

State Heritage Emergency Partnership: Fostering Communication, Coordination, and Collaboration

What Is It?

Heritage Preservation, in partnership with the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), has undertaken a national project that addresses the roles and responsibilities of state cultural agencies and emergency management agencies to protect our cultural heritage in the face of major disasters. The State Heritage Emergency Partnership initiative embodies Heritage Preservation's mission – to preserve and protect our nation's cultural heritage.

In 2013, Heritage Preservation convened three national forums to explore the role that state cultural agencies – the state library, archives, museum, arts and humanities councils, and state historic preservation office – should play in protecting cultural resources following a disaster. The two-day forums forged and strengthened partnerships in 22 states among each state's cultural agencies and between those agencies and their state emergency management agency. Facilitated discussions generated a clearer picture of how state agencies can successfully communicate, coordinate, and collaborate in advance of and following major disasters to provide timely and effective assistance to their constituents.

Why It's Needed

Libraries, archives, records repositories, museums, historical societies, and other cultural institutions are caretakers of more than 4.8 billion artifacts that are vital and often irreplaceable. In the aftermath of disaster, these institutions restore a sense of identity and normalcy, provide an economic anchor during recovery, and sustain and heal distressed communities. Cultural heritage institutions play an instrumental role in what the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) refers to as the "whole community" approach to emergency management. These institutions should be able to turn to state libraries, archives, museums, arts and humanities councils, and historic preservation offices for leadership and support in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and during the long road to recovery. In turn, these agencies must be able to effectively communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with one another to help cultural institutions rebound and rebuild.



The Value

This project is cultivating close working relationships among state agencies, heightening their commitment to protect cultural resources and increasing the sustainability of statewide initiatives that preserve cultural heritage. By encouraging an ongoing dialogue between cultural stewards and emergency managers, the State Heritage Emergency Partnership initiative is increasing organizational agility at the state level to prepare for and respond to disasters affecting cultural resources.

The Results

The three national forums discussed ways to improve statewide adoption, adaptation, and implementation of collaborative emergency preparedness models. The recommendations and conclusions that emerged from the forums are serving as the basis for follow-up conference calls with each state. In every call, each state is addressing the emergency preparedness goals they set at their forum, with the ultimate goal of incorporating cultural heritage into state emergency management plans.

The State Heritage Emergency Partnership website, www.heritagepreservation.org/SHEP, is enabling participants to share ideas and address challenges as they implement goals set at the forums. The project website is making forum resources widely available and is providing a venue for continuing the dialogue on obstacles, best practices, and accomplishments. A partnership action plan will identify the national challenges and opportunities raised at the forums, provide recommendations on how to best implement activities that will lead to coordinated statewide cultural heritage emergency networks, and outline actionable goals to make the incorporation of cultural heritage into state emergency plans a priority in all states and territories, not just those invited to the forums.

Your Participation is Vital

This project is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Every state can commit to protecting and preserving our nation's valuable and vulnerable cultural heritage. Your participation is the first step in this important endeavor.

Register to follow the State Heritage Emergency Partnership blog at www.heritagepreservation.org/SHEP.

Heritage Preservation is a mission-driven, independent, public policy organization dedicated to preserving the cultural, historic, and scientific heritage of the United States. For more information about Heritage Preservation, visit www.heritagepreservation.org.