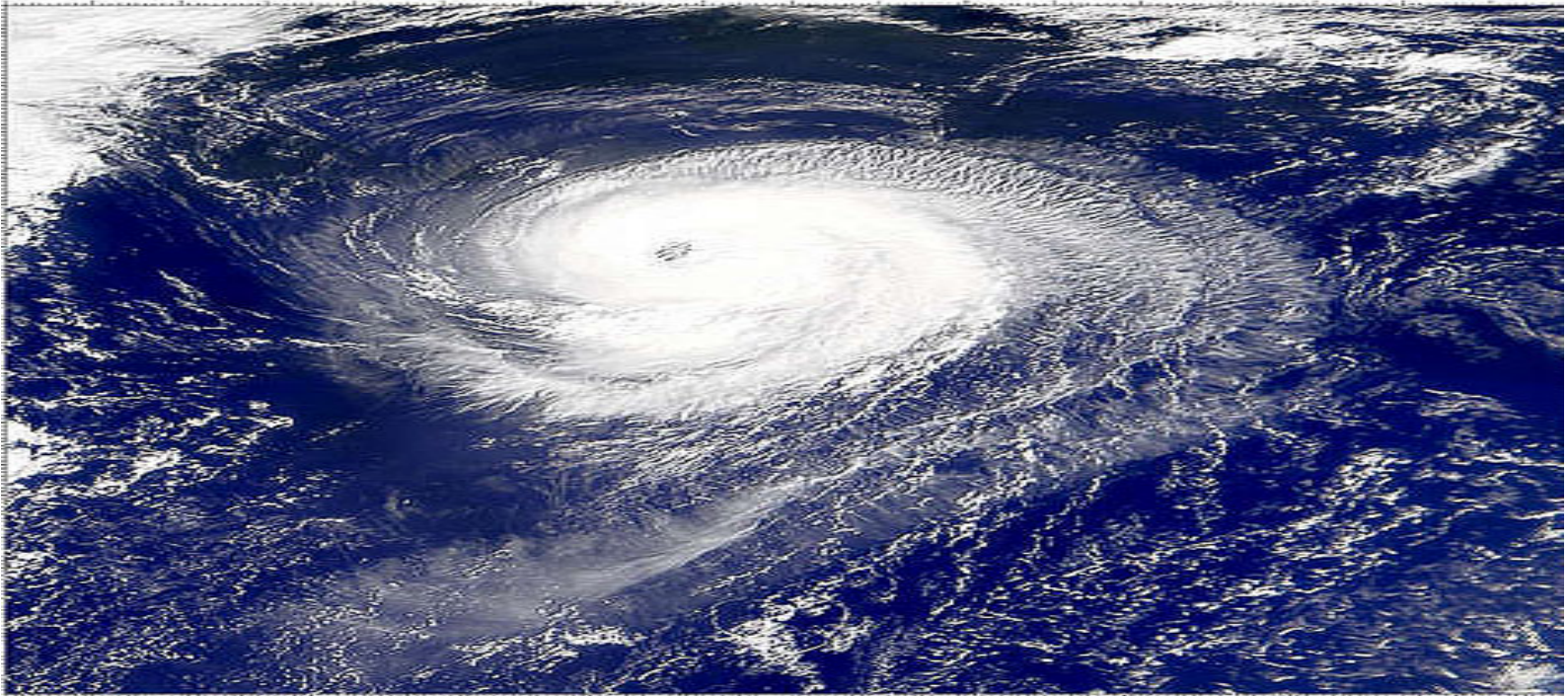


Public Libraries: Hidden Assets in Community Disaster Response



Credit: Hurricane Alberto [NASA Goddard Space Flight Center \(NASA-GSFC\)](#) 11.7.02 GL-2002-002155

There are more public libraries than McDonalds in the U.S. Isn't it time to systematically use and assist these assets in their community disaster response?



*Hurricane Preparedness &
Response for Florida
Public Libraries*

Public Libraries Hidden Assets in Community Disaster Response
An *Information Institute* Panel Presentation by:

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Project Manager Hurricane/Disaster Preparedness and Response by Utilizing
Florida Public Libraries Project [Bio](#)



**For additional information see the project
web site: <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>**

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Purpose

- Draw attention to public libraries as assets in community disaster response (preparation and recovery).
- Introduce disaster roles that public libraries play in aid of community disaster response.
- Suggest needed next steps to better utilize public libraries in disaster response.

The Case

- Public libraries are located in almost every community;
- Their locations are known and services trusted even by community members who do not regularly use the library.
- Any local public institution without a pre-assigned disaster role represents a lost opportunity should disaster strike.



