

Transportation Librarian Roundtable: Manager Readiness and NEDCC's Disaster Planning Services

Bob Cullen: Alright, great.

Alleman, Rosalyn (OST): Okay.

Bob Cullen: Thank you, Rosalyn. So, the topic of today's presentation is Manager Readiness: NEDCC's Disaster Planning Services. NEDCC stands for the Northeast Document Conservation Center. Our distinguished speaker for today's presentation is Jesse Keel. Before she gets started with the presentation, I'd just like to share some information about Jesse in terms of her background.

Jesse Keel is based in NEDCC's Andover, Massachusetts office, and she provides preservation consultations, training programs, assessments, and disaster advice to cultural heritage organizations nationwide. Since joining NEDCC in 2023, Jesse has taught hands-on emergency preparedness workshops from Louisiana to Massachusetts, in addition to webinars and conference presentations on disaster preparedness. Jesse has also provided training for organizations using dPLAN | ArtsReady to manage their disaster readiness.

Jesse currently serves as Education Chair and Member at Large on the Society of American Archivists Preservation Section. She is a certified digital archives specialist, and she has earned an MA in English from the University of Vermont and an MLIS with a concentration in Archives Management from Simmons University in Massachusetts. We're very fortunate to have Jesse with us. I've had the privilege of getting together at least twice in preparation for today's TLR, and I think we're very fortunate to have her as our speaker today. So, without any further delay on my part, I'd like to now hand the microphone over to our distinguished speaker, Jesse Keel. The floor is all yours, Jesse.

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: Thanks, Bob. Thanks for that introduction. I'm going to get my slides pulled up here for you all. Just going to adjust my screen... perfect. Well, welcome, everyone. Thank you for that wonderful introduction, and I am thrilled to be joining you all today to talk about one of my favorite preservation topics, which is emergency preparedness.

I'll start by a quick run-through. I would hope everyone here is a little bit familiar with NEDCC, but just in case, I'd like to recap. We are based in Andover, Massachusetts, just north of Boston. We do book, paper, and photograph conservation. We also offer digitization services as well as audio preservation services. But I am on our preservation services team, so we're a handful of archivists, librarians, museum professionals—we have all kinds of different backgrounds—and we do preservation assessments and trainings for cultural heritage organizations across the country.

One of the biggest things that we get asked to do, and where I feel like the trend is really heading, is this topic of emergency preparedness. When I have any conversation with folks about emergency preparedness, I like to start it by looking at this image here on screen. If you've done any emergency management or emergency preparedness work before, whether that's with a federal organization, a municipality, or another organization, you've probably seen some version of this.

We have the emergency management cycle. We think of it in this 1-2-3: we start with prevention or mitigation. We would love for an emergency or disaster to not happen in the first place. But we also are focused on preparedness because, unfortunately, emergencies and disasters do happen. The second half of the cycle is focused on response and then recovery: the initial

immediate steps you take after an emergency, and then the longer-term steps that go into your recovery.

The key about this graphic is that this is a cycle. Part of your recovery, and at the end of your recovery, you're thinking about reflecting on that experience and how that experience that you went through might feed back into better prevention and better mitigation so that exact same situation ideally doesn't happen again in the future. This is helpful because if you're talking to other folks in the emergency management field, this is going to be a concept that's very familiar to them, but I also think it helps break up the different ways we might approach preparedness and conceptualize emergency management.

I'm going to go through a few things from each of the categories, offering a mix of some best practice pointers that I can do quickly, and then also talking about some of the ways that NEDCC can help you and provide resources. If you were just starting out today with preparing yourself for emergency or disaster scenarios, the first thing I recommend to most people is to do a risk assessment. This is the key task that's going to help your prevention and your mitigation. It's not possible to prepare for every single disaster or every single emergency scenario. We need to do the work to assess what the most likely things are to occur and also what items have the risk of the biggest impact on our ability to carry out our missions. Those are the categories of potential disasters and emergencies that we want to put our most time and effort into preparing for. If you're not near a volcano, I don't recommend preparing for the eventual volcano eruption; it's just very unlikely depending on where you're located.

