

# Acting Now to Enhance Performing Arts Emergency Preparedness: A White Paper

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## Background

The aftermaths of regional disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and more recent wildfires in the West and flooding in the Carolinas, have highlighted the lack of emergency preparedness within the performing arts community and the challenges this presents to recovery. While tools and resources have evolved from these disasters to assist the arts community, their reach and adoption among performing arts organizations has been limited.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation convened a group of experts from the arts and heritage communities on September 22, 2015, to consider strategies for strengthening emergency preparedness within the performing arts sector. In response to what was learned during that meeting about needs, resources, barriers and opportunities, LYRASIS, one of the participants in the convening, proposed a planning project to design a program to improve and increase emergency preparedness within the performing arts sector.

A Planning Committee was assembled to elucidate issues and needs; identify strategies to increase knowledge, capacity and ability to execute emergency preparedness planning within the performing arts community; and recommend a plan to implement and evaluate those strategies through a follow-up proposal. The Committee brought together expertise in emergency preparedness and response from both the cultural heritage and performing arts communities with representatives from ArtsReady at South Arts, Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), LYRASIS (facilitator), Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC), National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness and Emergency Response (NCAPER), National Performance Network, New Jersey Council on the Arts, Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), and Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS). The planning grant period ran from January through August, 2016.

This White Paper provides a summary of what was learned during the planning grant project. It is a snapshot of the state of emergency preparedness among performing arts organizations in the U.S. This snapshot forms the basis for recommendations to improve readiness that will be piloted through an implementation project during 2017-2019.

## Emergency Preparedness in the Context of Performing Arts

The performing arts sector is diverse, encompassing organizations of varying sizes, structures and missions as well as individual artists. Most organizations do not plan for emergencies for a variety of reasons: limited use of business planning in general within the sector; not seeing emergency preparedness as a priority; not knowing where to start; and limited staff/contractor capacity or knowledge of emergency planning within the sector. Emergency preparedness is not a requirement to keep an organization running (by grant-makers, donors, Boards, etc.), so it is often deferred by organizations focused on more immediate priorities such as ticket sales. Yet performing arts organizations are especially vulnerable to disasters and emergencies. Since they rely primarily on time-based activity (performances) to generate revenue, even a short closure for an emergency can threaten sustainability. And while the more common, smaller scale emergency, like a broken water pipe, may seem manageable in comparison to the rarer hurricane or earthquake, an organization

can recover from both more efficiently and effectively with a well-constructed and up-to-date plan, ready to use if and when needed.

In “A Vision for Emergency Readiness, Response and Recovery in the Arts Sector” ([www.giarts.org/article/vision-emergency-readiness-response-and-recovery-arts-sector](http://www.giarts.org/article/vision-emergency-readiness-response-and-recovery-arts-sector)), the National Coalition for Arts’ Preparedness and Emergency Response divides emergencies into three phases – readiness, relief and recovery – and summarizes resources available at the time (September 2012) to assist any arts organizations in each area. Some resources focus primarily on disaster relief, helping individual artists after a disaster, not on preparedness, such as The Actors Fund (<http://actorsfund.org/services-and-programs/entertainment-assistance-program>) and MusiCares (<https://www.grammy.org/musicares>). Many resources focus more on visual artists than on performing artists, such as the Craft Emergency Relief Fund ([www.craftemergency.org](http://www.craftemergency.org)) and Studio Protector ([www.studioprotector.org](http://www.studioprotector.org)), emphasizing physical artwork and tools/facilities for creation.

Cultural heritage organizations – archives, historical societies, libraries and museums – have well-established and widely used tools and resources to support emergency preparedness and response going back to the 1966 flood in Florence, Italy, which ignited a world-wide focus on preservation and conservation of cultural resources. The tools and training initially developed in the field focused on collections, but over the years they have expanded to include electronic resources, continuity of operations planning, and the roles of cultural heritage organizations as community resources for recovery. While aspects of the cultural heritage-focused tools and training programs can be used by performing arts organizations, it takes significant effort to adapt and modify to local organizational context.

New community-based models for preparedness have emerged in recent years. These include first responders (fire, police, federal and state emergency management agencies, etc.) and engage cultural heritage organizations on a state and/or community-wide basis for mutual support. One example is the Alliance for Response model implemented in many cities across the U.S., initially through Heritage Preservation and now supported by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation ([www.heritageemergency.org/initiatives/alliance-for-response/afr-home/](http://www.heritageemergency.org/initiatives/alliance-for-response/afr-home/)). Performing arts organizations have become involved in some of these organizations, such as through South Arts’ engagement with the Heritage Emergency Response Alliance in Atlanta, Georgia, although not broadly or deeply as of 2016. While there are operational differences between performing arts organizations and cultural heritage organizations, these become less important in the mutual support context of community-based networks, where the connections among local organizations can provide valuable support for both planning and response.

