

## Alliance for Response Leadership Roundtable Summary

On November 18, 2008, Heritage Preservation convened the Alliance for Response Leadership Roundtable in Washington, DC. Leaders of current and future Alliance for Response local committees joined emergency management and cultural heritage experts to share information. Discussion topics focused on the challenges and rewards of hosting Alliance for Response Forums and the strategies to sustain and support the initiatives that result from them.

The meeting began with an update from the nine previous Alliance for Response Forum sites: Atlanta, Boston, California, Cincinnati, Dallas, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Seattle. The Forums have sparked interest in creating programs to encourage disaster preparedness and promoted working relationships between cultural organizations and emergency professionals. Starting a conversation with local emergency managers and first responders and keeping them involved were cited as major challenges. A special welcome was extended to leaders from 2009 Forum sites: Chicago, Denver, Raleigh, and Vermont.

The first discussion topic, facilitated by Julie Page of the California Preservation Program, generated good ideas for initiating and maintaining positive contacts with emergency managers and first responders. Cultural and historic resources may not be on their “radar” but it is possible to capture and sustain their interest. Suggestions for bridging the gap include volunteering to help in local emergencies and learning about emergency management culture and frequently-used terms. Personal contact was cited as the most successful way to bring emergency professionals to the table, and clearly articulating needs will help to make the case. It is important to stress that Alliance for Response initiatives are intended to help responders better protect the community; the state of an institution’s preparedness affects not only collections, but the safety of the visitors. Inviting emergency managers and first responders onsite to help evaluate risks is also a good way to build relationships. Even institutions with little funding should not shy away from this option, since emergency professionals are likely to understand budget constraints and suggest affordable measures.

While the first topic dealt with relationships at the institutional level, the second focused on local and state partnerships and policies. Facilitated by Lori Foley of the Northeast Document Conservation Center, the discussion highlighted several new national initiatives as well as local strategies developed through Alliance for Response. The Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness (COSTEP) pilot program in Massachusetts is a good example of a partnership at the state level involving both cultural heritage and emergency management agencies. There are also local and regional emergency planning groups that can offer a base for network building and funding. Participants were urged to learn about local and state government operations in order to identify partners and better understand how planning grants and relief funds are distributed. Participating in local disaster training or response efforts can be a step toward integrating cultural institutions into city or county emergency plans. The Alliance for Response group HERA (Heritage Emergency Response Alliance) created a list-serve of both cultural organizations and emergency responders that was mobilized after tornados damaged downtown Atlanta. Professional training in emergency response also makes members of the cultural community more valuable to local agencies. Free courses are

offered online through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and at the local level through Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.

Alliance for Response Forums have often resulted in new local networks. For the third topic, facilitator Christine Wiseman of the Georgia State Archives led a discussion on the challenges faced in building and sustaining local groups. One helpful approach is to recruit people in the community with experience in emergency planning and response, such as disaster recovery and insurance professionals. Recruiting participants for Forums and follow-up activities can be a challenge. Suggestions to increase participation include personalized phone calls, e-mails instead of paper invitations, and offering the option of bringing a colleague or sending an alternate. Since most of these networks are sustained in large measure by enthusiastic individuals, turnover can be a problem. A robust membership, division of responsibilities, and rotating leadership to prevent burnout are among the basic ways to sustain networks. Once the group is established, its mission and activities should be publicized through local and state associations.

The fourth and final discussion topic, facilitated by Tom Claeson of PALINET, looked at both programmatic and financial support for local networks. One often overlooked source of expertise and funding are commercial disaster recovery firms. Similarly, corporate contingency planning associations can be helpful. FEMA, regional conservation centers, and the Council of State Archivists are useful resources for education and training. In terms of funding, it is important to learn what Department of Homeland Security grants are available to nonprofits through state emergency management agencies. Representatives from both the Institution of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Humanities expressed interest in supporting collaborative Alliance for Response projects. State arts and humanities councils and State Historical Records Advisory Boards are also potential sources for funding.

The Roundtable concluded with discussions of future Alliance for Response initiatives, including such ideas as a media kit and glossary of emergency management terms. It was suggested that the expanded national Alliance for Response Web site could help link local committees to information on potential grants and successful applications. Chairs of current and future Forum committees were encouraged to contribute information on local activities to the Web site. Recorded portions of the Roundtable will also be available on the site.

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Alliance for Response is a national program on cultural heritage and disaster management. Through a series of local Forums, it builds bridges between the cultural heritage and emergency management communities before disasters happen. The Forums lead to new partnerships, policies, and cooperative planning efforts. Alliance for Response is a project of Heritage Preservation, made possible by Fidelity Investments through the Fidelity Foundation.

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