



Alliance for
Response

Forum Planning Handbook

A Guide to Bringing Together
Emergency Responders and
Cultural Institutions in Your
Community



Foundation for Advancement in
Conservation

© 2026 Foundation for Advancement in Conservation

Alliance for Response is an initiative of the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (FAIC).

For more information:

FAIC

727 15th St NW

Suite 500

Washington, DC 20005

202.452.9545

www.culturalheritage.org

info@culturalheritage.org

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	p. 4
I. Introduction	p. 5
Alliance for Response: The National Initiative	
The Importance of Community Collaboration and Partnerships	
What a Forum Can Do for Your Community	
II. What You Need to Get Started	p.9
Goals	
Funding and Budget	
Lead Time	
A Wide Circle of Friends	
III. The Local Planning Committee	p.11
Who Should Be Involved	
Recruiting Committee Members	
Responsibilities	
Many Hands Make Light Work	
IV. Planning a Forum	p.15
Selecting a Date and Venue	
Structuring the Program	
Selecting Speakers	
Defining the Audience	
Issuing Invitations	
Managing Registration	
Alerting the Media	
Conducting an Evaluation	
V. Follow-up Activities	p.23
VI. Conclusion	p.24
VII. Resources	p.25
Sample Documents	

Preface

Have you prepared your organization for an emergency? The formation of an emergency response team composed of your staff members and the development of a disaster response plan are important steps to get started. Forming a wider network of local and regional colleagues and first responders will improve your ability to respond effectively. Building relationships with sister organizations; first responders; emergency personnel; and allied professionals like archivists, librarians, collections managers, facilities staff, and conservators will play a vital role in your organization's survival and recovery.

The Alliance for Response (AFR) initiative brings cultural heritage and emergency management professionals together at the place where virtually all initial disaster response occurs—at the local level. AFR is designed to help you reach out and form these important partnerships, beginning with a one-day forum. The forum provides an opportunity for cultural heritage stewards, from caretakers to executive directors to curators to conservators, to exchange important information with each other and get to know their community's firefighters, police, and local, state, and federal emergency managers.

This handbook provides guidance for people inspired to bring AFR to their communities. It offers a general framework for organizing a forum, with the understanding that program specifics will be tailored to local needs. You will find templates and samples to help you on the [Plan an Alliance for Response Forum web page](#).



I. Introduction

Alliance for Response: The National Initiative

Working with emergency responders to safeguard collections and historic sites has been a priority for the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC).

A study of Lower Manhattan cultural institutions after the September 11 terrorist attacks confirmed the importance of preparedness. Museums, libraries and archives with emergency plans were better able to protect their collections from dust and debris. Institutions that had established relationships with emergency responders were able to gain earlier access to their collections after the tragedy. Emergency responders also gained a better appreciation for the cultural heritage community when several institutions opened their doors as rest and supply centers.

In 2003, the non-profit Heritage Preservation launched Alliance for Response (AFR) to address one of the study's major recommendations: building bridges between the cultural heritage and emergency response communities before disasters happen. In 2015, FAIC took over management of the program. Since its formation, more than 40 AFR kick-off forums have been held in cities and regions across the United States.

For each forum, strong local planning committees contribute not only to the success of the event, but to establishing networks, improving inter-institutional communication and developing cooperative projects/ collaborative activities.

Definitions

Community, as used in the handbook, refers to a group of people with ties that are geographic, cultural, psycho-social, or have a common professional or other interest.

Cultural heritage organizations refer to any organization that stewards and cares for cultural or historic objects and records. These organizations may be archives, community centers, historic sites, historical societies, libraries and museums.

Emergency managers play a coordinating role before, during, and after disasters and are usually affiliated with city, county, or state government. Representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are in this category.

First responders normally refers to professionals dispatched by the 911 system: firefighters, police, and paramedics. In larger events, this might also include the National Guard or Coast Guard.

In this guide, the term **emergency responders** encompasses both of the groups above.

Participants of forums include leaders of museums, libraries, archives, and historic preservation organizations, cultural heritage representatives and practitioners, community leaders, Tribal nation representatives, as well as federal, state, and local emergency responders. Cultural heritage representatives range from conservators and collections

care professionals to curators and security staff; emergency responders include representatives from FEMA, the U.S. Coast Guard, law enforcement, fire departments, local governments, and the American Red Cross. The forums are hosted by organizations such as community centers, museums, and public libraries.

The AFR initiative goes beyond convening a forum. Its ultimate goal is sustaining cooperation, both among cultural institutions and between the cultural heritage and emergency response communities. The cultural heritage community includes local and regional large and small organizations. An inclusive and extensive network is a stronger network. Below are a few examples.

