

## Group Activities Guide

### Navigating Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters

#### INTRODUCTION

Most libraries have made plans to secure and restore their facilities and collections in the event of disaster. Some plans include libraries as first information responders who help to restore some order and normalcy to their communities. This training intends to fill a specific gap in most disaster plans, which is how libraries can support the civil legal issues that community members encounter as a result of a natural disaster. These courses equip library staff to recognize the legal issues and be prepared to provide information and resources that guide patrons to positive outcomes.

#### Course 1 covers:

- Recognizing patrons' civil legal issues that result from a natural disaster and how libraries can support them.
- Planning to prepare the library and their patrons before disasters occur.
- Developing a collection of state and local disaster-related legal resources and legal aid, legal referrals.
- Getting involved in the network of community disaster responders.
- Meeting the immediate needs of disaster survivors.

#### Course 2 covers:

- Applying trauma-informed care to community members impacted by disaster.
- Understanding the three key sources of disaster assistance in a major natural disaster—FEMA, SBA, and insurance.
- Identifying key disaster-related legal issues when talking to patrons.

#### Course 3 covers:

- Recognizing long-term legal issues that persist months/years after a disaster.
- Understanding the library's role in supporting mitigation efforts.

#### Basics of Facilitating a Learning Group

If facilitating group learning is new to you, WebJunction has resources to provide you with the basic knowledge you'll need to organize and lead a group of learners through a self-paced course on any topic.

- An [Overview of Learning Group Facilitation](#) explains the value and power of learning groups to enhance self-paced learning, including a four-minute video introduction.
- The [Learning Group Facilitation Guide](#) [PDF, 21 pages] covers the basics of organizing, structuring, and leading a group. It also provides advice on how to maximize learning in a group, keep participants motivated and on track, foster the sharing of ideas and resources in an inclusive environment, and boost each other's confidence in applying the learning.

Read the following sections for some special considerations for this course series Navigating Civil Legal Issues of Natural Disasters.



## Foundational Civil Legal Reference Knowledge

This course series builds on the [Creating Pathways to Civil Legal Justice](#) (CPCLJ) series, which provides the foundational knowledge and skills for recognizing general civil legal issues and directing library users to relevant, helpful information and services. Therefore, if some group members are new to civil legal reference, you may want to allow time for them to work through all or part of the CPCLJ courses. Key content to focus on includes:

- For managing a civil legal resource collection, see [Course 2 – Civil Legal Issues and Resources](#).
- For connecting with partners and legal assistance, see [Course 3 – Partnering with Legal Service Providers](#).
- [Finding Local Legal Aid](#) [PDF, two pages] provides a basic list of places to look for local legal assistance.
- To learn about or refresh your understanding of the boundary between providing information and giving advice, watch and/or listen to the video [Legal Information vs. Legal Advice](#) [nine minutes].

Consider asking group members to fill out a short pre-survey to understand where they are starting from in their knowledge or experience with civil legal reference. Collecting this information a few weeks before the group's first convening will help you plan the learning schedule, scope the lessons, and adjust the activities.

## Group Approach to Disaster Response and Recovery Binder

Creating the disaster response and recovery (DRR) binder is a key outcome of Courses 1 and 2. The objective is to have essential disaster response information in hard copy format for easy access in case of a disaster-related power outage. Learners are instructed to assemble and print hard copies of crucial handouts as they progress through the first two courses in the series.

The learning group's approach to the DRR binder activities will vary according to who is in the group.

- Are your learners all from the same library? Then you can work together to create at least one DRR binder for the library. You may want to make copies of the completed binder to store in different locations in (or away from) the building.
- Are your learners all from the same library system? Each building or branch location will need to create its own DRR binder. You may work together to identify and assemble the content and to determine whether to print extra copies of certain forms.
- Are your learners all from different libraries? If so, then they will each need to assemble and print their own binder to have at their library.

## Course Notes

### *Using the Group Activities Guide*

The subject of this course series is particularly well suited to collaborative learning. Since civil law is complex and local, the course work includes understanding local community needs, creating a collection of local legal resources, and both finding and partnering with local legal service and information providers. The discussions and activities in this guide are intended to take advantage of the kind of



knowledge and experience-sharing that a group brings to a complex topic. The activities for all courses are suggestions. You are encouraged to customize the group learning experience in any way that is most appropriate for your group members. You may want to vary the activities according to whether the group is from the same library or branch, from a larger library system, or from across a state.