### Summary of Project Activities

The nine partners formed a Planning Committee, which brought together expertise in emergency preparedness from both the cultural heritage and arts communities. The Committee held monthly conference calls, beginning in early January 2016. During these calls, the Committee defined issues and barriers related to emergency preparedness and clarified scope and desired outcomes for an implementation project. They also began to map existing resources that could support an implementation project to identify overlap, gaps, and how those resources are or can be used within the context of performing arts organizations. The group also convened at two in-person Planning Committee meetings to identify user-centered strategies and approaches for advancing emergency preparedness in performing arts organizations.

Work of the partner group during the planning grant period included:

- Review of existing surveys and research on performing arts disaster preparedness;
- Two surveys of members of the National Performance Network and performing arts national service organizations with 75 total respondents;
- Hosting four focus groups (in New Orleans, New Jersey, at the Dance/USA conference in Austin, Texas, plus a virtual focus group) with 37 total participants from a variety of performing arts organizations across the country;
- Comparison of existing disaster preparedness online and print planning tools;
- Consideration of revision of the cultural heritage “industry standard” Pocket Response Plan (PReP) tool for use by performing arts organizations;
- Several presentations on the project to very supportive allied organizations including a session at the American Library Association Annual Conference;
- Development of strategies for an implementation project to test a variety of approaches to address barriers to emergency preparedness for performing arts organizations.

The planning project surveys and focus groups allowed the partners to learn a great deal, specifically on business continuity and disaster planning practices. To gain additional insight into barriers and impediments to emergency preparedness in performing arts organizations, a series of questions was developed by the Planning Committee and included in National Performance Network (NPN) January 2016 annual survey of its 75 member organizations. NPN also sent the emergency preparedness questions to 16 national arts service organizations. Responses were received from 67 (89%) of the NPN partners and half of the service organizations. Results indicated to project partners that a majority of the performing arts organizations participating did not have disaster plans, and even fewer have continuity of operations plans (CoOP).<sup>1</sup> Only 30% of the responding partners and none of the responding service organizations had disaster plans; 27% of the NPN partners and one of the service organizations had CoOPs. This type of planning is not an institutional priority, according to the survey results, and organizations do not have the time or expertise to develop such plans.

To assist in creating a user-centered design for the implementation project, onsite focus groups were held at three physical locations, and one additional focus group was held virtually, to test ideas and strategies with a variety of performing arts organizations. Focus groups followed scripted questions developed by the Planning Committee, using the results of the NPN surveys as an initial guide. Geographic and organizational diversity was sought in selection of locations and invitations to potential participants (for example, organization types, sizes, and levels of familiarity or experience with emergency preparedness). The focus groups included both producing and presenting organizations, and those with or without their own facilities at which to present performances and programs.

Focus group discussions reinforced the surveys’ findings while providing deeper insight into challenges faced by performing arts organizations related to emergency preparedness and planning. Participating organizations in focus groups that had disaster plans indicated that those plans primarily addressed human safety and communications issues; few participants had CoOP documents. The buildings, historical and business records, and many other aspects of these groups’ work were not covered in the majority of existing CoOP and disaster plans. The focus groups also highlighted the need for information and resources specific to the context of performing arts. Another

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by FEMA, in CoOP or business continuity planning, “the objective for organizations is to identify their Essential Functions and ensure that those functions can be continued throughout, or resumed rapidly after, a disruption of normal activities” (*Continuity of Operations: An Overview*, retrieved July 26, 2016, from <https://www.fema.gov/additional-resources-and-videos-continuity-operations>). Emergency or disaster plans also typically address risk assessment, prevention, response and long-term recovery. In some cases, CoOPs fit an organization’s needs better; in others, emergency or disaster plans. Both terms are used in the proposal, with “emergency plan” as the broader term that may include CoOP.

important finding in the planning phase of the project was the time sensitivity for performing arts organizations to resume their operations and performances.