Boston forum participants formed the Cultural Emergency Management Team (CEMT), which has since expanded to Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness: Massachusetts (COSTEP MA). The group, trained and deployed through the State Archives and State Library Commission, has an official role in responding to emergencies.

Forum Facts

.....

The first forum was held November 14, 2003, at the Dallas Museum of Art and featured a tour of the museum's collections and storage areas to point out what local heritage is at risk. One attendee wrote, "What a wonderful conference! This was like receiving a college education in one day."

.....

Thanks to COSTEP, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts added a new annex for cultural heritage to its emergency plan.

Seattle Heritage Emergency Response Network (SHERN) developed in the years following the initial Seattle forum in 2006. SHERN has developed a mutual aid agreement between its member institutions, providing advice, guidance, and/or actual recovery assistance when requested.

In Georgia in 2023, two AFR networks, Heritage Emergency Response Atlanta (HERA) and Savannah Heritage Emergency Response (SHER) merged to form the Georgia Heritage Responders (GHR). The two groups saw a need for a more expansive, state-wide, emergency training and response effort. Over the years, GHR has organized conference calls to check in with cultural institutions after regional disaster events including hurricanes and tornadoes.

Most recently, in 2025, both the Kansas and Arizona AFR networks held kick-off forums. While the Arizona AFR is housed under the Museum Association of Arizona, the Kansas AFR is hosted by the Kansas Division of Emergency Management. Both networks are strong in representation from emergency management and cultural heritage organizations and Arizona includes Tribal representation as well. The Kansas AFR has hosted a number of webinars for members, and the Arizona AFR will host a series of in-person workshops to build preparedness pocket plan templates by region.

The Importance of Community Collaboration & Partnerships

When an emergency strikes your organization, will you know the responders who arrive, who is in charge, and how to communicate your collection priorities? Likewise, will the first responders know who to contact on your staff for collections handling and where collections and hazardous materials are located?

Establishing relationships and discussing these issues before disaster strikes can significantly increase your chances of a successful recovery. At AFR forums around the country, emergency responders and cultural heritage stewards and caretakers have been sitting down together, sharing their priorities and methods, and designing ways to ensure the best possible outcomes for cultural organizations facing an emergency.

Emergency responders' first priority is saving lives; they also want to assist with protecting cultural heritage. In April 2007, a three-alarm fire at the Georgetown branch of the District of Columbia Public Library destroyed the roof and much of the 1935 building's second floor, including the Peabody Room. When the assistant fire chief was told of the precious historic records and artifacts in the Peabody Collection, he sent in a team to cover the collections with protective tarps and bring whatever paintings and artifacts they could carry on the way out. Communicating your collection's needs and importance to the community can invest responders in its survival.

The benefit of knowing your emergency responders was also illustrated after the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers. The grandson of sculptor Alexander Calder printed flyers with a photo and description of Calder's sculpture Bent Propeller (at first assumed completely destroyed.) Once the workers knew what to look for, they began finding pieces, eventually recovering over 35 percent of the artwork. It is not known how much may have been hauled away as debris before the flyers were distributed.

"Building Connections for Emergency Preparedness: A Conversation Guide for Communities and Responders" (available in the Resources section) is a helpful resource for initiating discussions between AFR networks and communities to share knowledge and build trust. The guide includes prompts designed to facilitate discussions that clarify priorities, roles, and communication channels before a crisis occurs. It provides a simple framework to help communities, including those with limited resources, identify what matters most and plan to protect it. For caretakers and cultural organizations, the guide provides space to document sites, spaces, and collections, as well as the people who care for them. For responders, it offers valuable insight into a community's priorities and traditions, helping guide respectful and effective action. The questions highlighted in the guide encourage collaboration and mutual understanding, ensuring that every community has a voice in protecting their heritage.

What a Forum Can Do for Your Community

Alliance for Response activity begins with a one-day forum for cultural leaders and emergency professionals.

AFR forum attendees often noted that the convening brought to light issues they had never thought about. Emergency responders said they learned about the importance of cultural heritage and why it needs to be protected; cultural heritage attendees learned how emergency responders operate and what they can do to help in an emergency.

A cultural heritage attendee wrote that she learned about “the hierarchy of local—state—federal emergency management; most importantly, that local offices are interested in hearing from me.” A museum staffer discovered some simple steps, like closing doors, that could help in a fire.

One participant from a fire department wrote that he learned to “take a proactive approach to asking about where high value/rare articles are located so that the fire department can address them as early as possible during an incident.”

An archivist noted that “the [state emergency management] folks were especially accessible, and I now feel more confident in reaching out to them and working with them.”