### *Structuring the Group's Learning*

The three courses in this series cover the scope of the Emergency Management Cycle, from preparation before disaster to long-term recovery afterwards. You'll want to determine how much of the material you want your group to cover in what period of time. Do you plan to have the learning group go through all three courses? Note the estimated times to complete each course and scan the contents to get an idea of the learning your group will be committing to.

Set expectations at the onset of the learning experience about what you want learners to have completed before the first group session. Will you ask that they go through the entire course before the group starts, or will you proceed one lesson at a time, asking them to do the self-paced lesson before they come to the group session? Identify and communicate any additional pre-work that you'd like learners to do before they join the group discussions and activities.

It is good practice to set goals for the learning group experience at the beginning. Ask about their individual goals for learning this topic. Jointly define the collective goals for learning this topic together. You can ask this ahead of or during the first group session.

### *Group Warm-Up*

When launching a learning experience that will unfold over time, it's good practice to spend some time getting to know more about each other and what learned or lived experience each person brings to the group. Consider holding a special get-acquainted session before learners dive into the course content. You could also schedule extra time in the first course-focused session to do icebreaker activities. For asynchronous group modes, create a get-acquainted discussion forum.

Ask your learners to share their experience level with disaster-related civil legal reference. You might ask them to rank their experience using a short survey, emojis, or nonverbal reactions.

For example:

- a thumbs-up if they have fielded more than five disaster-related reference questions, either in person or online (if facilitating online, use the thumbs-up reaction in their videoconferencing platform; or if asynchronous, create a poll to collect responses.);
- a thumbs-halfway if they've fielded one to five; and
- a thumbs-down for no experience.

From here, you could discuss the kinds of topics that come up in civil legal reference questions related to natural disasters and how your participants gained experience with these topics. If appropriate, make a list of topics and potential questions that the group thinks might be answered by these courses. You can compare their experiences with your initial predictions at the end of the course series.



## COURSE 1: DISASTER RESPONSE NETWORK

This course covers the basics of the Emergency Management Cycle and the civil legal issues that are likely to arise after natural disasters.

### Course 1 Content Outline

Estimated time for individual self-paced completion: four hours

#### Lesson 1. Introduction to Natural Disasters, Civil Legal Issues, and Library Roles

Video/transcript: *Why Preparation is Critical* – [7 minutes / 895 words]

Video/transcript: *The Emergency Management Cycle* – [10 minutes / 1147 words]

Print handout and add to DRR binder

#### Lesson 2. Building the Library Disaster Response Network

Video/transcript: *Meeting the Most Urgent Needs* – [7 minutes / 946 words]

Video/transcript: *Cultivating a Disaster Response Network* – [13 minutes / 1599 words]

Read: *Libraries at the Disaster Preparedness Table*

Print handouts and add to DRR binder

#### Lesson 3. Help Patrons Be Prepared for Natural Disasters

Video/transcript: *Help Patrons Be Prepared for Natural Disasters* – [11 minutes / 1786 words]

Print handouts and add to DRR binder

### Course 1 Activities

#### *Lesson 1. Introduction to Natural Disasters, Civil Legal Issues, and Library Roles*

Discuss disaster preparedness with the group.

- How well prepared do you each feel to help your library respond to a natural disaster situation? What do you need to feel better prepared?
- Does your library have a general disaster response (Continuity of Operations) plan?
  - i. Does the plan include anything about responding to patrons' civil legal needs related to natural disasters?
  - ii. Does the plan include technology preparedness information that would help the library restore operations in order to support patrons' information needs?
- If your library doesn't have a plan or the plan doesn't include civil legal issues for patrons, what are some steps you can take to develop this material for your library?

#### *Lesson 2. Building the Library Disaster Response Network*

Share experiences of disaster and how libraries responded.

Pre-work: Consider asking learners to query others at their library about any history of partnering or



interacting with any legal service providers, including local lawyers, legal aid providers, and law librarians as well as emergency management officials or disaster response organizations. Ask them to bring a list of current legal resources and partnerships to the Course 1 discussion group.

Consider inviting an agency representative to talk to your learning group about their services.