That's why risk assessment is so useful; it helps you know what to worry about and what not to worry about. In a risk assessment, you're walking through to identify hazards, doing a stress test, and viewing your collections, your buildings, and your organization with fresh eyes to identify where your pockets of vulnerability are and what the effects are going to be. It's not a one-and-done exercise. You have to reassess over time. Risks change seasonally, ahead of a major renovation or building move, as your collections change, or as your building gets older. You're thinking about: how up-to-date is your building? Have there been renovations done? Do you have any specific new acquisitions that are going to affect your priorities? Have things been moved around in your space? Have you had emergencies and disasters in the past? What are your staffing levels like? All of these things go into this risk assessment.

There are a lot of great tools out there. For folks getting started, the first one I recommend is this basic probability and impact matrix. You could draw this on a piece of paper right now. Try to think through the items that are possible within your geographic region and plot them on this matrix of things that are likely to occur and likely to have a big impact, compared to items that are unlikely to occur and would have a very low impact.

Wildfire is a great example in certain locations where if you don't have the conditions where a wildfire would be likely to occur, or if a wildfire did occur it would be so remote to your physical building space that the most you're dealing with is maybe some bad air quality, you can put that in that category. Maybe you know you have brand new shelves, so shelf collapse is a really unlikely situation. If you're a public library where you have a replaceable collection, shelf collapse gets to be put into that bottom corner middle spot. This is a great activity to do at a staff meeting just to get your thoughts going. It's pretty subjective, but I think it's a great starting place.

Beyond doing this risk assessment, what else can you be doing to think about prevention and mitigation? The fundamental thing I recommend is thinking about your building, because your collections are only as safe as the building around them. There are basic things you can do or work with a facilities team to do, including going through that entire building, thinking about the

way it changes in every season, and checking your fire detection systems to make sure you understand what they are and how they work.

You want to be thinking about any water protection that you have. Do you have leak sensors? Have you had leaky pipes in the past? Do you know where your water shutoff valve is? If you have a known issue like a funny-looking damp patch on the ceiling, are you monitoring it to make sure it's not changing? Have you had somebody properly inspect it? Is the roof up to date? You can incorporate these into a regular walkthrough process so that all staff are trained to know what types of building things they should be watching for. We also want to be doing our monitoring for pests and mold. You wouldn't believe how likely it is that a water leak leads to a mold issue that goes unnoticed for a long time. You also want to be thinking about security. If there's a lot of staff turnover, folks don't realize that passwords or keys are not being kept at the level of security they should be.

As far as collections go, these are sometimes things we take for granted that are easy to overlook. Such a small one that makes a big difference is making sure all of your collections are stored off the floor. I've been to a lot of organizations, and I don't think I've ever been to one that doesn't have anything on the floor, even if it's temporary. If you can do your best to have nothing stored on the floor, in the event of a water issue, that's going to make a big difference. Boxes also make a big difference, so making sure you have collections properly boxed can be helpful. You would be surprised at how much water will be absorbed by a box before it touches your documents, and even that bit of time can save you a whole lot of headache.

You also want to make sure things are labeled with good quality labels—not sticky notes. Sticky notes will fall off very fast in water, and the information on them will bleed. In a disaster, it's so easy to lose critical information. Knowing what your collection's priorities are and noting those on labels helps you save the items that are highest priority before wasting time on things that are less important.

Preparedness really comes down to your disaster plan. Fundamentally, your disaster plan is your preparedness. Lots of organizations don't have a plan in place, or they have a plan made years ago that doesn't get updated. Maybe they showed it at onboarding, but after 5 years, staff have never really worried about it because they've never had an issue. We want those plans to be regularly kept up to date and in use.

Think of it as a resource assessment. What is the information that you're going to need right at your fingertips in an emergency? This includes contact information for vendors, suppliers, and partner organizations. It's going to be your basic institutional information: where your organization is located, who is your emergency response team, and what's your insurance information? It will also include response and recovery procedures. If you have specific materials, like paper versus AV media, explaining those explicit procedures in your plan is helpful. In the chaotic moments of an emergency, it's easy for that stuff to fly out of your mind. Having that documented gives you extra confidence and safety.