Another participant from a state archives wrote that the forum helped her understand “not just the importance of the relationships but how to go about building them.”

After the AFR forum in New York City, a FEMA regional environmental officer wrote, “The entire day was very worthwhile and beneficial to planning. From my perspective, the meeting was an eye opener in terms of response and coordination in a disaster.”

An AFR forum provides mutual benefits to communities by establishing lines of communication: emergency responders tell cultural institutions how to make their jobs safer, and cultural heritage stewards share with first responders the special and fragile nature of collections and concerns over hazardous materials. Perhaps most importantly, the forum will ensure that in an emergency, you’ll have the help you need.

Network Highlights - Colorado Cultural and Historic Resources Task Force

On June 13, 2013, The Western Museum of Mining and Industry was in the mandatory evacuation zone of the Black Forest Fire, outside of Colorado Springs, CO. Two local museum professionals organized a rapid collections move, while members of the Colorado AFR connected with the State Patrol to gain escort for Air Force volunteers in the area to assist with the evacuation. In the aftermath of the fire, the members of the AFR were able to reconnect with the Air Force Academy to provide a truck to bring the materials back to the museum.

II. What You Need to Get Started

Goals

An Alliance for Response forum is different from a hands-on workshop or educational seminar; its focus is on leadership, policy, and ongoing relationships. It can influence your trustees, raise your organization's standing in the community, and create lasting partnerships with people who are critical to disaster recovery.

The overall goals of the Alliance for Response initiative are to:

- Provide education on local disaster management issues and protocols
- Raise awareness of the need to protect cultural and historic resources
- Encourage disaster planning and mitigation
- Develop strong, ongoing networks to facilitate effective local response

Funding and Budget

The costs associated with a forum can vary widely. Yours will depend on the general cost of living in your area, whether you can secure donations of space, materials, or catering, and whether you pay honoraria for speakers.

Be creative about funding—think locally and nationally. Will a potential speaker already be in town for another engagement? Is there an organization or company in your community that may have much to gain from this new alliance of the cultural and emergency response communities? Has a local

organization dealt with an insurance agency or disaster recovery firm that would be willing to support this initiative? Also, check with your local or state government to see whether funding might be available—the California forums were supported by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Put together a packet of information to give to prospective funders. This may include any material you have developed to date, from a proposed agenda to confirmed speakers. (Communication templates are included in the Resources section of this handbook.)

FAIC may have funding available to help support administrative costs for forums. E-mail emergencies@culturalheritage.org to inquire.

It's best to break your budget into categories and consider the costs for each:

Speakers. Decide up front whether you will offer honoraria for speakers; if so, include those costs in the budget. If you invite speakers from out of town, you may need to cover travel and hotel expenses. Most of your speakers should be local, but you may decide an out-of-town keynote speaker will be impactful. (The travel of federal employees, such as FEMA regional officials, is usually covered by the government.)

Catering. Previous forum planners have found sponsors for lunch and snack breaks.

Ask local representatives from disaster recovery firms or the chamber of commerce; point out that it is a great way for them to reach both the local cultural heritage and emergency response communities. An acknowledgement of their support should appear on the program and in the welcoming remarks.

Administration. Even if you secure donations to support some direct administrative costs (printing, mailing, conference calls), staffing resources will still be needed. Ask your committee members to enlist volunteers from their respective organizations—you can spread the work, and thus the cost, among several organizations.

Lead Time

Planning such an ambitious gathering can be daunting, so be realistic about the amount of time you need – usually five to seven months. If you have a framework in place, such as cultural heritage network group that can help with the planning process, you will need less time than if you are starting from square one. (See Sample Timeline, p. 14).



A Wide Circle of Friends

An Alliance for Response forum brings together several communities that normally have little or no contact. Making connections within new communities, particularly with emergency managers and first responders, can be challenging. You'll need to network and be prepared to do some legwork to find the right people to join you in the endeavor. For guidance, see the Tip Sheets (Diversifying Your AFR Networks and Increasing Community Inclusivity and Creating Welcoming AFR Events for Communities) in the References section.

Network Highlights - Kentucky Heritage Emergency Response Network

Following the February 2025 flooding in Kentucky, the Breathitt County Museum sustained water damage to artifacts and displays when its roof was compromised. The museum was able to request assistance thanks to its connection with the Kentucky Historical Society, a partner of the Kentucky Heritage Emergency Response Network (KHERN). In response, KHERN partners quickly activated, providing guidance on salvaging wet textiles and sending recovery supplies—including tarps to prevent further damage, materials for cleanup, and archival supplies such as boxes, folders, and enclosures to help stabilize and rehouse damaged materials. The AFR also worked to ensure the museum was included in the county's insurance claim process. These coordinated efforts supported a much faster response than during the 2022 floods, when the museum was left to navigate recovery largely on its own.

