

Collaborative Emergency Planning: Building Partnerships Outside-in

by Dale M. Gregory

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to recount how a group of urban professional cultural institution facility managers responded and worked together in the aftermath of 9/11 to develop an emergency planning guide and shared resource network. I give some background on the beginnings of the group and its development through networking locally and beyond, and I make recommendations on how to form a group of your own and sustain membership. A sample group meeting: schedule and invitations, are included on this site. In addition, a summary of the Emergency Planning Guide book, generated by this group can be located under the name of the guide's co-authors, David Ward and Harry Yarwood.

Background

The Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Facility Group of Greater NYC (Facility Group) began in the early 1990s as a small group of professional facility administrators. It has grown to include associations with city government agencies, and has developed a network that also includes: chief operating officers, collections managers, finance directors, environmental health and safety managers, and curators. The direction of the group in emergency planning, its growth in membership and its association with city government was hastened by the tragedy of 9/11.

I became a member of the Facility Group in the late 1990s. At that time I was a member of its sister organization, The Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Protection Committee of Greater New York City, which held monthly educational-networking meetings focused on security issues. In the early 1990s, a few of the Protection Committee members joined the International Association of Museum Facility Administrators (IAMFA) and formed a local chapter directing its attention to operations issues. One of the founding members of the Facility Group, Vinny Maggioran, former Director of Operations of the Museum of Modern Art, said he "...hoped the larger more powerful organizations would be able to help the smaller ones."

The first Facility Group meeting I attended was at one of New York City's major art museums. It was organized by a colleague who discussed how the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM) had come to their aid during a flood. It was interesting to hear how quickly the OEM responded to a Museum in distress, setting up equipment on the sidewalk and within a short time providing the necessary power for a major clean up. Without the quick response of the OEM, it is possible that a good portion of the collection could have been damaged.

Eventually, I became involved as a co-chair of the Facility Group. Managing a Museum with a small on-site staff, I was especially interested in learning more about emergency planning and developing external resources.

We planned another meeting, this time at the New York City Police Museum where two of our members gave a presentation on disaster planning. Subsequent to their talk, a poll was conducted which disclosed that only 7 of 50 members had fully written/working disaster plans for their organizations.

We then planned a meeting (on the Intrepid, Sea, Air, Space Museum) to further discuss the way the NYC Office of Emergency Management works with cultural institutions during times of emergency. We invited Mary Ann Marrocolo, Director of Mitigation and Recovery at the New York City Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM) to speak at our October 2001 meeting.

As a result of 9/11 and due to the devastation in lower Manhattan, the FBI used the Intrepid as a 'home' office to carry out their investigations. Our meeting was re-scheduled to meet at the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center in the northeastern section of Central Park on the beautiful Harlem Meer.

Formation of a Committee to develop an Emergency Planning Guide and Shared Resource Network

At the Discovery Center in October 2001, Mary Ann Marrocolo suggested that in the wake of 9/11 the Facility Group form a committee to develop a shared resource network and written framework for emergency planning specific to New York City cultural institutions. She assured us that the NYC OEM would act as advisors throughout the process, by attending meetings and offering advice.

In the initial burst of enthusiasm, 17 people signed up for the committee, but over time that number decreased. David Ward, Director of Operations, New York City Center and Harry Yarwood, Director of Operations of the Brooklyn Public Library, were charged with writing the Emergency Planning Guide based on committee discussions.

The Guide and Network.

The fact that a committee was working together to develop a plan stimulated great interest among the Facility Group members. They were very anxious to see our recommendations and looked forward to the eventual distribution of the book. Robert Santos, Chief of Operations at the New York Public Library (NYPL) and a member of the committee, offered the NYPL publication services to produce the book. The goal was, and continues to be, to solicit member feedback on the usefulness of the guide and to suggest changes or improvements thereby giving as many members as possible "buy in and ownership" in the final product.

In writing the guide, based on committee discussions, David Ward and co-author Harry Yarwood made use of resources found on the Internet, including emergency planning information from the Getty and New York University. "You don't have to re-invent the wheel." David Ward remarked. "Many guides on how to do emergency planning have been written, and there are many sample plans that you can customize for your specific

needs.”

This Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Facility Group of Greater NYC Emergency Planning Guide is currently in the process of being reviewed by Facility Group members and other colleagues. We see its development as an ongoing process and envision it becoming an even more useful tool as time goes on. The distribution of the draft and its development, through discussions with members, will help strengthen the shared resource network.

The Emergency Planning Committee agreed that one of the most important resources we have is our ability to share information and knowledge. Smaller institutions can turn to larger ones with fuller more specialized staffs; and those with long years of experience can help out those who are just beginning. In the first few years of my job, in charge of operations and community programming for the Museum, I invited Ron Simoncini, Director of Security, Museum of Modern Art, to conduct risk management training sessions for the entire Museum staff. This kind of assistance is invaluable and was deeply appreciated by the Museum Director and staff alike.

During our Facility Group educational meetings, and through collaborative projects like the Emergency Planning Guide with the OEM, we have enhanced our ability to work together as a team in service to our colleagues. Mary Ann Marrocolo (Director of Mitigation and Recovery, NYC OEM) believes that, “The Facility Group and the City working closely, developed a valuable planning template that will aid cultural institutions in their preparedness efforts.”

