

Building Resiliency In the Arts Sector

A Prospectus for Organization and Operation for the Next Phase of the National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness and Emergency Response, 2014-2020



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January, 2014

An official entity to support the emerging field of arts emergency management is clearly needed and warranted, as this plan demonstrates. The existing National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness and Emergency Response is well-positioned to grow into that role.

Executive Summary

“...a strategy of resilience will involve more than changes to our physical infrastructure. Increasingly governments and disaster planners are recognizing the importance of social infrastructure: the people, places and institutions that foster cohesion and support.”

Eric Klinenberg, *“Adaptation: How can cities be ‘climate-proofed?’”*¹

Artists and arts organizations are integral to the health and welfare of communities in good times, but especially in times of difficulty. As individuals and groups who are rooted in place and committed to engagement, they have often played an active role in the healing process after disasters (whether due to localized events or megastorms), providing the social capital so important to the recovery and rebuilding of neighborhoods, towns and cities.

However, as the spate of 21st century disasters has also demonstrated, the arts and culture sector itself is highly vulnerable. Time and time again, creative careers and creative economies have suffered great loss and devastation, which has often included severe damage of unique cultural artifacts and venues. Simply put, the twin problems are that creative

communities are underprepared for emergencies, and underserved when disasters strike.

Since 2006, a small group of national arts leaders (experienced in managing arts relief efforts) has been working as an informal, cross-disciplinary task force to address solutions to this long-neglected, dual set of problems—and how, in turn, a more resilient arts sector could become a more active and recognized partner in helping local communities rebound from crises. The voluntary group, a mix of government agencies and non-profit service and funding organizations, has functioned under the name, **National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness and Emergency Response** (“the Coalition”). It has operated as a communications and advocacy group, and during several recent major disasters (including hurricanes Irene, Ike, and Sandy) has served as an ad hoc national leadership team to novice ‘arts responders’² in the affected locales. In addition, Coalition member organizations have produced and disseminated new information tools and piloted new training and technical assistance programs to serve the field.

Energized by the gains achieved, lessons learned and relationships forged over the last seven years, the Coalition is now poised to move beyond its pioneering phase and both build a stable, formal operational structure and expand its reach. This plan charts a seven-year course to improve emergency preparedness, coordinated relief efforts and effective recovery strategies and practices in the arts sector through the development of a national network of responders. It outlines an initial transition/incubation period (2014-2016) to complete internal capacity-building that will give the network the necessary ‘runway’ to successfully launch an ambitious action agenda in the second period (2017-20). By 2020, it projects significant and measurable changes in the organized disaster safety net that will diminish losses from major emergencies and accelerate the recovery process for artists, arts organizations, and arts businesses.

¹ Klinenberg is a Professor of Sociology and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge at New York University; his article appeared in the January 7, 2013 issue of The New Yorker, pp. 32-37.

² We'll use the term ‘arts responder’ to describe participants’ common roles as providers of various arts emergency management services, encompassing readiness, relief, and recovery

The plan has been informed by the recommendations of the Coalition Steering Committee and a five-month study process involving interviews with leaders of other collaborative initiatives (within and outside the arts sector) and veteran personnel from the emergency services field, plus input from arts responders at all levels. It also draws on documentation and research on innovative paradigms for systemic change, particularly the concept of collective impact and a network approach to large-scale problem solving.

Key findings and components of the plan:

- To enroll new stakeholders and to activate greater participation by current groups, the Coalition needs to sharpen its focus and services and clarify its target constituency.
 - While ultimately seeking to improve resilience for individual artists, arts organizations and arts businesses, Coalition programs and services should target intermediaries—rather than all arts constituents—in order to build a community of practice in the emerging field of arts emergency management.
 - The Coalition should grow from a *cross-disciplinary*, arts-focused enterprise into a *cross-sector* initiative that involves the participation of stakeholders from allied fields, particularly cultural heritage preservation and emergency management.
 - Programmatic priorities for the next phase of work should include strengthening arts emergency management at the local level; producing/disseminating research reports that can be used to educate arts responders about best practices and to convince public and private funding sources of the urgency of the problem.
 - To advance the readiness movement in the arts and culture sector—to make continuity planning a new business standard—the Coalition should promote an “ingredient strategy” message (integrating preparedness into existing funding and service programs). Finding effective messengers for different constituencies is also paramount.
- Creation of a common agenda by an expanded, more diverse leadership group will provide a framework for collective action and for program implementation within participating organizations.
 - The Coalition should develop a network infrastructure that is nimble and flexible (“with surge capacity”) and that will minimize overhead.
 - Securing an out-of-sector fiscal sponsor, rather than allying with a specific arts organization or agency, will give the Coalition greater latitude to shape its independence, brand and messaging.
 - Financial stability will depend on a combination of multi-year commitment from a consortium of funders and earned revenue from training programs.
 - The combined imperatives of creating and developing a stable infrastructure, defining its “service lines,” and securing multi-year funding underscore the need for an incubation period before attempting a broad-based, public program.



A group of Middletown, New Jersey students from grades K-12 collaborated in original multi-media projects that culminated in a performance to benefit New Jersey families affected by Hurricane Sandy. Photo from Monmouth County Arts website.