III. The Local Planning Committee

Who Should Be Involved

Assembling an effective planning committee is the single most important action to ensure your forum is a success. In general, a planning committee should consist of 8 to 10 people from the cultural heritage and emergency responder communities.

Planning committees may include collections staff (archivists, curators, conservators, collection managers, preparators, registrars, librarians), facility and maintenance staff, security, museum and library administrators, SHPOs, THPOs, as well as first responders, regional emergency management, or insurance industry representatives (see roster in the Resources section). To make sure your forum will attract a wide array/range of cultural and emergency responder professionals, seek out planning committee members from diverse institutions and organizations. Members bring different audiences and connections. Varying perspectives on program needs can lead to a stronger and more interesting agenda.

Forum Facts

.....

At the Triangle Alliance for Response Forum, Raleigh (NC) Fire Chief John McGrath told the cultural community to step up and “identify yourself. We will be grateful for your expertise, and we are looking for your guidance to do the right thing.”

.....

Recruiting Committee Members

When making your pitch to potential committee members, be sure to explain in general terms what an Alliance for Response forum is. Mention that they will be an integral part of shaping the forum and follow-up activities. Committee members will be involved in refining the goals and setting the forum agenda.

When speaking with potential planning committee members, be clear that this project will require consistent and enthusiastic support, even after the forum is over. Committee meetings will most likely take place at least once a month leading up to the forum, possibly more often depending on the timeline. Members' attendance and involvement is key to hosting a forum that will facilitate collaboration between the cultural and emergency management communities.

Perhaps a group of cultural or preservation professionals already meets regularly in your community, either for workshops and training or just to share information and expertise.

This might be a good place to start looking for planning committee members. These people already demonstrate their interest in the preservation of cultural heritage and will most likely work well together.

Be sure to recruit committee members from the emergency management/response field. This can be the most challenging part of putting your committee together.

Ask other recruits for emergency manager and first responder contacts in their areas—networking is the best and easiest way to find these professionals. The local city emergency management agency or a university campus emergency planner should be able to offer good leads.

You can also look for emergency responders online. Every state has its own website, which should have a link to the state emergency management agency. Your city or county may have a website with similar information.

When you make contact with emergency responders, explain who you are, what you do, and why cultural organizations and historic sites need special attention. For further talking points, see “Working with Emergency Responders: Tips for Cultural Organizations”. This poster has helpful tips on communicating with first responders and emergency managers. A printed poster is available at our online store www.culturalheritage.org/shop and can be downloaded for free as an 8.5 x 11-inch booklet.

Don’t be discouraged if some of your first recruits turn you down. Ask them for recommendations of others in their organization or field who might be interested in contributing to the success of the project.

Tip

Use your forum invite list as a starting point for recruiting steering committee members.

Responsibilities

In general, the planning committee should begin meeting about six months before the forum date. For the inaugural meeting of the committee, find a convenient time and place, which does not need to be where the forum will actually be held. It is important that everyone attend, since this will be the first time many of these people meet each other.

At this meeting, the first priority is to set the goals of the forum. (See Goals, p. 9.) Your particular goals will depend on the hazards in your area (natural disasters as well as industrial and environmental risks), the size and nature of your cultural heritage collection, and other needs of local organizations. Strive to frame your forum’s objectives within the overall Alliance for Response goals.

Such goals might include highlighting the need for cooperative disaster planning or expanding the membership of a response network that is already in place. Thinking through your goals will help shape the program and ensure an effective follow-up to the forum.

A suggested agenda for this first meeting is included in the Resources section. Future planning committee meeting agendas will be determined by what you decide during this first meeting. Suggest that committee members bring their calendars to discuss the date for the forum and schedule future planning meetings. Be sure to create a timeline for when tasks need to be accomplished (see Sample Timeline, p. 14) and begin to develop a budget.

The committee should meet regularly until the forum date and undertake the following tasks:

- identify forum goals to inform program design
- identify and recruit the speakers
- set a date that doesn't conflict with cultural or emergency responder events
- decide on the size of the meeting
- secure an appropriate venue
- identify participants, media contacts, and potential funding sources
- issue invitations
- encourage decision-makers to attend
- keep track of registrations and follow up as necessary
- work with the speakers to ensure effective content
- provide assistance to the host organization to guarantee a successful meeting day

Many Hands Make Light Work

Each member of the committee should be encouraged to contribute talent, knowledge, and time. Assignments may include drawing up and reviewing the invitation list, making logistical arrangements, composing emails and correspondence, designing promotional pieces such as a save-the-date postcard or an informational brochure, identifying and inviting speakers, arranging for catering, identifying and soliciting additional funding, registering participants, and assembling forum packets.

