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Practicing your plan before the disaster strikes

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and Response, 17 August, 2023

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
University Library



Introduction

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Agenda

- What is a tabletop exercise?
- Why are tabletop exercises important?
- Who should be included?
- Sample tabletop exercise
- Case Study: University of Illinois Library

What is a tabletop exercise?



Photo by Christina Morillo: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-on-a-conference-room-1181406/>

What a tabletop exercise is NOT



Photo by Michael Barnes: <https://siarchives.si.edu/what-we-do/preservation/emergency-preparedness>

What is a tabletop exercise?

- Method to practice disaster plan
- Facilitated discussion, not physical practice
- Focus on hypothetical emergency/disaster scenario
- Participants talk through their roles in the disaster & recovery efforts
- Learning exercise, not a test of participants knowledge

Why are tabletop exercises important?

- Familiarize staff with the disaster plan & their roles
- Encourage cooperative problem solving
- Practice in a low-stakes learning environment
- Discover plan's strengths and weaknesses
- Identify questions and knowledge gaps
- Increase institutional buy-in

Who should be included?

- Facilitator(s): Set up the scenario & guide discussion
- Recorders: Observe and take notes
- Disaster team members (may include):
 - Preservation & Conservation
 - Facilities
 - Human Resources and Business Office
 - Circulation and Fulfillment
 - Communications
 - Curators and Collection Managers
 - Information Technology

Sample tabletop exercise outline

1. Introduction and set expectations
2. Describe initial emergency scenario
3. Discussion
4. Add complicating factors and additional information
5. Discussion [repeat steps 4 & 5 as needed]
6. Wrap-up, debriefing, assessment

Sample tabletop scenario outline

1 June, 2023: River levels are rising and likely to cause flooding in the library within 24 hours

Possible discussion questions:

1. Where is each member of the team?
2. Who will be involved at this stage?
3. What are their roles?
4. Are there ways to mitigate possible damage?

Sample disaster scenario outline

2-6 June, 2023: Due to local flooding, the library is closed for 5 days

Possible discussion questions:

1. What members of the disaster team are involved?
2. How will the disaster team communicate?
3. Are there anticipated supply or equipment needs?
4. What information is released to the public?
5. What steps might be taken to prepare for continuity of operations?

Sample disaster scenario outline

7 June, 2023: A small number of staff are allowed into the building to assess potential damage

Possible discussion questions:

1. Who should be allowed to enter the building?
2. What will each team member do and in what order?

Sample disaster scenario outline

8 June, 2023: Approximately 3,000 bound volumes sustained water damage, as well as carpet, walls, and upholstered furniture

Possible discussion questions:

1. What does each team member do and in what order?
2. What information should be made available to staff? The larger intuition/campus? The public?
3. What supplies and equipment needs are there?
4. What vendors should be contacted?
5. Has an off-site recovery location been established?

Sample disaster scenario outline

9 June and beyond: Ongoing salvage & recovery efforts:

Possible discussion questions:

1. What is each team members' role, what will they do, in what order?
2. What are the plans for recovery of materials?
3. What are the priorities for recovery of materials?
4. What challenges will the Library face in:
 1. Recovery?
 2. Continuity of services?
 3. Other areas?

Case Study: University Library

- Approximately 20 Disaster Team members
- Two (2) Facilitators
- Two (2) Observers/Recorders
- One (1) Disaster recovery vendor
- Three (3) hours long
- Scenario: 3,000 water-damaged books in Classics Library

Case Study: What worked well

- Disaster team together, in person, built relationships & trust
- Staff reported feeling more prepared
- Disaster recovery vendor brought outside perspective
- Identified gaps in public communication plan
- Plenty of time for discussion
- Well-planned and facilitated
- Provided snacks for attendees

Case Study: What we would change

- A larger-scale disaster scenario
- More “twists and turns” to add real-life complications
- Invite first responders or campus emergency management
- Consider other types of disasters

Resources

- Disaster Planning for Libraries, Guy Robertson, Ch.10-11
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9781843347309/disaster-planning-for-libraries>
- Level of Collections Emergency Scenarios, Library of Congress
<https://www.loc.gov/preservation/emergprep/plan/scenarios.html>
- What is a Tabletop Exercise?, Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness Massachusetts (COSTEP MA)
<https://mblc.state.ma.us/costepma/index.php/2020/07/31/what-is-a-tabletop-exercise/>