Mobile, Ala., Dec. 11, 2004 Mobile, AL - Federal Coordinating Officer Tony Russell teaches Annzwanetta Clark, 4, of Mobile, about the FEMA for Kids website at the Mobile Public Library Holiday Open House. FEMA Photo/Amanda Bicknell. From FEMA photo library, February 25, 2009, http://www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=12312

The Case

At minimum,

- A trained public library staff:
 - What are public library roles and my specific responsibilities?
 - What is the emergency response system and the library's place in it?
 - Why does what I do matter?
- With adequate facilities and equipment to meet disaster's demands:
 - Is the library as secure as possible?
 - What infrastructure needs upgrade to meet disaster recovery demands?



Represents a useful, complimentary asset in the disaster response toolkit.

Public Libraries Play Key Roles to aid Community and Evacuee Hurricane Response

Public library disaster roles may include providing:

1. [Safe Haven](#)
2. [Normal Service](#)
3. [Disaster Recovery Center](#)
4. [Information Hub](#)
5. [Cultural Organizations Liaison](#)
6. [Evacuee Resource](#)
7. [Improvisation](#)



Credit: Hialeah (FL) Public Library

Public Library Disaster Roles

Brief Descriptions

- **Safe Haven:** The public library is the community's living room and study before and after a storm with safe, secure buildings, relaxing space, light, air conditioning, bathrooms and comfortable chairs.
- **Normal Service:** The community counts on normal library service before and after a disaster be it book DVD or Internet use, reference or family programming. Normal service provides hope, re-establishes government presence, reduces stress, returns normalcy, and offers recreation.
- **Disaster Recovery Center (DRC):** Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) offers a FEMA designated DRC; a state, county or municipal DRC, a Point of distribution (POD) of aid, or simply a place for neighbors to make sense and provide aid.

Public Library Disaster Roles

Brief Descriptions

- **Information Hub:** The community counts on the library to offer access to various communication equipment, to be a trusted provider of accurate, reliable information, to produce needed information aids where they do not exist, and to deliver this information using whatever IT the community uses and can afford.
- **Cultural Organizations Liaison:** May serve as a liaison between emergency management and community cultural organizations.
- **Evacuee Resource:** Evacuees count on the nearest public library DRC, and information hub.
- **Improvise:** Should a disaster strike, the public library will improvise and do what is needed to assist in the community's recovery.

Next Steps: Federal & State

- Define public libraries as “essential services”
- Is there a need for a public library emergency support function (ESF)?
- Survey, on a statewide basis, public library capacity & need.
- Integrate public libraries into the emergency response system.



Vero Beach, FL, December 2, 1999 -- Federal Emergency Management Agency and Florida emergency management officials confer with a resident at the County Library DRC. Credit: Ty Harrington/FEMA News Photo.

Next Steps: Public Library Disaster Capacity Survey

- Survey, on a statewide basis, public library capacity & need. For partial examples see:
 - Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. (2009, February 20). [Libraries as DRCs sparks national interest.](#)
 - Ryan, Joe. (2009). [Disaster recovery center basic requirements.](#)



Credit: FEMA photo library

http://www.photolibrary.fema.gov/photolibrary/photo_details.do?id=38306

Next Steps: Local

- Take a look at our [project web site](#), focused on hurricanes, and then at [Making the Case](#)
- Offer NIMS and other training to library managers and staff so at minimum they better understand your priorities and focus.
- Invite your local librarian to lunch to discuss priorities, opportunities, pre-coordination and preparation?!
- Thanks for your attention!!



Temporary public library in Louisiana after Hurricane Rita Credit: M McKnight

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More Detailed Information Available on the Project Web Site:

<http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>

The *Information Institute* gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance provided by the Florida Catastrophic Storm Risk Management Center, at <<http://www.stormrisk.org/index.cfm>>

HURRICANE/DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE BY UTILIZING FLORIDA PUBLIC LIBRARIES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Background. The [Information Use Management & Policy Institute](#) directed by Charles R. McClure, Ph. D., Francis Eppes Professor at the College of Information, Florida State University (FSU) has been awarded a \$218,000 grant to assist public libraries and local communities better plan for and respond to hurricanes.

The [Florida Catastrophic Storm Risk Management Center](#) at Florida State University's College of Business awarded the grant to the Information Institute for the period August 8, 2008 thru July 31, 2009. The Institute has partnered with the [State Library and Archives of Florida](#), directed by Judith Ring, [SOLINET](#), directed by Kate Nevins, and Florida's [Multi-type Library Cooperatives](#) and public libraries throughout the region as well as federal, state, local and community agencies concerned with Florida hurricane preparedness and response.