Some jobs will require more than one person, but be sure everyone has an assignment and knows when tasks should be finished. You may want to draw up a job chart that includes deadlines.

If committee members are unable to meet physically on a regular basis, consider online meetings .



Sample Timeline

Four to seven months out:

- Planning committee begins meeting together.
- Select program, venue, and date.
- Select and invite speakers.
- Begin contacting potential sponsors.
- Send letters of agreement to speakers and sponsors once they agree to participate.

Two to four months out:

- Shape the list of invitees. Remember that not everyone you invite will come, so build some redundancy into your list.
- Send save-the-date postcards or e-mails to invitees.

One to two months out:

- Send speakers a list of talking points for their presentations to ensure minimal overlap and adequate topic coverage. Ask for any audio-visual requirements.
- Send invitation letters with details about the forum, including the agenda and any special activities being offered by the host institution. Be sure to specify the RSVP date.
- Arrange for speaker honoraria.

Two weeks out:

- Host a conference call to coordinate presentations and panels.
- Confirm arrangements with the caterer and host institution.
- Confirm hotel and travel arrangements for out-of-town speakers.
- Have participants sign media release forms.

One week out:

- Registration closes.
- Send reminder to participants.
- Assemble materials for attendee packets; collate the list of participants and include it in the packets.
- Send a media advisory to local reporters.
- Have speakers send any audiovisual materials for testing.

One day out:

- Give a tour of the facilities for planning committee members and others helping on meeting day.
- Set up the venue space(s) and test the audiovisual equipment.
- Send email reminders to local media contacts.

IV. Planning a Forum

Several basic decisions need to be made simultaneously. The committee should select a general target date for the forum, outline the program, identify key speakers, and select some possible venues. Consider the budget for travel expenses and honoraria. Members of the planning committee should tackle these issues in coordination with each other.

Selecting a Date and Venue

Coordinating the date, speakers and venue is foundational to effective planning. When picking a date, consider potential scheduling conflicts. Find out the schedules for other conferences and meetings, holidays or seasonal celebrations that may occupy your audience and avoid those dates. This takes some work, especially in the case of emergency responders. Also, keep in mind that preparedness campaigns (e.g., your state's emergency preparedness month) are usually a busy time for emergency responders.

Forum Facts

.....

Savannah's Forum, held in 2009, proved to be an inspiration to a member of the state EMS/fire department, who noted that "preservation of the archives is a must; we can no longer look at the archives as only a piece of paper of no value. The history and the information these documents provide are essential for society to function."

.....

When selecting a venue, a central, accessible, and iconic setting is ideal. For example, past forums have been held at:

- Denver Public Library, Denver
- Jepson Center for the Arts, Savannah
- Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, Biloxi
- Sunflower Foundation, Topeka
- S'edav Va'aki Museum, Phoenix

Cultural organizations may be in a position to donate meeting and dining spaces, free admission, free parking, or tours of collections storage. Potential venues could include cultural organizations impacted by a disaster. Consider also offering remote location hub options like libraries, so people can join the forum at distance. For any location, ensure there is internet access or provide a hot spot.

Consider how events will flow when you choose the venue; be sure to consider accessibility issues. Some forums used one room all day for presentations, lunch, and general discussions. Others reserved additional rooms for lunch and break-out sessions. You will also need registration space and a display area for materials from participants and sponsors. Pick the setting that best suits your forum's unique needs.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Are the space(s) for the presentations, break-out sessions, and lunch/snack breaks adequate for the number of people you anticipate at the forum?
- Will the organization donate the space or will a fee be charged?
- Is the location easily accessible, either by car or public transportation?
- Is parking free or can vouchers be negotiated?
- Could the venue provide child care?
- Will the organization donate security and other needed staff?
- Will the venue also serve as an added attraction for people to attend?
- Does the organization have strict requirements for catering (e.g., allowing only certain vendors or only allowing food in certain areas)?

Structuring the Program

There are two elements of the forum program that your planning committee will need to consider: the content and the structure.

Content. The content should address the forum goals (see p. 9) and provide a learning experience for representatives of both the cultural heritage and emergency response communities. The intention of the panels, presentations, and break-out groups is to help participants understand one another better.