Discussion about building the network:

- Share successes and challenges of connecting with emergency management agencies and other community partners. Discuss strategies for connecting. Whose permission is needed to reach out? Are there existing relationships at any of the agencies? Which person at the agency might be best to contact first?
- Share information about local resources. At the state level, share statewide resources to bolster each other's reference collections.
- If learners are from the same library or system, share existing connections, brainstorm new connections, and make relevant action plans.
- What was each group member's experience in starting a Disaster Response and Recovery (DRR) binder? Were there challenges, such as getting buy-in, identifying local resources, or customizing the course resources?

### *Lesson 3. Help Patrons Be Prepared for Natural Disasters*

It is a persistent challenge to motivate people to prepare for disaster ahead of time.

Discussion:

- Ask each learner to share what motivates them to be prepared, as well as what gets in the way. Discuss applying this understanding of self-motivation to ideas for patron programming.
- Make a group commitment to take at least one preparedness action before the next group meeting, holding each other accountable. At the next meeting, reflect on how that worked and how they might apply the strategy to motivating patrons.



## COURSE 2: TRAUMA RESPONSE AND DISASTER ASSISTANCE

This course covers the Response and early Recovery phases of the Emergency Management Cycle and continues the development of the disaster response and recovery (DRR) binder begun in Course 1.

### Course 2 Content Outline

(Estimated time for individual self-paced completion: six hours)

#### Lesson 1. The Immediate Aftermath

Video/transcript: *Trauma-Informed Care in Natural Disasters* – [14 minutes / 1948 words]

Video/transcript: *People Just Need to Tell Their Story* – [7 minutes / 1037 words]

Video/transcript: *The Disaster Assistance Landscape* – [8 minutes / 1090 words]

Print the handouts and add to DRR binder

#### Lesson 2. FEMA Individual Assistance Programs

Video/transcript: *FEMA Individual Assistance Programs* – [18 minutes / 2894 words]

Video: *Five Common FEMA Mistakes to Avoid* – [5 minutes / no transcript]

Print handouts and add to DRR binder

#### Lesson 3. SBA Disaster Assistance Programs

Video/transcript: *SBA Disaster Assistance Programs* – [18 minutes / 2644 words]

Read: *New Data: Why 800,000 Applications Were Denied Federal Disaster Assistance Loans*

Print handouts and add to DRR binder

#### Lesson 4. Common Issues: Fraud, Scams, and Other Pitfalls

Video/transcript: *Common Issues: Fraud, Scams, and Other Pitfalls* – [13 minutes / 2030 words]

Print handouts and add to DRR binder

### Course 2 Activities

#### *Lesson 1. The Immediate Aftermath*

Note: This section may be difficult for your learners to discuss, perhaps because of personal experiences and/or lack of familiarity with the trauma-informed approach.

Trauma-informed care: The following steps suggest a discussion approach that allows participants to contribute anonymously:

- Watch the video *Trauma-Informed Care in Natural Disasters* [14 minutes] together (if time).
- Then break the learners up into groups and give each group some sticky notes on which they will write words that relate to the content on trauma-informed care in natural disasters. This anonymizes the responses and shares what the learners have internalized from the content.
- Gather the sticky notes, put them up in the room, and read them to the group. Encourage discussion about the responses.



- Consider repeating this activity to lead a discussion of ways that staff might take care of themselves, so they are better prepared to handle disaster-related reference questions from community members who have experienced trauma.
- If you are facilitating online, consider using a tool like Mural, Jamboard, or Padlet to gather responses from your group. Be sure to take care of any necessary setup and access procedures ahead of time.

At the end of her video, Dr. Patin poses six questions to ask of your institution and your role within it as part of a process to move to better trauma-informed care for your community. Select at least one question suitable for group discussion and potential action.

1. What are the characteristics of a trusting and transparent library organization?
2. How can we promote a sense of psychological safety among library workers?
3. How do certain language and labels undermine mutuality?
4. What delivery models empower patrons?
5. How can proper furniture arrangement help people suffering from PTSD feel safe?
6. How do we create safe zones for LGBTQIA+ children, teens and adults, and other community members experiencing marginalization?

### *Lessons 2 and 3. FEMA and SBA*

The amount of detailed information about federal disaster assistance programs (FEMA and SBA) in these two lessons may be completely new to learners and, therefore, possibly overwhelming. Encourage your group to dig deeper into the content where they'd like to know more and to explore their understanding of how to apply this information. As a group, discuss their reactions and their takeaways, using these questions from the Course 2 final activity.