Florida public libraries have provided a range of useful hurricane and disaster preparation and response services and activities, but there has been no systematic effort to identify the activities, best practices, guidelines and services provided or to better organize, coordinate, and assist all Florida public libraries to provide these hurricane/disaster planning and response services.

This project will reduce the state's overall risk by raising the readiness level of all the state's public libraries to meet the challenges posed by these catastrophes. The project, through a web portal and other means, will:

- Identify and then organize relevant public library hurricane related information resources, services, roles, and best practices;
- Identify, aggregate, assess, and organize successful individual Florida public library best practices related to hurricane preparedness and response;
- Develop model plans, standards, guidelines and recommendations – which will be made available via print and through an interactive website;
- Offer strategies to assist state and regional public library and government officials with disaster coordination and organization responsibilities; and
- Disseminate to Florida's public libraries, agencies, and other organizations, via print and project website, resources, services, experiences, best practices, plans and guidelines to coordinate Florida's public library managers and government partners to better prepare for and respond to hurricanes.
- Offer workshops on the roles of public libraries and community preparedness and response around the state during the month of April 2009.

McClure stated that “this project offers a great opportunity for Florida public libraries to better demonstrate the range of services and responses they can provide during such disasters.” Listen to a 3 minute WFSU [radio interview](#) with McClure about the project, read a [LibraryJournal.com article](#) about the project or visit the project website at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>.

Preliminary Findings. Preliminary findings from the study suggest that public libraries play several key roles in aid of community and evacuee hurricane response. Before and after a storm public libraries may provide:

- **Safe Haven:** The public library is the community's living room and study before and after a storm with safe, secure buildings, relaxing space, light, air conditioning, bathrooms and comfortable chairs.
- **Normal Service:** The community counts on normal library service before and after the storm be it book DVD or Internet use, reference or family programming. Normal service provides hope, re-establishes government presence, reduces stress, returns normalcy, offers recreation and distraction.
- **Disaster Recovery Center (DRC):** offers community a DRC whether a FEMA designated DRC; a place to prepare residents for a DRC visit; a Point of distribution (POD) or a place to make sense.
- **Information Hub:** The community counts on the library before and after a storm to offer copiers, phones, fax computers, WiFi, Internet and hurricane preparation and recovery information and assistance.
- **Cultural Organizations Liaison:** Public library may serve as a liaison between emergency management and the community's cultural institutions.
- **Evacuee Resource:** Evacuees count on the nearest public library for a safe haven, normal service, disaster recovery center, and emergency information hub.
- **Improvisation:** The community counts on the public library during a disaster to improvise and do whatever is needed as directed by emergency management and local government.

Key Issues. Many public libraries are an underutilized community asset in disaster response. How can public libraries be better utilized to improve community hurricane preparedness and response?

- **Refocus public library managers' attention on what the public library may do to aid its community hurricane response** rather than to simply aid in the library's recovery.
- **Increase Awareness:**
 - **Among Librarians:** What are the roles and best practices that public libraries may adopt? What does county emergency management and other responders do?
 - **Among emergency management:** What are the roles and best practices that public libraries may adopt?
 - **Among residents:** In what ways will their public libraries assist residents to prepare for and recover from a hurricane?
- **Share public library best practices and related information:** What mechanisms can be used to increase opportunities, like the project web site, for sharing of best practices among public libraries.
- **Better coordinate, prepare and integrate public libraries into the local hurricane responder community:** What can the public library obtain from emergency management, local government, and others to enable public library hurricane service roles (see above) implementation? What can emergency management, local government and residents receive from their public library?
- **Increase local and regional planning among libraries and other cultural institutions:** What are the best strategies to integrate public library and community planning for hurricane preparedness/response? What are the key individuals in a particular community to participate in this process and how can they best be organized?

Next Steps. The Information Institute will continue to provide training; refine and expand the project website and its content at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/hurricanes/>; and collaborate with existing and new partners both within and outside the state of Florida. The project will continue to assist public libraries so they can expand their role and impact in assisting local communities in hurricane preparedness and response.

Contact Us. For further information or for those who have knowledge and experience in dealing with public library hurricane preparedness and response please contact Joe Ryan, Project Manager jjryan@earthlink.net or Charles R. McClure cmccclure@lis.fsu.edu Principal Investigator at the Information Institute.