There are several basic topics that Alliance for Response forums have found useful to cover:

- how cultural heritage contributes to the community
- what hazards particular to the community or region put cultural heritage at risk
- how local and state emergency protocols work
- how to integrate cultural heritage into local planning efforts
- how to build and sustain a successful network

Design break-out sessions with follow-up activities in mind. Specific topics can help you identify and refine future efforts. Sample issues include promoting cooperative efforts in disaster planning, identifying local resources, developing strategies for working with emergency managers, building a local network, or addressing training needs. (See the Resources section for break-out session worksheets.)

Structure. Your mission is to fully engage the forum audience and encourage them to learn about each other's contribution to the community. The structure of the program can be as helpful in this regard as the topics you select and the quality of the presentations. Avoid too lengthy a program and build in many opportunities to network.

The typical forum begins with a welcome from the host organization and local planning committee and a keynote address.

It is also a good idea to allow participants to

briefly introduce themselves. It requires less time than you'd think and encourages networking. Panel presentations usually follow. Some of the most successful panels have featured a mix of local, state, and regional emergency responders; offered case studies of emergencies at local organizations; or provided an overview of local resources and networks.

A facilitated discussion of a disaster scenario is a good way to illustrate how communication between cultural organization staff and emergency responders can affect the outcome of an emergency. Recruit an experienced facilitator and use a mixed panel of both emergency responders and cultural heritage staff to highlight their respective roles and responsibilities.

Use lunch and breaks to enhance networking. Ideally, attendees will be assigned to tables to ensure diversity among lunch companions. Your goal is to facilitate a dialogue about the morning's content that can fuel ideas and enthusiasm for a more permanent alliance.

Although you may have one presentation after lunch, most of the afternoon should be devoted to break-out sessions. Reconvene participants at the end of the day to hear reports from the break-out groups and make plans for following up. (See Resources section for sample forum agendas.)

Selecting Speakers

The forum panel should include a session moderator and speakers from a diverse range of organizations and emergency personnel.

Forum Facts

Following the Minneapolis/St. Paul Forum, a state emergency manager proclaimed that "we are here as a resource and encourage cultural institution representatives to reach out to local contacts and tap into available training/exercise resources to strengthen/build contacts and capabilities."

Draw on committee members' experiences at national meetings as well as their knowledge of local experts to get the right speakers for this program. Committee members themselves might be the best possible choice. Speaker topics could include case studies of specific incident response examples (i.e. a water incident that impacted collections storage).

Be sure to secure emergency managers and first responders as speakers, along with representatives from the cultural community. The audience has much to learn from both fields.

Cultural community speakers could include an archivist, collection manager, conservator, librarian, THPO, cultural landscape knowledge-keeper, SHPO, or state archaeologist.

Other speakers may include government officials qualified to talk about the local and regional disaster relief process (such as state

emergency management, FEMA regional officials, university emergency management, Tribal emergency manager, or someone from the area who has experienced prior emergency recovery).

Representatives from insurance companies and disaster recovery firms who have worked on cultural projects may also make good speakers. Additionally, forums have featured presentations by meteorologists from the National Weather Service, a water and sewer commissioner, and an earthquake specialist.

When a speaker has been recruited, send a confirmation letter. A session schedule and an outline of talking points are very helpful. A pre-forum gathering or phone call will guarantee strong presentations. (See the Resources section for a template of the confirmation letter and talking points.)

Defining the Audience

A key element of the forum to discuss at the first meeting of the planning committee is the intended audience. The audience will help achieve your forum's goals, so its composition is crucial to success. The mix of participant roles is very important. You need facilities, security, and collections staff to implement plans and forge ties with emergency responders. Organizational leaders who can approve new disaster planning efforts and meet with local officials have a key role to play, too.

A diverse planning committee should be able to identify key people to invite from the following:

- the cultural heritage community
- emergency responders
- representatives from local and Tribal governments
- representatives from local businesses (insurance agents, representatives from recovery firms and suppliers, art and building appraisers)
- sponsors (local foundation or business representatives)

Depending on your community, consider the balance of cultural and non-cultural organizations represented. It is advisable to overestimate the number of attendees; plan to invite at least two times the number of potential participants. The invitee list and actual attendance will be determined by the needs of the community/communities.

While creating the invitation list, pay special attention to ensuring a diverse representation of organizations. Possible venues to help reach a wider audience could include a community center or other cultural organization in a city, town, or rural area. Strike a balance between targeted invitations and open participation to ensure a diverse attendance while remaining inclusive to all interested parties.

Forum Facts

.....

One of the Key Speakers at the Vermont Forum was Barbara Farr, Director of Vermont Emergency Management. Director Farr later extended an invitation for participants to take part in VEM's second annual Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference.

.....

