

Chapter 5

The LOUIS Consortium and Catastrophe

Megan Lowe

*University of Louisiana – Monroe,
USA*

Lindsey M. Reno

University of New Orleans, USA

Michael Matthews

Northwestern State University, USA

Michael A. Sartori

McNeese State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Using interviews, pictures, and LOUIS-related documentation, the chapter will describe the experiences of LOUIS and LOUIS member institutions affected by the hurricanes in the context of how the consortium helped its member institutions cope, recover, and better prepare with regard to disasters. It will detail the challenges the consortium faced as a whole and the lessons learned from those experiences with a focus on its ILS, ILL, and shared library facilities. Finally, the chapter will also describe the changes the consortium made as a result of those experiences and lessons and how LOUIS plans to continue supporting its members and serving the state in the future and how it would handle future hurricanes and similar disasters.

INTRODUCTION

When discussing the notion of catastrophes with regards to libraries, particularly for libraries in Louisiana, there are two types that may apply: literal and metaphorical. In the library literature dramatic budget cuts are often characterized as disasters, and this is quite accurate. As publishers increase prices on both individual titles and

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database collections, it becomes more and more difficult to maintain existing digital collections and resources, not to mention acquire new ones. Of course, scholarly, open access publications and other non-traditional publishing models have attempted to fill the gap, but to some degree open access has still not quite hit its stride, and many disciplines have yet to adequately recognize or support such publications (Lowe, 2012). Such disciplines still return to traditional publications and forms of publishing, requiring libraries to purchase extremely expensive resources, albeit useful and often accreditation-required. This does not take into consideration the ways in which state governments often try to cover deficits in state budgets by taking funds back from colleges and universities after the state has allocated those funds. And more often than not, when universities have to cover their deficits, libraries feel the knife. Nevertheless, while budget cuts make it difficult to provide access to resources, such disasters remain metaphorical. In Louisiana, libraries have faced both literal and metaphorical disasters which have brought low institutions of higher learning, their libraries, and the consortium that supports most of those institutions in the state, LOUIS: The Louisiana Library Network (but more on that shortly).

Academic libraries in Louisiana over the last decade have endured many challenges, but throughout it all one thing remained constant: partnerships, with the most important one being LOUIS. Even as LOUIS itself was affected - its home office is located at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge - it was still there for the libraries in the state. Throughout several hurricanes, LOUIS and its member institutions were able to provide support and assist one another and make use of the hard lessons the hurricanes taught them. When the Board of Regents (BOR) rescinded funding, LOUIS did not give up; it marshaled its forces - its own staff and its member libraries and their constituents - to take up the campaign to recover that funding. The BOR (n.d.), which oversees the three university systems, “coordinates the efforts of the state’s 34 public colleges, universities and professional schools” and, as such, handles funding and allocations for the state’s higher education institutions. Through the efforts of consortium members and the students and faculties of their universities, funding was restored, though at a fraction of the original amount. But it forced LOUIS and its member libraries to not take LOUIS for granted, and to be more proactive in marketing, advertising, and in general getting the good word about LOUIS out to its stakeholders.

This chapter will describe in detail the challenges LOUIS has faced in the form of disasters, both literal and metaphorical. These challenges will be presented in the words and pictures of people who were there: the LOUIS staff, libraries, and their stakeholders. It will outline the lessons LOUIS and the libraries learned after every experience, how those lessons were applied to improve services, and how they have shaped LOUIS. This chapter will conclude with a description of where LOUIS is as of the writing of this chapter, with a look toward the future of LOUIS

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