One tool I like to mention is our dPLAN | ArtsReady tool. This is an online emergency preparedness tool specifically developed for arts and cultural heritage organizations. It's got a risk assessment feature to help you target action items and pull together the pieces that become your disaster plan. There is also a free download on the website for our Pocket Response Resource (PRR). It's a one-page document you can fully edit, type in all your critical contact information and initial response steps, and then print it out; it's small enough to fold up and fit in your wallet. I always have my cell phone on me, so I actually screenshot my PRR and keep it on my phone for fast response and reference. Risk assessment is number one, and then coming

up with a pocket response resource can be a good starting point on the way to writing a full disaster plan.

For your plan to be effective, it has to be published and kept up to date. Make sure there are copies located within your office and buildings, but also probably at home, in your car, and on your phone. I recommend revising it if a disaster has occurred, if a staff member has changed, if your building has changed, or if you've gotten a new collection. The bare minimum would be once a year. If you finish editing your plan, put a note in your calendar to remind you a year from then.

We work with organizations all of the time who need extra help. We offer preservation assessments, emergency preparedness-specific assessments, and coaching or writing parts of disaster plans and policies. Sometimes organizations just lack the staff time to write the plan themselves, or there are many stakeholders and having an external person bring fresh ideas is helpful. There is a case study on our website about a disaster plan writing consultation we did with a wildlife zoo and library in San Diego.

Another important part of preparedness is your supplies. You want the plan, but you also need the stuff to actually do the response. You can customize your own disaster supply kit or buy pre-made kits online. Having access to basic things to clean up water, organize collections, and do air drying is critical. If you have supply kits, when was the last time they were inventoried? Often they're missing stuff because someone borrowed scissors and never put them back.

Now that goes with your vendors. If you already have vendor contracts with recovery services like Polygon or BELFOR, that's great. I also recommend connecting with your first responders and your partner institutions. The Transportation Librarian Roundtable is a great example of an organization of people who are your partners in making sure you're prepared because you have similar collections and concerns. You can support each other with advice, share experiences with vendors, or share templates for disaster plans. Think about organizations closely located to you that could be a spot to operate out of if you needed to do salvage work.

The next step is training. This could be fire drills, tests of warning systems, or even a pop quiz at a staff meeting. One of my favorites is a tabletop exercise where you bring in a hypothetical scenario and work through the response based on your disaster plan. Trainings are a big part of what we do here. We do a hands-on wet salvage training that's very popular. We'll talk about disaster plans and response steps, and then we take a bin, fill it with books and documents, and fill it with water. We walk everyone through the process of what that feels like. Until you've held a sopping wet document, it's a very specific experience. Everyone becomes like a little kid again when you give them a wet bucket full of stuff to play with. We can also customize other related training.

We have a regular schedule of webinars, many of which relate to emergency planning and writing disaster plans. Some webinars end up for free on our YouTube channel. My favorite free resource is our Preservation Leaflet series on our website. Series 3 is all on emergency planning. There is a worksheet that you could work through to have a workable plan at the end. There are also salvage leaflets. The one I send to the most people is 3.8: the emergency salvage of moldy books and paper. It has explicit instructions and photographs on responding to an active mold situation. You could even print these leaflets and put them in your disaster preparedness binder.

There is a Disaster Assistance page on our website that pulls together key resources. I also want to highlight our 24/7 collections emergency hotline. This is a totally free service. If you walk into your collection and have wet stuff, moldy stuff, bugs, or some other disaster, you can call

that number. We are human beings staffing this; it goes to our cell phones. Even if it's Saturday morning, I'll talk you through initial steps and point you towards the right vendors. Put it in your cell phone today and definitely in your disaster plan.

