

# Chapter 11

## Zen and the Art of Disaster Planning: Collaboration Challenges in Library Disaster Plan Design and Execution

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter outlines the process through which an original disaster preparedness and recovery plan document was created at a mid-sized academic library with no dedicated preservation staff. A particular emphasis is placed on collaboration and advocacy with the library's parent institution in the formulation of the disaster plan, including the many challenges that arise when institutional communication is flawed and support for the library's goals is lacking. This chapter utilizes concepts adapted from Zen Buddhism to illustratively describe the ways in which the numerous pitfalls and challenges faced through the disaster-planning process were overcome. Taking lessons learned from one library's experience, recommendations are offered for garnering support and successfully completing a disaster plan document amid various pitfalls and constraints. This chapter is aimed at an audience of library professionals and cultural collections stakeholders in need of disaster preparedness documentation but who do not possess the requisite expertise and experience in writing such policies.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2012, Colorado was wracked with devastating fires; in 2013, floods ravaged much of the state's Front Range and affected a number of libraries and institutions. Regis University, a mid-sized private university in Denver, Colorado, was not directly affected by these natural disasters, but the proximity to these events was a clear indication of the necessity for a disaster preparedness and mitigation plan for the university's library. In conjunction with these events, the Regis University Library's Assessment Task Force called upon its faculty to create disaster preparedness documentation as part of its efforts to align the library's services and policies with the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (2011).

In early 2014, a Disaster Planning Committee (DPC) was formed among library faculty and staff at the Regis University Library with the aim of designing an effective and comprehensive disaster preparedness and recovery plan for the library's collections. The DPC found that as more effort was put into creating a disaster plan, more issues came to light regarding lack of communication and miscommunication between university departments. In general, there seemed to be insufficient awareness at the administrative level of the value of the library collections and their unique needs in the event of a disaster. Prior to the committee reaching out to central administration, the library and its collections were not given any specific consideration in Regis University's Emergency Operations Plan. It was clear that upper-level management had very little understanding of the value held within the library. To that end, one of this chapter's primary purposes is to explain and provide recommendations on how to raise awareness of the library and its collections, as well as centralizing communication and information regarding disaster planning among multiple university departments to avoid such oversight.

Using recent experiences at Regis University as a guide, the authors of this chapter aim to supply readers with a full range of considerations that arise when a library disaster plan is created: from drafting an outline and acquiring appropriate supplies to educating library and the university's personnel at large on the execution of the plan. By imparting first-hand experiences and lessons learned along the path to creating an original library disaster plan at one institution, the authors hope that more library professionals will be armed with the knowledge and tools required to successfully manage, or even prevent, disasters.

Library professionals must assume responsibility for the fate of their institutions' collections in the event of a disaster, both in advocating for the unique needs of the library and its collections and in raising awareness of these collections' importance to the governing institution. This endeavor includes numerous and ongoing tasks, but if a sincere effort is put forth in the plan-writing stages, maintenance of the disaster plan and support from key departments will be more easily negotiated and accomplished.

This chapter presents the steps taken in the creation of a library disaster plan at Regis University. It will guide readers through the processes required to compose and implement original disaster management and contingency policies. Of primary concern is the provision of an overview of the collaboration required among numerous university departments to effectively create and execute a disaster plan. The purpose of this chapter is to inform library professionals new to disaster planning about some of the uncommon challenges that should be considered at the initial design level, especially when reaching out to other university departments for information and involvement.

A word on the employment of "Zen" in this chapter: although its title recalls the philosophical narrative *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, this chapter does not aim to present Zen Buddhism as central to its mission or thematic purpose. Zen philosophy is merely utilized as an approach to overcoming the challenges of a large project with a positive and "Zen-like" attitude. Principles such as mindfulness,

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