Encourage a team from each organization to attend, such as a curator and a facilities manager or security chief. Note in the invitations that if the invitee is unable to attend, someone else from the organization is welcome.

Past forum planners have noted that one of the biggest challenges is identifying and attracting emergency responders, because they are busy with many other priorities. One way to identify likely participants is to ask your cultural heritage invitees to recommend emergency managers or first responders they know. If the Planning Committee members do not know any emergency contacts, the state emergency management website can be consulted for a list of names. Invite many first responders—several are likely to drop out at the last minute to respond to emergencies.

The primary responsibility of first responders is protecting human safety. First responders are also members of the community and care about its heritage and economic well-being.

Issuing Invitations

Once the invitation list has been finalized, consider sending a save-the-date postcard and email, followed by the invitation containing more details. A follow-up email containing logistical information is also a good idea. (You can find templates for these in the Resources section). Many of the people you are inviting have busy schedules; plan on sending the save-the-date information at least two months in advance of the forum date. Be sure to also send a reminder one to two weeks before the forum.

The invitation will also include information about Alliance for Response. A PDF version of a flyer, as well as the Alliance for Response logo in electronic format, are available in the Resources section.

Consider dividing the invitee list among planning committee members, who place phone calls and send personalized e-mails to key invitees. Many times, the only motivation a person needs to attend the forum is more information about what is going to be accomplished. For example what session topics and panels will be included; who the speakers will be; and the variety of case studies of emergency response efforts to be presented. Interactive sessions are recommended.

Tip

Consult your organization to see if the forum can count as a continuing education credit for emergency responders or other professionals as an added incentive.



Managing Registration

A volunteer or group of volunteers is necessary to staff the advance registration process. Decide how it will be handled—online, by mail, or by phone.

In addition to name, title, and contact information, collect any special meal or accessibility requirements. Keeping track of responses in a spreadsheet or database makes the data more accessible and portable.

Review registrations periodically to ensure the correct mix of attendees. If one target audience is unresponsive, you may want to follow up with e-mails or phone calls.

Set up a staffed registration table at the forum. When participants arrive, they should check in and receive a name badge and program packet. The packet should contain the agenda, lists of all participants and sponsors, brief biographies of the speakers, speaker presentation handouts, discussion questions for the break-out session they are assigned to, and an evaluation form. Make sure to share media permission/release forms (see Resources section for a template). Explain the purpose, provide an opt-out provision, and collect signed forms.

Tips for a Successful Meeting

- Assemble extra meeting packets to have on hand
- Plan for all audio-visual equipment needs and make sure someone is on hand who can help if problems arise. If speakers are using visual presentations (such as PowerPoint), get them in advance so you can test them. Load presentations onto one computer to be used all day
- Assign someone to keep track of the time to signal speakers when their allotted period is ending. Small signs with large, easily readable numbers indicating 10, 5, and 1 (minutes left) will help speakers manage their time
- Include evaluation forms (see Resources section) in the packets. The information gathered will help you tailor future meetings. Collect as many evaluations as possible – ask for them as one of the final activities of the day. Be sure to ask whether attendees want to participate in follow-up activities
- Decide ahead of time how you want to keep in contact with the attendees after the forum and make sure you get the appropriate information. Don't rely on them to provide business cards or send e-mails; get the information during the forum

Alerting the Media

Depending on the goals of your forum the press may or may not be contacted. Although the forum is invitation-only, publicity can attract broader participation in your follow-up activities. An article in the paper or a piece on a local radio station can help spread the word and might even attract some funding for future efforts. However, consider if any presentations contain sensitive information and make sure speakers are comfortable with a media presence. (For more information, see the media advisory in the Resources section).

Assign someone with media experience as the forum spokesperson and supply them with talking points for interviews. After the forum, send out a press release (see Resources section). Post your press release online for anyone who might be searching for information about your forum.

Conducting an Evaluation

An evaluation form can help you discover more about forum participants and to plan follow-up activities effectively. It can be constructive to solicit feedback (either written or oral) on the forum itself: inquiring what invitees had hoped to gain; whether expectations were met; and what aspects worked well/need attention. The evaluation form is also a tool for future planning. Design it to elicit information about the interests of participants, the needs of their organizations, and their commitment to future cooperative efforts.

The form gives attendees the opportunity to sign on to a new partnership in their community. You will find a good evaluation example in the Resources section.

The evaluation form should be included in the meeting packet attendees receive at registration. Encourage them to complete the form. Emphasize its value several times during the day and station volunteers at exits to collect the forms as participants leave the meeting.

Forum Facts

.....