One thing I want to talk about is a grant project we have wrapping up in California. It's a great case study for what can look like if you get state-level support to protect cultural heritage. Some folks might be familiar with the Ready—or Not? Cultural Heritage Disaster Project, funded by the California State Library. NEDCC has had a staff person in California specifically doing assessments, trainings, and disaster planning consultations. I think they visited over 500 sites. About 78% of those organizations have taken action to improve their risks, whether that's writing a disaster plan or applying for grant funding. It's a great model I'm hoping other states see, especially the impact on small, volunteer-run organizations.

To wrap us up, I made this checklist for getting started:

- Start with your risk assessment.
- Work on your pocket response resource.
- Use that information to do a full disaster plan.
- Make sure you have your supplies.
- Publish your plan and do some training.

You will have these slides so you can go back to this checklist. I'll stop talking there. There's my contact info, and I'm happy to answer questions.

Bob Cullen: Great presentation, Jesse. Thank you so much. If anybody has any questions or comments for Jesse, we have ample time for that for the remainder of the hour. Just do the show of hands and I'll call on you. I'll go ahead and call upon Marilee with her questions or comments.

Marilee R Tuite: Hi, Jesse, that was a really helpful presentation, thank you. I have one question: looking back on the slide about collections, the first bullet point said to ensure they're stored at least 3 feet off the floor. I was wondering, are you referring to regular stacks in a library or just an archive room?

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: It's 3 inches, not 3 feet.

Marilee R Tuite: Oh, okay, thank you.

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: Maybe my notation on the slide is wrong, so I'll double-check that. 3 feet is really hard for anyone to achieve. In the event of a large flood, 3 inches isn't going to make a huge difference, but for small, low-level leaks, it helps. We're just trying to get anything off the floor, so even if you're putting stuff on a pallet, that's great. Most standard shelving is already going to have that.

Marilee R Tuite: It has that, yeah. Okay, great, thank you.

Bob Cullen: Great. Thank you, Marilee. While we're waiting for other questions, Jesse, I appreciate the clarification that it's 3 inches, not 3 feet. What I want to ask you about is the cycle. For the first part of the cycle—the preparation and mitigation—I'm thinking it must be easier said than done to get people to embrace that and take that crucial first step. I'd be interested in your thoughts on how receptive people have been to engaging in that first part. Also, you impressed upon me that the first stage is not a one-and-done thing; the cycle

continues. Eventually, you have to get back to it again. What has been your experience emphasizing that? Have you ever encountered anyone saying, "Why should we do that again? We already have it in place"?

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: I don't get a lot of that directly because the folks engaging with my trainings usually know why this matters. But I speak to a lot of folks struggling to get higher-level leadership and boards to understand putting financial resources and staff time into mitigation. You might say, "I know we have a high likelihood of hurricane-force winds, we should reinforce the windows." That's expensive, but it could make an enormous difference.

That's why a risk assessment can be powerful. There are tools out there, like on the AIC website (American Institute for Conservation), which is an Excel spreadsheet where you put in a numerical value for the severity and likelihood of each item to give you data. FEMA also creates maps to evaluate risk based on weather data and past disasters, and it can put a financial number on the economic impact. This way, you're not having a conversation about being personally worried a tornado is coming. Instead, it's like, "Statistically, it's likely we'll be hit by a hurricane in X amount of years, so we need to consider investing in a sump pump." Executive leadership likes numbers and financial incentives for acting ahead of time versus reacting.

The disaster planning is hard. Folks who deal with collections are extremely busy. Convincing them that disaster preparedness is an ongoing effort is a hard sell because it's an activity that's never crossed off your to-do list. As cultural heritage stewards, we understand it's imperative to our jobs, but it's harder to explain that it's a sustained investment from the organization to continue to train staff and keep supply kits full. It goes back to making the argument based in data—until something happens. If a disaster has recently happened, take full advantage of that moment to pressure your organization into making changes, because sometimes it unfortunately takes that.

Bob Cullen: Excellent. As somebody who maintains lists and loves crossing things off, I appreciate you speaking to that. Any other questions for Jesse? I'm going to sneak in another one. The 3-inch requirement off the floor—where does that come from? Does it originate with NEDCC or is it a national standard?

