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# News Release

## **FDRC/FIRC Helps Cultural Community Build Preparedness Network**

**EATONTOWN, N.J.** – On the sunny morning of September 15, 2014, members of New Jersey cultural resources community gathered at the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Sandy Recovery Office to talk about the challenges they face in protecting the state’s cultural resources and figure out ways they could work together to better preserve and protect them.

The weather was drastically different from the rains, winds and floods of Hurricane Sandy, but it was Hurricane Sandy that brought these stakeholders from the state’s leading cultural resource agencies to the table at the SRO.

The meeting was arranged by members of FEMA’s Federal Disaster Recovery Coordination/ Federal Interagency Regional Coordination Team, which is charged with assisting New Jersey’s recovering communities in planning for a stronger, more resilient future.

“Our goal was to introduce them to other entities that could assist them in preparing for emergencies,” said FDRC/FIRC Specialist Deborah Costa.

The gathering at the SRO included representatives from the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, the New Jersey Department of State, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, The New Jersey State Archives, The New Jersey Library, The New Jersey Archives, The New Jersey Office of Historic Preservation, the New Jersey State Historical Commission and the New Jersey State Museum.

Several of these lead organizations and Rutgers University had recently collaborated on a preservation and disaster preparedness initiative, “the NJ Collections Care Consortium (C3NJ)” which was funded by a two-year, \$250,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services that covered the costs of more than 36 workshops on such topics as Best Practices in Collections Care, Disaster Preparedness, Storage Solutions for Special Collections, Fundraising for your Collections, Archival Management, and more. The event drew more than 600 participants from cultural institutions around the state. The grant concluded with an emergency preparedness summit that brought the cultural community together with emergency first responders for the first time.

With the grant at an end, there was a need to consider the creation of a permanent alliance focused on preparedness and recovery. Every agency had taken steps to protect their cultural resources, but there was no collective organization in which members of the entire community could share tools and ideas and collaborate on preparedness education and training.

FDRC/FIRC offered their help in making the idea a reality, assisting in the creation and cultivation of a new organization that they named the New Jersey Cultural Alliance for Response (NJCAR), a network of agencies and individuals dedicated to safeguarding the cultural heritage of New Jersey.

“The opportunity to sit at a table with someone from the NJOEM who could answer their questions and help guide them in formulating their response, continuity of operations, recovery and preparedness plans was particularly valuable,” said Costa, who also attended the CR3NJ summit. “They were excited to be sitting down with the NJOEM.”

NJOEM’s first and most important mission is to save lives and protect the public before, during and after a disaster. But the wealth of knowledge and experience emergency responders possess is a resource that can be tapped by the cultural community.

And for members of NJOEM, knowing what cultural artifacts most need protection, where they are and how emergency responders can assist in planning for their protection ultimately is of benefit to everyone.

“We’re not asking anyone to put their lives on the line to save a Michelangelo,” Costa stressed. “But at some point we need to be able to save these special collections. The cultural community needs to have a relationship with their local emergency services. They need to know, for example, what are the ten most important things in the museum, library, archive or historical society? We need to help them recognize the importance of preserving our cultural heritage.”

While many agencies have taken steps to protect the special collections under their care, a 2004 study by the Heritage Health Index showed that approximately 80 percent of the state’s cultural resource institutions do not have a preparedness plan in place. Establishing a collective organization capable of sharing tools and information on disaster preparedness, response and recovery could significantly reduce that.

“When our group first met, we were unclear of where to turn,” said New Jersey State Archives Records Analyst Argean T.P. Cook. “After our first FEMA-FDRC/FIRC meeting on September 15, 2014, we were highly encouraged knowing that there are numerous allies that share our mission to protect New Jersey’s cultural community that we represent.” As a result of that meeting, Cook continued, “Our path became evident and we began making progress.”

NJCAR has met several more times since that September day and are well on the way to creating a permanent cultural preparedness resource for arts and cultural organizations around the state.

“This is the first time state cultural institutions have worked together, and along with our state emergency managers and FEMA for the protection of cultural resources,” said New Jersey State

Library Associate Director Michele Stricker. “This is a unique and special partnership we have developed, building upon the national Alliance for Response Initiative from Heritage Preservation.”

In November 2014, the group paid a return visit to the FEMA SRO where they participated in a Webinar on Continuity of Operations in a disaster and heard a presentation by members of FEMA’s Environmental and Historic Preservation program on FEMA policy guidelines for disaster assistance to nonprofit such as museums, zoos, libraries, archives and historical societies, performing arts facilities, and many others.

In December 2014, these leaders from the cultural resources community toured the New Jersey State Police Regional Operations and Intelligence Center in Trenton, which is the command center for emergency response in the state. They also were introduced to the field coordinator for natural and cultural resource preservation from the Department of the Interior. The DOI is the lead agency for natural and cultural resource protection and is the agency responsible for determining when the Natural and Cultural Resources Recovery Support Function outlined in the National Disaster Recovery Framework should be activated.

Members of the newly formed NJCAR are now finalizing steering committee selections, chairs and co-chairs of committees and membership protocols. Ultimately, their goal is to engage all of the members of New Jersey’s cultural and arts communities in the preparedness network.

“While it’s true that the state’s cultural institutions may hold the most valuable treasures, what is more precious or unique than a town’s local history which resides in small libraries, archives and museums through New Jersey. These cultural resources showcase a community’s history, its identity and represent its future,” Stricker noted.

Members of NJCAR are now collecting data on available resources that include recovery vendors as well as technical and communications professionals.

“The group is extremely grateful to the FDRC/FIRC for not only committing their time and knowledge to the development of the network, but for the opportunity to sit at a table with someone from the NJSP OEM who can answer their questions and help guide them in formulating their response, continuity of operations, recovery and preparedness plans,” said Cook.

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