
Recommendations for Resource-Sharing Disaster Preparation and Response

History:

Originally prepared by the Codes, Guidelines, and Technical Standards Committee of the Sharing and Transforming Access to Resources Section (STARS) of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (ALA); approved by the STARS Executive Committee in December 2009 and by the RUSA Board, June 2010. Revised by the Codes, Guidelines, and Technical Standards Committee; approved by RUSA Standards & Guidelines Committee, June 25, 2017, the STARS Executive Committee, June 26, 2017, and by RUSA Board September 7, 2017. Revised by STARS by the Codes, Guidelines, and Technical Standards Committee, 2020; approved by the STARS Executive Committee, January 20, 2021. Approved by the RUSA Professional Resources Committee, December 2, 2021.

Introduction:

The Reference and User Services Association, acting for the American Library Association in its adoption of this recommendation, recognizes the importance of disaster planning and appropriate resource-sharing responses to libraries affected by disasters, whether of natural or human origin.

The nature of a disaster that may affect a library is difficult to predict in terms of type, timing, and level of damage. It is therefore difficult but necessary for libraries to plan for potential disasters. Regardless of the type of disaster, as an affected library begins its recovery effort, resource sharing can be an important avenue to ensure continuity of service to the library's users.

Purpose:

The purpose of this document is two-fold: 1) to make recommendations regarding preparation in advance of potential disasters and 2) to make recommendations regarding resource-sharing responses to libraries affected by disaster.

Scope:

This document, although not a policy, recommends communication channels and processes to assist libraries affected by disasters and outlines library-to-library responses to ensure continuity of service to users of affected libraries.

1.0 Preparation before a Disaster

- 1.1 Libraries should have an up-to-date and regularly reviewed disaster plan including, but not limited to, current contact information for essential personnel, including the persons responsible for recovery and communications. Resources for writing an institutional disaster plan are available on the American Library Association "Disaster Preparedness and Recovery" website at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/disaster-preparedness>.
- 1.2 In terms of resource-sharing needs, libraries should identify in their disaster planning documents what partnerships and agreements they have with other libraries. Resource-sharing agreements and expectations for consortium relations during a disaster should be explicitly defined. If such agreements do not already exist, libraries should consider forming them. Additionally, libraries should consider developing a formal relationship with a library or related institution in another region to act as a backup for important information and/or as a conduit for communicating to other libraries after a disaster.
- 1.3 Departments/divisions that participate in resource sharing should develop their own disaster plan or ensure that their institution's disaster plans adequately address resource sharing concerns.

The resource sharing disaster plan should include information about and assign responsibility for such matters as:

- 1.3.1 Where resource-sharing operations might relocate after a disaster;
- 1.3.2 How requests are to be received and processed;
- 1.3.3 How to contact patrons and libraries with active requests;
- 1.3.4 How to integrate into the library's material remediation processes and to communicate and coordinate with resource sharing units at other libraries about losses or damage to their materials;
- 1.3.5 How materials are to be delivered to users;
- 1.3.6 What technology, supply, and equipment needs exist;
- 1.3.7 How staff might be redistributed to ensure efficient services;
- 1.3.8 What services can be provided in various scenarios, including but not limited to work-from-home, reduced staff availability, limited access to physical collections (limited in time or scope), or reduced patron access to library building;
- 1.3.9 How institutions are to be contacted about the disaster and assistance needed;
- 1.3.10 How to make necessary changes in ILL systems/networks (e.g. OCLC Policies Directory, DOCLINE, etc.) to reflect current status;
- 1.3.11 How to update collection availability if using automation services locally or within consortia;
- 1.3.12 How to contact delivery services such as the U.S.P.S., FedEx, UPS, and any van or consortial delivery services that ship to or from your library with questions or to inform them of your shipping/receiving status.

2.0 Proposed Channels of External Communication

Informing the resource sharing community of a disaster that has affected a library can be difficult: electricity may not be available; computers, phones and/or their lines may be damaged; and mail/courier routes may be disrupted, especially if a disaster affects multiple libraries within a region. In the latter case, consortial operations may also be disrupted. It is advisable for a library to employ several methods of communication to ensure that information reaches all targeted institutions.

Examples of possible methods of communication include:

- 2.1 Posting messages to resource sharing listservs, such as ILL-L, CircPlus and online discussion platforms such as ALA Connect.
- 2.2 Using electronic communication such as the library website, wikis, blogs, or social media to provide updates;
- 2.3 Arranging "telephone trees" with consortia and partner libraries;
- 2.4 Establishing a toll-free hotline to disseminate and receive information;
- 2.5 Contacting library associations to provide news releases.

3.0 Resource-Sharing Information to be Communicated by Affected Libraries

When a library is affected by a disaster, resource-sharing operations may have specific information to be shared with the library community, such as:

- 3.1 New contact information (e.g. shipping address, phone, email);
- 3.2 Dates for which services will be modified or suspended;
- 3.3 Service needs, such as due-date extensions, storage space, alternative courier routes, delays in returning other libraries materials, etc;
- 3.4 Equipment & supply needs, such as computers, printers, scanners, book carts, office supplies, etc.;
- 3.5 Staffing needs.

4.0 Recommendations for Responding Libraries

After a disaster has occurred at a library, potential responding libraries should wait to be contacted by the affected institution(s) or their designee(s) so as not to add to the stress of the recovery effort.

Once contacted, responding libraries may be asked for assistance with resource-sharing equipment or service needs, such as the following:

- 4.1 Direct assistance in the rescue of damaged or potentially damaged materials;

- 4.2 Computer and other office equipment/supplies;
- 4.3 Interlibrary loan of print and electronic resources without charge or at a reduced rate;
- 4.4 Extended due dates for materials lent to the affected libraries or their users;
- 4.5 Fee waivers for items lost or damaged during a disaster;
- 4.6 Extended time for billing matters to be resolved;
- 4.7 Onsite or remote access to collections/resources;
- 4.8 Bookmobile services.

Conclusion

All libraries are encouraged to have an up-to-date disaster plan and ensure all employees have reviewed it. Since resource sharing can be a vital component to ensuring continuity of service during disaster recovery, staff responsible for resource sharing should ensure that their potential needs are adequately addressed in their institution's disaster plan. Libraries are strongly encouraged to form resource-sharing agreements with other institutions and to develop contingency plans before a disaster occurs. After a disaster, affected institutions should employ a variety of methods to communicate their needs to the resource sharing community. Non-affected libraries are encouraged to respond as generously as possible to the resource-sharing needs of disaster-affected institutions.

Definitions:

Resource-sharing activities include services such as interlibrary loan, document delivery, consortial/remote circulation, access services, courier services, and other shared library services.

A disaster is any circumstance that significantly damages or threatens a library facility, its collections, and/or staffing and that results in disruption to the services of that library for an extended period of time. A disaster, whether of natural or human origin, may involve but not be limited to the following types: flooding/water, fire/smoke, mold, tornado/hurricane/wind, earthquake, vandalism, terrorism, structural collapse, and/or epidemic/pandemic.

Responding libraries are those not affected by, or less affected by, a given disaster that are willing to provide assistance to an affected library or libraries.