At the Denver Forum, a panel of local emergency response professionals was a big hit. Participants remarked on the evaluation that “learning about first responders’ priorities and expectations,” was part of the program of most interest to them.

.....



20/20 Hindsight

We asked people involved in planning Forums what they would do differently next time based on their experiences. Here are some of their replies:

- Coach speakers and have more contact with them before the forum
- Network more with cultural institutions to identify people in the emergency response community. Include emergency responders and representatives of insurance companies and other for-profit companies with art collections, such as banks, on the planning committee
- Ask the state emergency management association to encourage their members to attend
- Publicize earlier and better, explaining the benefits of attending in ways that appeal to each of the target participant groups
- Recruit media representatives to cover the forum

V. Follow-up Activities

By the end of the forum, aim to come away with a strategy for the future. Following up with the audience and planning next steps are vital to accomplishing the forum goals. An Alliance for Response forum is the first phase in a process, not an isolated event.

As quickly as possible, send thank-you letters to speakers, planning committee members, sponsors, the host organization, and anyone else who contributed to the success of your forum. (See Resources section for templates.)

Promptly send a summary of the meeting and next steps to attendees. Be sure to thank them for coming and making your forum a success.

Make some follow-up calls to the media contacts to whom you sent press releases. Publicity may attract new participants vital to your goals— perhaps even leading to funding support.

Several days after the forum, your planning committee should de-brief. What went well? What didn't? What would you do differently next time? Review the program evaluations and decide what they mean for future activities.

Send a summary of your forum information to FAIC so we can share your experiences with others planning forums around the country.

Make arrangements to continue the dialogue begun at the forum. It is important to agree on realistic goals for follow-up efforts. Don't be

overly ambitious; select strategies and projects that are achievable. As with forum planning, spread responsibilities among committee members. Start with a meeting or conference call for those who indicated interest on their evaluation forms. Invite local organizations that weren't able to participate in the forum.

Examples of follow-up activities include:

- adapting Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) for cultural organizations and historic sites
- incorporating cultural organizations in a city-wide emergency access communications system
- developing a local disaster supply cache
- building an online database of local disaster prevention, response, and recovery resources and vendors
- designing a mutual aid agreement for neighboring cultural heritage organizations
- creating a mentoring plan to help smaller organizations prepare for disasters

Forum Facts

Following the New York Capital Region Forum, the group held a three-part workshop series titled “Building Your Institution’s Disaster Preparedness Plan.” Participants completed a disaster plan, shared a risk assessment with their county emergency manager, and learned the Incident Command System.

- sponsoring a series of tabletop training exercises adapted to the needs of museums and libraries
- on an on-going basis, ensuring the contact list of organizations in the region is inclusive and comprehensive
- using the Conversation Guide (see Resources section) to engage stakeholder communities



VI. Conclusion

Convening an Alliance for Response forum is an important step in improving emergency preparedness in your organization. Bringing members of the cultural heritage and emergency response communities together is one of the best ways to make sure your community's cultural heritage is as safe as possible in any situation.

Your first task is to assemble a group of people who are enthusiastic and committed to the goals behind Alliance for Response. From there, it becomes a collaborative effort—a model for the kind of partnerships you will build between the cultural and emergency response communities.

Remember, the forum is only the beginning. Building networks is the ultimate goal of the national Alliance for Response initiative. Communities around the country have continued to build on the relationships formed at their forums by programming subsequent collaborative activities.

FAIC welcomes you to this vital national initiative.

VII. Resources

The following resources will help plan Alliance for Response forums, work with emergency responders, identify allies in your community, and help sustain local disaster networks.

General

- AFR flyer
- Outreach & Welcoming Events Tip Sheets
- Conversation Guide for Communities & Responders

Logos

- AFR Logo

Sample Documents

The following are templates, based on documents used by various planning committees for previous forums, available at www.culturalheritage.org/afr-forum.

Please remember to credit FAIC on your program materials as follows: "Alliance for Response is a national initiative of the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation. For more information, visit www.culturalheritage.org/afr

Sponsors

- Solicitation Letter
- Confirmation Letter
- Thank You Letter

Planning Committee

- Pre-Forum Checklist
- Committee Roster
- Meeting Agenda
- Planning Outline

Program

- Agendas
- Breakout Session Materials (see Program Packet Materials below)

Speakers

- Invitation letter
- Confirmation Letter
- Talking Points
- Thank You Letters

Invitation

- Save the Date Postcard
- E-mail Invitation

Program Packet Materials

- Breakout Session Ideas & Worksheet
- Acronym List
- Evaluation Form
- Sponsor Acknowledgement

Media

- Media Advisory
- Press Release
- Media Permission/Release Form