As we further develop our network and build alliances here in the city, and elsewhere, we continue to explore resources we might share—i.e., space, equipment, vehicles, labor. One member has volunteered labor (security staff) and radio equipment in the event of an emergency; other organizations already have storage agreements. To date, our greatest shared resource is the knowledge base of the large number of cultural institutions represented in our organization, and our ability to communicate easily when help is needed.

Networking, New Alliances and the Genesis of a Forum

During November 2001 while attending a conference on museums and community at the New England Museum Association in Newport Rhode Island, I met David Dempsey, Associate Director of Museum Services for Smith College. He was about to give a presentation on disaster planning, based on a regional planning workshop that he organized for a rural network of cultural institutions in 1988. I told him about our group’s efforts and he commented, “You must know Barbara Roberts. She’s one of the country’s top experts on disaster planning.”

I didn’t know her. When I returned to the city, I looked her up—she was then Chief Conservator at The Frick Collection—and I invited her to one of the first Emergency Planning Committee meetings. Martin Cavanaugh, then Director of Operations for The Morgan Library, volunteered the Morgan’s trustee rooms for this entire project and

Barbara visited us there in January 2002. She stressed that, “Unless you have upper level administrative support for disaster planning and involve other staff members in the planning process, the plans will not work.”

At a conference co-sponsored by the Conservation Center for Art and Historical Artifacts at the New York Genealogical & Biographical Society on June 2002, Jane Long, Director of the Heritage Preservation’s Emergency National Task Force, and I were scheduled to give presentations on the post 9/11 response by cultural institutions. Jane gave an overview of the national response; and I focused on New York City with the efforts of the Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Facility Group of NYC. After our talks, Jane approached me and said her organization was interested in supporting our efforts. She had heard about us through Barbara Roberts.

I invited Jane Long to guest speak on a panel with Mary Ann Marrocolo at a Facility Group meeting at the American Folk Art Museum in October 2002, entitled, “*Cultural Institutions and The Office of Emergency Management: Working Together in NYC.*” Jane then visited our Emergency Planning Committee during a meeting at the Morgan Library and made the commitment to support our efforts. In November 2003, she invited me to organize a local committee in New York City to plan the fourth in a series of Heritage Emergency National Task Force “Alliance for Response” Forums.

With the help of Jane Long, David Ward, and Bob Schnare, Director of the US Naval War College Library, a committee was formed to include: an archivist, a conservator, a collections Manager, a director of facilities, a director of operations, a director of security, an emergency management professional, and an insurance representative.

Terry Brown, a Facility Group member and Director of The Society of Illustrators, donated the Society’s roof-top restaurant for breakfast meeting space where we spent many mornings planning.

NY Alliance for Response Forum

The NY Forum, scheduled for October 27, 2004 at The Jewish Museum was the result of a collaboration between the Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Facility Group of Greater New York City and Heritage Emergency National Task Force. NYC Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Kate D. Levin was the keynote speaker and acknowledged the “...pioneering efforts...” of the Facility Group. We look forward to a continued association with the city and Heritage Preservation.

The full day Forum Agenda reflects a broad examination of the external and internal relations needed to prepare for and respond to emergencies. It touches on emergency communications in the form of amateur radio networks and looks back to one of the worst disasters that hit New York City before 9/11, *The General Slocum*. Beginning with a small group of founding members in the early 1990s, the Museum, Library and Cultural Properties Facility Group eventually grew to include a database of over 150 names, and advanced to play a major role in shaping an historic citywide Forum on emergency management.

The Emergency Planning Guide produced by the Facility Group was distributed to Forum attendees, and we now look forward to working together with a wider group of colleagues and city agencies. We hope to organize joint training sessions in addition to regular meetings and explore a wider shared resource network.

By tapping into outside resources with regard to emergency planning, your organization's chances of qualifying for certain types of insurance coverage are enhanced. Insurance carriers typically request to see an emergency (or disaster plan) if you want coverage in the following categories: "business income" (lost revenue) and "extra expense" (reimbursement for damages). The higher the insurance coverage the more information they will want about the resources you have used to organize the plan and prepare for disasters, including documentation of meetings, training and drills covering loss prevention, emergencies, business continuity and recovery.

If you want to organize an emergency planning effort (preparedness, response and recovery) at your cultural institution, upper level management support and teamwork within your place of work are two essential ingredients for success. It will be easier to approach your staff and board if you present them with a set of guidelines produced collaboratively by colleagues from other cultural institutions with the support of your local first responders. That's "Collaborative Emergency Planning: Outside-in."

A few suggestions for starting up an organization with an emergency planning committee, maintaining membership, attracting new members, developing local resources:

1. Begin with an existing group of colleagues who have reason to be interested in emergency planning
2. Create imaginative programs based on your constituent needs. Talk to your members or potential members to find out what specific topics would attract them.
3. Invite local experts who in turn will become members, enriching the network including fire, police and other emergency management professionals and educators.
4. Make personal phone calls as a follow-up to emails and letters of invitation sent by regular mail
5. Collect names and addresses at each meeting and enter them on a database