### Barriers and Needs: Research Findings

The two surveys conducted early in the planning project by NPN provided valuable insight from a small section of the performing arts community. As noted above, one survey went to 75 NPN partners (listed at <http://nnpweb.org/partners/profiles/>); responses were received from 67 (89%). The second survey went to 16 national service agencies; responses were received from eight. Both surveys asked the same set of questions. Among NPN partners, 53% did not have an emergency plan, while 30% did and 16% reported being in the process of developing a plan. Only 20% of those with a plan reviewed or updated it annually. Among the national service organizations, one reported being in the process of developing an emergency plan; the others did not have one. CoOP documents existed at 27% of the NPN partners and one of the performing arts service organizations, and were under development at 8% of the NPN partners and two service organizations. A third of the NPN partners with CoOPs reported updating them annually, and 72% had been updated within the past three years, compared to 55% of the emergency plans. Data from the survey was analyzed by budget size for the responding NPN partners. Organizations in the highest budget group, above \$3 million, were more likely to report having an emergency plan (73%) and a CoOP (55%). For those in the middle groups (\$500,000 to \$3 million), 26% had emergency plans and/or CoOPs, and for the lower groups, below \$500,000, 11% had emergency plans and/or CoOPs.

While no nation-wide survey exists to benchmark emergency preparedness among all U.S. performing arts organizations, other recent local assessments provide similar context to the NPN surveys. For example, a 2013 survey by the Southern California Arts Responder Network found that most of the 192 responding arts organizations, more than half of which are involved in performing arts, do not have an emergency plan and do not have a cash reserve for a disaster, although most do have liability insurance. ArtsReady participated in a survey of arts organizations in Houston in 2013, and assisted the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in their statewide survey of arts organizations in 2014. Neither were exclusive to, but both included responses from performing arts organizations. From the Houston survey, 56% of the 82 respondents did not have a business continuity or emergency plan, and of those who did, 62% did not make regular updates to their plans. From the New Jersey assessment, a majority of the 70 responding organizations had evacuation plans and cancellation/ticket refund policies, but did not have staff emergency training, methods to communicate with patrons in an emergency, inventory policies, shutdown processes, or a succession plan.

Respondents to the NPN surveys that had not developed an emergency plan were asked about the reasons for not doing so. Among 45 NPN partners, 42% replied that it was not an institutional priority and 22% were unaware of the need for a plan; 33% did not have the time to develop a plan, 29% did not have the expertise, and 20% said that they could not afford to develop a plan. For the performing arts service organization survey, half of the respondents (4) indicated that emergency plans were not developed because it was not an institutional priority and they lacked expertise; two did not have time to develop a plan and one was unaware of the need for a plan. Other assessments of emergency preparedness found the same barriers. For example, lack of priority and time were barriers to planning in a 2014-15 pilot project with ArtsReady involving 22 small arts organizations (not all performing) in Los Angeles. Even though the pilot included cash incentives for completing benchmarks, which was a motivating factor for many to join, most participants were unable to fully engage and complete plans due to lack of staff time and priority, including lack of board/leadership buy-in.

Performing arts organizations that engaged in the Mellon planning grant focus groups spoke of the same barriers in their organizations, placing extra emphasis on the need to be able to resume performances quickly after emergencies or disasters. There was strong interest in having more information on resources, best practices, and training specific to the performing arts sector. In addition, focus group participants expressed interest in heritage/arts disaster response networks that already exist in many areas and provide a means for collaborative planning and mutual assistance. Many also identified a need to preserve and archive organizational records, from performance recordings and memorabilia to business records. Focus group participant organizations that already had emergency plans indicated they were limited in scope and focused on safety, communications and data back-up, which are components, but not the only aspects of emergency preparedness.

In addition to barriers to preparedness noted above, performing arts organizations have few tools and resources specific to their needs to help create effective plans. General emergency preparedness and response resources are widely available through many of this project's partner websites and allied organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), and the Craft Emergency Relief Fund/Artists' Emergency Resources and their Studio Protector website.<sup>2</sup> These resources are very useful for planning, but take time to navigate, interpret for one's own situation, and apply. Most are generic by organization type, so a performing arts organization must adapt and make adjustments for their own field and add elements unique to their situations. This makes planning more time consuming and intimidating than if the content were designed specifically for a performing arts organization. Many of the arts emergency resources, such as Studio Protector, are focused primarily on the visual arts or directed toward connecting individual artists with sources of post-emergency aid, as noted above.