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: It didn't originate with us. I think it's pretty standard advice. My original understanding was that standard advice was 4 inches, and if you were reading old books talking about library design, you would see 4 inches. We lowered it to 3 inches as a general number to give folks to essentially get things off the floor. I would take 2 inches if that's all folks can do; I just don't want to see boxes on the floor.

Bob Cullen: Right. I think I saw Gabi Hysong with her hand raised. Gabi, the floor is yours.

Gabi: Alrighty, I guess I got it to work. This is really great. I actually took one of your courses a long time ago. I have a meeting next week with someone in our company; they're looking at what we would lose from the library if a major disaster happened, like a tornado or a fire. This is perfect timing and a great refresher. Even though we have plans in place, they've never really asked the librarian what we would lose if something happened. So, this is perfect. Thank you.

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: Good. Happy to hear that.

Bob Cullen: Thank you, Gabi. We have at least another six or seven minutes. I'll sneak in another biographical question. As a fellow liberal arts major, I'm intrigued by the journey people take. How would you characterize your journey from being an English major to becoming a librarian? How did you end up in the field you're in now?

Jesse Keel | NEDCC: I was surprised when I got to library school and not everyone had studied English. I was an English and History double major and got the master's in English. I had been working at a museum in Vermont since high school. When I finished my master's, I returned to that museum and had an opportunity to work in the archives. Working in the archives broadened my interest into rare books and documents, and that's when I decided to attend library school to focus on archives management.

I also did a lot of front-facing work—giving tours of the archives and the main collection—and I liked the people aspect. I wasn't necessarily cut out for a traditional archival position where you mostly just process collections. This job at NEDCC allows me to travel the country to see everyone's coolest books and documents and help preserve them. I've enjoyed a position where I get to help the most people possible and still do a fair amount of teaching. My love for books started with studying what's in them and progressed to how we preserve them. I live in New Hampshire now, but I'm from Vermont originally, so I'm happy to still do work in New England.

Bob Cullen: Thank you very much. My undergraduate degree is in history. People assumed I was an English major because I wrote for the campus newspaper. After I graduated, I responded to an ad for a publishing house that emphasized it would be an ideal job for an English major, and I ended up getting the job and working there for about 5 years.

Any other questions for Jesse? I should provide context that the person I'm indebted to for bringing Jesse into our lives today was Kendra Stull, senior librarian at Caltrans. Kendra contacted me last fall about having someone from NEDCC give a TLR presentation on the strengths of the workshop they had given to Caltrans employees. I see a raised hand from S142449.

s142449: Oh, hi Bob, this is Kendra. I just wanted to say I'm here. I attended one of the workshops funded by the state of California. Like Jesse said, it was a big help, especially for smaller historical organizations for whom it was brand new information. For me, it was a refresher we needed because of staff changes. I'm glad people are getting good stuff out of it today.

Bob Cullen: Thank you again, Kendra. A round of applause for our speaker today, Jesse Keel. I'm grateful for the information and for putting this issue firmly on our radar.

All good things must come to an end. As mentioned in recent announcements, the next TLR will take place next month on Thursday, June 18th. Please note it's the third Thursday in June to accommodate those attending the ACIST conference. Our speaker will be Amy Bogus, librarian for the New Mexico Department of Transportation.

Rosalyn, did you want to talk about the link? Today was on me for providing the out-of-date link.

Alleman, Rosalyn (OST): Thanks, Bob. I cancelled the invite for the Teams meeting because DOT is switching over to Google Workspace, so we won't have access to Teams forever. This will be the same link moving forward. If you want to be added to the invite, let me know. It should also be on the NTKN calendar and LibGuides. We decided Zoom was a better option since we have access to Zoom for Government. We are still planning to have NTKN meetings on Google Meets because we can use the AI note-taker there, but for this, we're planning to keep using Zoom. Let me know if you want me to add you to the invite.

Bob Cullen: I appreciate that, Rosalyn. I hope everyone found today's...