



ALLIANCE FOR RESPONSE: CONNECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE COMMUNITIES BEFORE DISASTERS HAPPEN

In the event of a disaster—no matter the type or scope—the first response is always local. For the institutions and organizations charged with safeguarding the nation’s cultural and historic treasures, building relationships with local first responders and emergency professionals before disasters happen is key to ensuring the safety of staff and collections should one occur. With this in mind, the nonprofit organization Heritage Preservation founded Alliance for Response, a national program that facilitates communication between the cultural heritage and emergency response communities.

The initiative began in 2003, when Heritage Preservation sponsored Alliance for Response forums for cultural leaders and emergency professionals in Dallas, Boston, Cincinnati, and New York. In each city, the forum launched a regional Alliance for Response network to build on the partnerships, policy and project ideas, and cooperative planning efforts that forum participants had begun.

Since then, Heritage Preservation has held forums in 15 other regions across the country. “Slowly but surely, the Alliance for Response networks are raising the profile of cultural heritage in the world of emergency response,” said Lori Foley, Vice President for Emergency Programs at Heritage Preservation. “They’ve been instrumental as information gathering and sharing resources for cultural institutions.” Most recently, Alliance for Response networks along the East Coast helped cultural institutions to prepare for Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee this past August and September and organized damage assessments and salvage-and-recovery efforts following the severe flooding.

> ALLIANCE FOR RESPONSE IN PHILADELPHIA

In 2007, Tom Clareson (now Senior Consultant in Digital & Preservation Services at LYRASIS) worked closely with Heritage Preservation and representatives from a variety of local organizations to plan an Alliance for Response forum in Philadelphia. Presenters from city and federal organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region III National Preparedness Division, spoke to nearly 90 attendees from the cultural heritage and emergency response communities.

Clareson had spent the previous two years working with Philadelphia’s many cultural heritage institutions, and he recognized their importance to the region. Familiar with Alliance for Response’s success in other cities, Clareson believed that Philadelphia institutions would benefit from the program.

“What I had hoped—and what has been done really well—was that the Philadelphia Alliance for Response would provide education on disaster planning as well as support to peer institutions when disaster hits,” Clareson said.

Under the direction of its steering committee, the Philadelphia Alliance for Response (PAFR) has built on the connections made in 2007. Representatives from a range of cultural heritage organizations meet regularly with members of the emergency response community, including the Philadelphia

Office of Emergency Management and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force, to plan activities in the area. “There’s interdisciplinary and multi-agency interaction,” said CCAHA Director of Preservation Services Laura Hartz Stanton, Chair of the Philadelphia network.

In May, the steering committee organized a visit to BELFOR, a disaster response contractor in Exton, Pennsylvania, for a tour of the facilities and a demonstration of paper and book recovery methods. PAFR has also sponsored a disaster plan writing clinic and a business continuity workshop to assist institutions in planning how to resume essential functions after an emergency or disaster. Additionally, the group has been working with the City of Philadelphia to add cultural institutions to the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS). In an emergency, first responders would consult the GIS in order to immediately notify institutions in the affected area.

PAFR has a number of upcoming activities planned. Working with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Task Force, PAFR will offer Incident Command System (ICS) 100 training to the cultural community. Universal to fire and police departments, FEMA, and other response groups, ICS is a communications system that sets up a structure for operations in an emergency situation. PAFR will also host a tabletop

exercise session to allow institutions to test their disaster plans. It will continue work on compiling shared disaster supply caches in the area, encouraging mutual aid agreements that would allow staff from one institution to help another during disaster recovery, and building a presence online.

Hartz Stanton also plans to hold a state-wide Alliance for Response meeting in 2012, joining with established networks in Pittsburgh and Central Pennsylvania and emerging ones in Scranton, Erie, and Williamsport.

—KATHERINE MAGAZINER

> WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

The Philadelphia Alliance for Response is looking for volunteers—first responders and cultural heritage professionals—to help implement project ideas and participate in activities. Contact Laura Hartz Stanton at 215.545.0613 or lhartzstanton@ccaha.org for more information. Sign up for email communications at groups.google.com/group/AFR-Philly.

> NOT IN PHILADELPHIA?

Visit www.heritagepreservation.org/afr to find out about other Alliance for Response communities across the nation. The site also features a Tool Kit, which offers resources such as program templates, essential contacts, project ideas, and funding sources for planning Alliance for Response forums in other regions.