- What new insights did you gain into how FEMA and the SBA aid disaster survivors?
- What was most helpful for you to be able to guide patrons in navigating their disaster assistance options?

### *Lesson 4. Common Issues: Fraud, Scams, and Other Pitfalls*

The issues identified in this lesson all have civil legal aspects and are the most likely questions that patrons will bring to the library. Use the **Check Your Disaster Reference Readiness** activity in the course as the basis for this activity. (Either provide online access or have copies of the **Issue-Spotting for Library Staff** handout.)

- First, discuss group members' comfort level with distinguishing between providing information versus advice. Ask for examples where there was uncertainty and share thoughts about how to respond.
- Have the group break into pairs. Ask each breakout group to pick one of the "prompts" and role play a reference interview. For the role play, one learner will be a disaster survivor and the other will be the library staff. After 5–10 minutes, ask them to pick another prompt and switch roles.
- Bring the group back together and discuss. How well prepared do they feel to handle these questions? Do they know where to turn to provide information? What was uncomfortable or challenging in the practice interview? What do you feel like you still need to know?



## COURSE 3: ONGOING ISSUES AND MITIGATION

This course captures the often-protracted phase of Recovery and delves into Mitigation.

### Course 3 Content Outline

Estimate time for individual self-paced completion: two hours

#### Lesson 1. Persistent Trauma

Video/transcript: *Trauma is Long Term* – [10 minutes / 1548 words]

Read: *Tips for Survivors of a Disaster or Other Traumatic Event*

#### Lesson 2. Long-term Civil Legal Issues

Video/transcript: *The Legal Long Tail of Disaster* – [8 minutes / 1329 words]

#### Lesson 3. Mitigation

Video/transcript: *Community Development Grants for Disaster Survivors* – [7 minutes / 894 words]

Video/transcript: *Challenges of the CDBG-DR Program* – [7 minutes / 993 words]

### Course 3 Activities

#### *Lesson 1. Persistent Trauma*

Discuss retraumatization with your group:

- Ask learners to break out into pairs and talk to each other about encounters they've had with people demonstrating retraumatization. How did they respond to them? How might they respond differently with any new insights gathered?
- Bring the group back together and ask them to share any new insights or "aha" moments from the course content or from this activity.

#### *Lesson 2. Long-term Civil Legal Issues*

With the knowledge of new legal issues (FEMA recoupment, disaster tax relief, bankruptcy), identify and make a plan for the following:

- How might you update your disaster-related resource collection and referral agencies list?
- What resources or programs could you provide to inform patrons about these issues? How might you provide these discretely to patrons?

If you feel it's appropriate, lead a discussion about the optional readings on the unequal impact of natural disasters on people's financial health.

#### *Lesson 3. Mitigation*

Discuss the group's understanding of mitigation for individuals:

- How is this related to and different from preparedness? What ideas do they have for resources or programs they could provide to educate and motivate patrons to take mitigation actions?





Discuss the Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program:

- What is unclear about the program and about connecting individuals with the opportunity? What is one thing you learned about CDBG-DR that you didn't know before? What is one thing you want to know more about and what steps will you take to find that information?
- How does knowing about some of the challenges of the CDBG-DR program help or complicate how you will communicate the opportunity to patrons?
- What is one action you can take to foster an ongoing relationship with your state or local emergency management network?

## FACILITATOR FINAL ACTIVITIES

You can help your learning group retain and reflect on what they've learned by intentionally planning some future activities that will remind participants about their experience. Here are some suggestions for how you can reconvene and reconnect with your learning group, but you are welcome to develop your own practices, too.

- In the final meeting, provide and collect postcards from participants on which they write a message to themselves with their top three priorities over the next three months to improve their civil legal reference ability. For example:
  - initiate a connection with an emergency management agency;
  - develop a patron preparedness (or mitigation) program; or
  - share the contents and value of the DRR binder with colleagues.

Set a reminder for yourself to mail the postcards to participants three months from now as an accountability check.

- As an asynchronous alternative, use the "delay send" feature in your email to send check-in emails to your Learning Group one month, three months, and six months from now. You could include a mix of discussion questions from the course series as well as general questions about how participants are using what they have learned.
- Schedule a meeting for a year after your group has finished this course series to discuss what you remember from the series and how you've applied what you've learned. When and how have you used your DRR binder in the past year? What, if anything, have you added to the binder and would you recommend those additions to your fellow learners?

