Supporting Library Staff in Emergencies and Natural Disasters

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Background/Purposes

Three situation-specific case research studies:

- explore the role of public libraries in South Carolina and Texas during emergencies
- identify librarians’ basic required competencies

Framework

Public health experts recommend a framework for effective risk communication preparedness and implementation in dealing with pandemic influenza:

1. Process - use of multiple channels and technology for information distribution and services
2. People - use of community-first approaches for the provision of services
3. Partners - library’s collaboration with multi-level agencies to facilitate emergency response and recovery


Methodology

- 2015-2016
  - Public Libraries’ Partnerships and Librarians’ Operations
    - 5 focus group meetings with public library administrators and librarians
  - Public Libraries’ Partnerships with Other Agencies
    - In-depth interview with a Public Health Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) agent

- 2017
  - Community Members’ Information Access
  - Disaster information sources the community members used
  - How people shared information with others (e.g., social media, etc.)
  - Three sets of survey and questionnaires were used.

- 2018-2019
  - Public libraries serving as community catalysts to facilitate the building of community capacity and resources for emergency response and recovery
  - 5 focus group meetings with Houston Public Library’s administrators and librarians

Results

Successful Public Libraries’ Partnerships and Librarians’ Operations

- Richland Library, Columbia, South Carolina
  - FEMA established disaster centers in Richland Library Main and its branches.
- Georgetown County Library, Georgetown, South Carolina
  - The Library is partnering with the Georgetown County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and serves in the EOC’s public information officer section.
- Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, South Carolina
  - The Library served as a satellite administrative office for the local fire department.
- Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas
  - The Library system is an integral part of the city’s emergency response and recovery team.

Recommendations

Public libraries and librarians:

- select and disseminate trustworthy digital health resources
- provide health information and technology literacy training to the general public
- promote public librarians’ use of disaster information resources prepared by the National Library of Medicine and CDC
- deliver collaborative real-time health information services through the use of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter
- integrate competencies identified to enhance LIS curriculum and to develop professional CE

Acknowledgement: The author thanks Dr. Jingjing Liu and Dr. Liz Hartnett for assistance in data collection and data analyses. The author does not have any potential conflicts of interest.