



## **Guidelines for Resource-Sharing Response to Natural and Man-made Disasters**

7/23/2010 – submitted by RUSA Standards and Guidelines Committee

This guideline began with a report prepared by the Task Force on Resource-Sharing Response to Natural Disasters, June 2007. Prepared in 2009 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 Executive Committee of STARS in December 2009 and by the RUSA Board in June 2010.

### **Introduction**

The Reference and User Services Association, acting for the American Library Association in its adoption of this guideline, recognizes the importance of appropriate resource-sharing responses to libraries and library collections affected by natural or man-made disasters.

The nature of a disaster that may affect a library is difficult to predict in terms of the type of disaster and its damage, and also in terms of when it may strike. It is therefore difficult for libraries to effectively prepare for a disaster. Regardless of the disaster, as the library begins its recovery effort, resource sharing is an important avenue to ensure the continuity of service.

### **1.0 Definitions**

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

1.2 A disaster is any circumstance that significantly damages a library (including damage to the physical structure of a library facility) and/or its collections with interruptions to the services of that library for an extended period of time. It may involve the following damages: flooding/water, fire/smoke, mold, tornado/hurricane/wind, and earthquake, or factors such as war or terrorism.

## **2.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this guideline is to make recommendations as to what are appropriate resource-sharing responses to libraries and library collections affected by natural or man-made disasters.

## **3.0 Scope**

This guideline, although not a policy, recommends suitable communication channels and processes to assist affected libraries, and to outline a library-to-library response to ensure the continuity of services.

## **4.0 Recommendations for Responding Libraries**

After a disaster has occurred at a library, responding libraries should wait to be contacted by the affected institution(s), or designee(s), so as not to add to the stress of the recovery effort. Once contacted, the responding library may be asked for assistance with resource-sharing equipment or service needs, including such actions as:

- 4.1 Providing direct assistance in the rescue of damaged or potentially damaged materials;
- 4.2 Providing needed rescue supplies for materials;
- 4.3 Extending due dates for materials lent to the affected institution(s) or their patrons;
- 4.4 Allowing more time for billing matters to be resolved;
- 4.5 Sharing electronic and print collections/resources and allowing the affected library's users access to these collections/resources (possibly without charge);
- 4.6 Increasing and being more flexible in providing interlibrary loan and consortia circulation services;
- 4.7 Providing bookmobile services from either the affected or responding libraries (if local).

## **5.0 Preparation before a Disaster**

5.1 Libraries should already have an up-to-date disaster plan that at the very least includes 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 Libraries Association website "Disaster Preparedness and Recovery" at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/govinfo/disasterpreparedness>.

5.2 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 with 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 possibly act as a back-up of important information and/or act as a conduit for communicating to other libraries after a disaster.

5.3 Departments/divisions that participate in resource sharing should develop their own disaster plan or ensure that their institution's disaster plans address resource sharing concerns within the larger document. Should a library's collection become damaged or inaccessible, resource sharing can help ensure the continuity of library services that is essential during disaster recovery. The resource sharing disaster plan should address topics such as:

5.3.1 Where resource-sharing operations might relocate after a disaster;

5.3.2 How requests would be received and processed;

5.3.3 How materials would be delivered to users;

5.3.4 What technology and equipment needs exist;

5.3.5 How staff might be redistributed to ensure efficient services;

5.3.6 How institutions are to be contacted for assistance in providing essential services;

5.3.7 How institutions are to be contacted about the disaster;

5.3.8 How to update the changes necessary in the OCLC policies directory;

5.3.9 How to identify the contact information for courier services.

## **6.0 Proposed Channels of Communication**

Informing others of a disaster that has affected a library can be difficult: electricity may not be available, computer and phone lines may be inaccessible, and mail/courier routes may be disrupted, especially if a disaster affects multiple libraries within a region. In this latter case, consortia operations may also be interrupted. It is very unlikely that using only one method of communicating to the resource-sharing community about a disaster will be effective. It is advisable for a library to employ several methods of communication to ensure that the information reaches all institutions. Examples of possible methods of communication include:

- 6.1 Posting messages to resource sharing listserv, such as ILL-L, Circplus, Stars-L, and others;
- 6.2 Arranging “telephone trees” with consortia and partner libraries;
- 6.3 Establishing a toll-free hotline to disseminate information;
- 6.4 Using electronic communication such as wikis, blogs, Facebook, or Twitter to provide updates;
- 6.5 Contacting library associations to provide news releases.

## **7.0 Resource-Sharing Information to be Communicated by Affected Libraries**

After a library is affected by a disaster, resource-sharing operations may have specific needs to be shared with the library community. Such information may include:

- 7.1 New address information;
- 7.2 Equipment needs (computers, fax machines, scanners, etc.);
- 7.3 Staffing needs;
- 7.4 Dates for service to be suspended;
- 7.5 Service needs, such as due-date extensions, storage space, alternative courier routes, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Resource sharing is one of the most important components to disaster recovery. Responding libraries are encouraged to be receptive to the resource-sharing needs of disaster affected institutions. Libraries are strongly encouraged to form resource-sharing agreements with other institutions, and to develop contingency plans before a disaster occurs. Departments that deal with resource-sharing operations should ensure that their potential needs after a disaster are adequately addressed. After a disaster, affected institutions should employ a variety of methods to effectively and efficiently communicate the assistance needed.