection, organizing, and analyzing the data. The aim will be to create training programs related to the general topical areas mentioned above in multiple formats. The research team will prepare summaries of the findings and post them to the website and other work. The team will use the research findings and other recommendations to develop the training modules and related documents such as toolkits, service guidelines, and templates. Advisory board members will be the content area experts to peer review the resources created. Additionally, they will use their connections to identify library staff at different levels and from various organizations to review the training program prototypes and provide feedback for revision. The research team's evaluations address the following questions: 1) do the findings aid in developing training programs? 2) do the advisory members essentially support the development of training programs? The research team will hold focus group meetings with the reviewers and then select several of them for one-on-one interviews to further understand how to improve the contents of the program. Focus group meetings may also be used with the advisory board to assess activities at various phases.

Once the training programs are complete, modules will be created to meet the needs of different audiences, such as paraprofessionals, LIS-degreed librarians, or partners. Afterward, two groups of librarians from both public and academic libraries (10 people per group as evaluators) will be recruited to assess the effectiveness of the training programs. The research team will conduct pre-and post-tests to assess the evaluators' knowledge gained regarding the subjects/topics. The professional toolkits associated with the training programs and service guidelines will be created by the research team and peer-reviewed by the project advisory board. Evaluations at this stage relate to the implementation element of this project and address the following: 1) what is the effectiveness of the training programs for different audiences?; 2) are the resources on the website helpful to promote professional development for librarians and library staff/paraprofessionals?; 3) do the distribution channels for the training programs and professional toolkits reach the audiences easily to facilitate user access? Data collection will be conducted by using multiple approaches. Surveys will be conducted to identify the evaluators' feedback, and the research team will revise the program following their feedback. The training program's instructors will be interviewed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the programs for revision. In addition, the research team will hold focus group meetings and interviews with advisory board members to evaluate the project's efficacy.

Project Results: The website will provide research results, training curriculum, service guidelines, and professional toolkits in various formats that will be hosted permanently on the site. The research team will disseminate the results of the projects and website by sharing the information in publications representing public libraries, library administration, communication, and related professions at professional conferences and related training. Marketing and promotion will be done through the research team, advisory board, and partners (e.g., the CIC/USC) using a distribution plan to ensure the information's broadest reach. The research team, the advisory board, and the partners will also promote this model nationally/internationally and evaluate the data management plan at the end of the project period. The project's goal is to see the change in attitude and behaviors for disaster preparation and to provide easily accessible resources during and after disasters to help the communities the libraries serve return to normalcy.

Budget Summary: The funds requested from IMLS are 249,420 (direct = \$172,723 indirect = \$76,697). The budget includes: 1) Summer comp for PIs at \$43,269; 2) Fringe benefits at \$14,296; 3) Travel – data collection \$5,408 and conference \$11,756; 4) Consultants/Contractual, including advisory, reviewers, and transcription at \$48,698; 5) Student support, including tuition and pay at \$46,576.00; 6). Other costs include Zoom and publication processing fees at \$2,720.00. Indirect costs at the University's federally-negotiated indirect rate of 49%, applied to the MTD of \$156,523.