

Chapter 77

Disaster Management and Exhibition Loans: Contingency Planning for Items on Display

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ABSTRACT

Materials on loan to libraries and other cultural heritage institutions are very often historically significant, highly valuable, and frequently irreplaceable, yet traditional disaster management planning literature does not address the additional needs that items loaned for exhibitions present. In the event of an unforeseen incident, this omission leaves loan participants vulnerable to risk and exposed to potential loss. Disaster preparedness and response policies that address risks presented by exhibition loans, and that detail procedures for these materials, can help libraries minimize the potential loss of often prized and high profile borrowed materials in the event of an emergency. The chapter provides information and guidelines on how to address the needs of loaned materials into institutional contingency planning.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries, particularly those with rare book, manuscript, and archival holdings, display materials in exhibitions to showcase significant materials and to highlight valuable research resources. Exhibitions draw upon library collections to illustrate the importance of cultural heritage materials and to illustrate the power these items have to facilitate scholarly inquiries that emerge through research across broad holdings. Yet, no matter how extensive the collections, exhibitions regularly prompt libraries to borrow materials from other organizations, or to participate in loan arrangements for exhibitions at other libraries or museums, to complete or enhance exhibition narratives. Exhibitions offer libraries and lenders an opportunity to further institutional missions. Through loans, together each promotes their collection while supporting scholarship and appreciation of cultural heritage holdings with a wider audience.

Libraries face increasingly tighter financial constraints, which impact and limit the scale of exhibition programs. Unlike museums with dedicated registrar staff, participating in loans adds responsibilities to

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the workloads of library staff and presents extra expenses for fine art packing, transportation, and insurance. Loan costs can be considerable expenditures that administrators scrutinize and often challenge. In response to budget constraints, exhibition curators tend to limit item selections to exemplary materials that they cannot substitute or omit from the overall exhibition project.

While protecting collection holdings is always important, it is of paramount significance to protect displayed materials, especially those on loan, because of the potential public relations implications losses would have during the run of an exhibition. Moreover, in the context of a formal exhibition loan, protecting materials is legally compulsory, and failing to protect materials has lawful ramifications and additional media repercussions.

While disaster management is not a panacea, thorough contingency planning helps libraries and other cultural heritage institutions care for materials, including those borrowed for exhibition loans. This chapter gives librarians, archivists, private collectors, and students information and guidance on how to address the needs of materials loaned for exhibition display into disaster management policy work. This chapter outlines proactive ways to incorporate contingency planning principles into the management of exhibition loans. The chapter provides guidance on how to fully review and assess loan requests, specify insurance coverage, document physical conditions, properly register loan documents, and respond to emergencies involving loaned materials. In addition to a detailed discussion on how to incorporate disaster planning practices into the loan process, the chapter includes templates for condition and incident reports, guidance on developing internal loan review procedures and loan policies, and disaster response checklists for lenders and borrowers.

BACKGROUND

From a legal perspective, formal written agreements obligate institutions borrowing materials to care for materials on loan, including care initiated in contingency responses, yet the body of professional library literature does not directly provide comprehensive assistance on how best to administer exhibition loans with disaster planning protocols in mind. Frequently, library staff administer loans as an additional task assigned to a person involved in exhibition planning, preservation, or departmental administration. Librarians managing exhibition loans can benefit from the professional standards and best practices developed by museum registrars and collection managers who manage loans as their primary professional pursuit.

Furthermore, libraries insure materials on loans differently from their main holdings, and loan materials may present legal indemnity issues. The body of professional library literature does not directly enumerate these matters, yet librarians managing exhibition loans must understand these concerns and know how to address them.

Overall, there is scant information in the professional literature that addresses the unique considerations exhibition loan material presents in disaster management. Although materials loaned for exhibition commonly include valuable and often irreplaceable materials, the topic of how to address and incorporate the needs of these materials into contingency planning largely goes overlooked. However, one can obliquely synthesize information about legal considerations, insurance, indemnity, and loan registration best practices from museum and legal textbooks such as *MRM5: Museum Registration Methods* (Buck, Gilmore, & American Association of Museums, 2010), *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections* (Malaro & DeAngelis, 2012), and *Art Loans* (Palmer & Bently, 1997). Proven sources such as these from other

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