Online templates and tools can be time-saving resources in emergency planning. Downloadable templates exist, such as the Council of State Archivists' Pocket Response Plan (PReP), but not for performing arts organizations. There are also two relevant online tools that can guide an organization through the process of creating an emergency plan. One is ArtsReady, launched in 2011 and developed with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. ArtsReady is a membership program that assists arts organizations of all types in emergency planning and response. At a fee-based Premium Membership level, it provides a web-based application for risk assessment, creation, and updating of a preparedness plan. The creators indicate that uptake has been slower than hoped, in part due to the need for expanded awareness of the value of emergency planning and increased capacity for creating plans within the arts community. The second tool, dPlan, was created in 2002 by the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. It is similar in scope and complexity to ArtsReady, but designed for libraries and archives. Opportunities exist to coordinate the tools, which will be useful for institutions that support multiple sectors in arts/heritage communities. In addition, initial assessment during the planning project indicated that both tools require updates and improvements to make them more valuable to performing arts organizations, easier to use and more accommodating for small organizations.

#### Ongoing Collaboration among Performing Arts and Other Arts and Heritage Partners

The partners in this planning effort represent a combination of performing arts and other arts and cultural heritage service organizations. Each has brought unique experience and perspective to the planning effort. The cultural heritage community – archives, historical societies, libraries and

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<sup>2</sup> FEMA [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov), AIC <http://www.conservation-us.org/emergencies#.V5jX0Xn2Y5s>, CERF+ [www.craftemergency.org](http://www.craftemergency.org) and Studio Protector [www.studioprotector.org](http://www.studioprotector.org).

museums – have widely used tools and resources to support emergency preparedness, including established training programs and networks. Training and resources from cultural heritage communities provide useful models for the performing arts, with shared concern for assessment and mediation of risk; safety and well-being of staff and patrons during and after crises; asset protection and recovery; and operational continuity to re-open the doors and resume service to the community as quickly as possible. In combination, the partners bring deep knowledge of business continuity and emergency preparedness resources and training, understanding of the diversity within the performing arts sector, national coverage, and commitment to the value of planning for emergencies and crises.

While cultural heritage communities provide useful models, the partners gained deeper insight during the planning project into the differences between the performing arts and cultural heritage sectors, such as terminology, organizational infrastructures, types of assets, and funding sources. They also found similarities, such as a primary focus on people as the key to recovery from emergencies, recognition of the roles performing arts and cultural heritage organizations play in promoting community-wide recovery from large-scale disasters, and an interest in preservation and sharing of organizational history. Continuing to combine perspectives from these two communities – performing arts and cultural heritage – will build a base of resources, expertise, and outreach that can not only support emergency preparedness at individual organizations, but also expand capacity and support for emergency preparedness throughout entire communities.

### Moving Forward

Continuing to bring combined perspectives from cultural heritage/arts and performing arts communities to address critical issues around emergency preparedness is at the core of the implementation project which has emerged from the assessment and planning described above. During the three-year project, partners will adapt successful models and test new ideas to address key barriers to emergency preparedness among performing arts organizations: lack of awareness, priority, expertise and time to develop plans; lack of information and best practices specific to performing arts organizations; and lack of support networks. The implementation project, which will run from January 2017 through December 2019, includes:

- Outreach and community engagement efforts to raise awareness of the value, increase the priority for, and improve understanding of the importance of planning for emergencies.
- The provision of information resources, models and best practices, online and in-person training, and conference programming specific to the contexts of performing arts organizations, to address the need for expanded emergency preparedness knowledge and expertise in the field.
- Readily-accessible and easy-to-use templates and enhanced online tools that enable customized planning, from basic to advanced levels, to suit the emergency preparedness needs of a diverse range of organizational sizes and situations.
- A “Circuit Rider” mentoring program which will provide local community-based training, consulting, and expertise in selected cities and states, for the development of individual institutional emergency plans and area-wide networks and partnerships.
- Sub-grants to provide the resources to build or enhance cooperative emergency networks in cities, states, and regions, and to support the creation of continuity of operations and emergency response plans for individual institutions.

Ten partner organizations will work together to implement the project, which is based at LYRASIS – the nine original partners (CCAHA, LYRASIS, MACC, NCAPER, National Performance Network, New

Jersey Council on the Arts, NEDCC, South Arts, and WESTPAS) and the Performing Arts Alliance, a national policy advocate, leadership forum, and learning network for America's nonprofit performing arts organizations, artists, and allies. As each of the implementation project programs is introduced, the partners will provide information to the performing arts and cultural heritage communities. For more information on the planning project, or to get involved in the implementation project, please contact Project Director Tom Clareson, LYRASIL'S Senior Consultant for Digital & Preservation Services, [tom.clareson@lyrasis.org](mailto:tom.clareson@lyrasis.org).