

Museums & Galleries NSW

What is a disaster preparedness plan?

A Disaster Preparedness Plan is essentially an outline for people to follow in the event of a disaster. You will never be able to think of every possible calamitous event which might befall your organisation but if you have a well prepared plan, you will have a guide in place that will avert turning emergency into catastrophe.

With this in mind, try to keep your plan as simple and succinct as possible. There may be a lot of background research required and you may have detailed backup files but the main plan should be slim, clear and concise. Nobody wants to rifle through volumes of instructions to find the plumber's phone number when there's a burst pipe pouring water into the main exhibition space.

The basic steps in writing a disaster preparedness plan are as follows:

1. **Assess all risks and threats**
In essence, look at the history of disasters which have occurred both in your organisation and the local community (remember to include smaller incidents of leaks and near disasters), think about the sort of risks which may occur in your area (floods, fires, earthquakes, industrial accidents, vandalism etc.), rate the likelihood and impact of each of these.
2. **Reduce or remove those risks**
One of the great immediate impacts of the first phase of Disaster Preparedness is the opportunity to identify the repairs and maintenance activities which need to be done around the building and provide further impetus to act upon them. These include repair of rooves, clearing of gutters and establishing a maintenance schedule.
3. **Prioritise the collection**
Look at this, both in terms of significance and vulnerability.
4. **Establish a disaster response team**
Keep in mind availability, suitability and proximity to the museum.
5. **Establish a support network**
Look at where you can establish relationships for broader community support, can the museums in the area band together to support each other?

Fact Sheet

6. Prepare a disaster response plan
This is your initial response, remember, HUMAN LIFE COMES FIRST
This needs to have clear, simple instructions that anybody in the organisation can act upon
7. Prepare a disaster recovery plan
This is where the medium to long term action takes place- air drying books, documenting the situation, dehumidifying the building, rebuilding etc.
8. Train all staff
This is an ongoing activity and needs to ensure that all new members of the organisation are informed about the plan as part of their induction
9. Review the plan
Your plan cannot remain static, it needs to be reviewed as circumstances change, whether this is a change of personnel, new or changing buildings, changes to the general environment as they occur. If you do experience a disaster, review the plan afterwards, to see where it could be improved