Risk and Readiness

Records protect the rights of both the government and its citizens. Governments need documentation of decisions, regulations, precedents and lines of succession and authority. Individuals need proof of identity, medical histories and documentation of assets. Communities need historical records to retain a sense of continuity with the past on which to build a future. These are the records that need to be protected now and ensure that they can be accessed in the future.

The first two steps to the process are identified as Risk and Readiness.

Risk

Records can be damaged or lost due to a variety of factors. Understanding what risk factors exist is the first step to protecting the records. While natural disasters such as floods, tornados and hurricanes are the ones that come to mind first, it is important to identify other conditions that may put records at risk.

It would be cost prohibitive to protect all records, so it is important to determine which records are unique and essential to either the government or its citizens and then identify and mitigate the risks that affect them. Identify essential records and the risks to those records, and develop and implement policies and procedures for mitigating those risks.

Readiness

Once the risks to essential records have been identified and evaluated, the next step is to develop plans, policies and procedures for mitigating risk and responding to emergencies. These plans may be stand-alone documents or part of larger Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans. Polices and procedures should be developed to for risk mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Tools such as dPlan, a free online program can help institutions write comprehensive disaster plans. dPlan provides a template that allows museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions of all sizes to develop a customized disaster preparedness and response plan. For more information go to http://www.dplan.org/

Identify and procure equipment and supplies that may be needed in an emergency. These may include:

- Plastic sheeting
- Fans
- Dehumidifiers
- Water pumps
- Wet Vacs
- Generators
- Dust masks
- Crates
- Personal Safety equipment

Determine what outside sources of assistance may be needed and consider securing contingency contracts for those services. Some sources of assistance include:

- First responders
- Conservation services
- Mold remediation services
- Freezer/freeze-drying/cold storage facilities
- Fumigation services

Training for personnel is also an essential part of readiness. Designate coordinators and response teams and assign responsibilities for immediate response, assessment and salvage. Test procedures for emergency plans and systems.

Some risk factors have simple and inexpensive mitigation solutions. Others will be more complex and costly. In most cases, the cost for any mitigation will still be less than any costs for recovery after a disaster has occurred.

Risk to Records Best Practices Checklist

- ☐ Determine agency's critical functions.
- ☐ Identify program staff who can help identify essential records for each function.
- ☐ Designate essential records.
- ☐ Prioritize essential records.
- ☐ Determine timeframes for accessing essential records during and after emergency.
- ☐ Identify and evaluate risks to essential records.
- ☐ Identify and evaluate preparedness and mitigation strategies to protect and ensure continued access to essential records in case of natural disasters or human-caused threats.

Readiness Best Practices Checklist

- ☐ Develop disaster plan for records and include records protection in all disaster plans and emergency action plans
- ☐ Designate personnel and assign responsibilities for immediate response, assessment and salvage
- ☐ Determine procedures for accessing essential records during and after emergency.
- ☐ Identify and procure supplies and contingency service contracts
- ☐ Train all personnel on the plans
- ☐ Test procedures for emergency plans and systems

Resources

CoSA offers detailed self-directed online courses in Essential Records and Records Emergency Planning and Response at:

- https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/essential-records-er-course/
- https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/records-emergency-planning-and-response-repr/
- CoSA also provides links to other emergency preparedness resources at
- https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/emergency-preparedness-resources/

About CoSA

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a nonprofit membership organization of the state and territorial government archives in the fifty states, five territories, and District of Columbia. Through collaborative research, education, and advocacy, CoSA provides leadership that strengthens and supports state and territorial archives in their work to preserve and provide access to government records. CoSA facilitates networking, information sharing, and project collaboration among its member organizations to help state and territorial government archives with their responsibilities for protecting the rights and historical documents of the American people. Read more at www.statearchivists.org.

About Polygon Group

Polygon is a disaster recovery company that provides emergency response and restoration services for damaged archives. Polygon specializes in water and mold damage restoration, archival cleanings and pest eradication. www.polygongroup.com

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