

Tragedy Response Checklist

The following is a brief checklist of actions and questions to undertake in the event your organization and/or community experiences and is called upon to respond to a tragedy. Remember, each event and community is different, as are the needs and capacity of each organization. Every item on this checklist might not be relevant to your organization or situation, or you may need to add actions and questions to this list.¹

Before a Tragedy Occurs:

While no community or organization wants to experience a tragedy, the most important action you can take is to prepare in case the worst does happen and you and your organization are called upon to respond. It is strongly suggested that you pursue organizational/administrative support during the planning process. The following are some considerations and preparations you can undertake in advance to ensure you are well positioned to respond quickly, effectively, and sensitively.

- Consider how your community and/or organization might respond to a tragedy. These considerations and discussions should address practical, logistical, and ethical aspects concerns, including but not limited to:
 - Is developing a collection a feasible, appropriate, and sustainable response for your institution and community? Consider the mission of your organization, the desired impact and use of a potential collection, as well as how a collection might be used and by whom.
 - Does your organization possess the physical and/or digital space, personnel, financial, and other resources necessary to acquire, preserve, and provide access to a collection dedicated to a specific tragedy? If not, but collection development is desired, are there peer institutions or other partners and resources within your community who could assist with these efforts?
 - If a collection is created, will it be temporary or permanent? Consider the enduring historical value for future generations of a potential collection and the types of materials that might be selected for inclusion in that collection.
 - If developing a collection is not possible or preferred, are there are other ways in which you and/or your organization might offer support in the aftermath of a tragedy? What types of programming or resources can you offer? Consider both the immediate aftermath as well as the long-term role of your organization in the community's process of grief and remembrance.²
- If you make the decision to respond to a tragedy by creating a dedicated collection, the following are selected suggestions about how you might prepare your organization and community to pursue that response strategy.

¹ Response Checklist partially adapted from "Essential Questions for Managers of Condolence Archives" created by Ashley Maynor, Accessed 2019-07-09.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/w2ps4u45uublvat/SAA-Maynor-Handout-1.pdf?dl=0>

² Maynor, Ashley. "Five ways we can do better to respond to crises in our communities," Accessed 2019-07-09.

<https://ncph.org/history-at-work/five-ways-we-can-do-better-crises-in-our-communities/>



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- o Consider preparing drafts of/reviewing any documentation you might need. Creation of unique documentation for tragedy-based collections may not be necessary or relevant to your institution or event. Possible documentation might include, but is not limited to the following:
 - Collecting Policy
 - Deed of Gift and addenda
 - Memorandum of Understanding (between your organization and other organizations that might be involved in response efforts)
 - Volunteer Agreement and Guidelines
 - Guidelines for Social Media Capture
 - Web Archiving Agreement
 - Digital Submission Terms
- o Identify partners within your organization and community to support immediate response efforts. This could be ad hoc or through the formalization of an internal emergency response team. These might include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Peer institutions
 - Storage solutions (both temporary and long-term)
 - Public and internal communication networks and personnel
 - IT personnel and resources (e.g. server space, web archiving services, social media capture, etc.)
 - Established volunteer and emergency response networks (e.g. Red Cross, Rotary, service organizations, campus security, local law enforcement and emergency response, etc.)
- o Identify peer institutions who have dealt with responding to and archiving tragedies in their own communities/organizations.
- o Identify resources through your professional organizations and networks that may be able to provide information on best practices or resources for immediate response (e.g. disaster recovery networks, regional consortia teams, etc.)
- o Identify appropriate psychological and emotional support providers for your staff and any volunteers that may assist with immediate response and long-term management of tragedy-related collections (e.g. campus and local counseling services and groups, HR support services, etc.)

Immediately following a tragedy:

- Identify stakeholders in the community and your organization (e.g. victim and family groups, peer institutions, emergency responders, etc.).
- In consultation with stakeholders, update any existing draft documentation as necessary to ensure it is relevant to the tragedy that has occurred. If no existing draft documentation has been created, determine what types of documentation might be needed.
- Contact the partners you identified during your preparation period to activate any arrangements or agreements that may have been established (e.g. temporary storage,



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communication plan, digital harvesting, volunteer networks, trauma support, emergency responders, etc.).

- If the decision has been made to collect materials, identify the location(s) of any spontaneous or temporary memorial(s). In consultation with stakeholders, assess the ability to designate locations for materials to be deposited if no public memorial sites have developed organically.
- Identify where materials will be moved to, any necessary quarantine or initial remediation services, and who will be responsible for these actions.
- In consultation with stakeholders, establish a plan for the periodic removal of temporary memorial materials as relevant. Any removals should commence after an appropriate interval of public engagement that takes into account the location of the memorial site and factors such as inclement weather forecasts.
- Determine who will be responsible for removing materials, if relevant. Consider partnering with a neutral and recognized community organization such as the Red Cross if a volunteer network of archival volunteers cannot be assembled. Communicate your plan for removal, storage (both short-term and long-term), and any additional needs through notices at memorial site(s), through social and traditional media, and any other relevant and/or established outlets.
- Connect staff and volunteers to psychological and emotional support providers.

After the Immediate Response Period:

- In consultation with stakeholders, determine appraisal guidelines for determining which materials will be retained and for how long.
- Determine who “owns” the materials and who will be responsible for organizing and maintaining any materials that may have been collected. If your organization will be the final repository for the materials/collection:
 - Identify long-term storage for those materials that will be permanently retained, whether digitally (e.g. server space) or physically.
 - Identify any additional staffing and budgetary needs for arranging, describing, and managing digital and physical collections.
- Maintain contact with psychological and emotional support providers for staff and volunteers.

Long-term Preservation, Access, Development, and Management:

- In consultation with stakeholders, determine access procedures and restrictions.
- Determine whether controversial or objectionable materials will be retained. Consider the ways in which the collection might be used by future generations.
- Determine the timeline and feasibility for committing to a permanent archive or memorial. Consider the resources of your organization as well as the wishes of stakeholders.
- Consider whether and how the collection will grow and be used (e.g. oral histories, anniversary material drives, additional collecting areas, changing stakeholders, etc.).



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- Plan future and ongoing opportunities to engage with community stakeholders and participate in the ongoing legacy and memorialization of the tragedy.
- Continue to communicate actions and plans surrounding the collection.



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