The 4 "Rs"

Records are everywhere, in both paper and electronic forms. While all records are important, not all records are essential to a government or its citizens.

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 four stages of emergency preparedness for records can be summed up as:

1 **Risk**

2 **Readiness**

3 **Response**

4 **Recovery**

Risk	Records can be damaged or lost due to a variety of factors. When we think of damage and loss, we think of natural disasters such as tornedos or hurricanes, however, there are many other ways that records can be lost or damaged. It would be cost prohibitive to try to protect all records, so it is important to determine which records are unique and essential to either the government or its citizens.

The first steps would be to identify your essential records and the risks to those records, then develop and implement policies and procedures for mitigating those risks.

- Consider your entity's critical functions, designate and prioritize the essential records.
- Identify and evaluate the risks to those essential records.
- Evaluate and develop preparedness and mitigation strategies to protect and ensure continued access to essential records in case of natural disasters or human-caused threats.

Readiness

Once you have identified the essential records for your entity and identified and evaluated the risks to those records, the next step is to develop plans, policies and procedures for mitigating risk and responding to emergencies.

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.

Essential for readiness includes:

- Plans, such as disaster/emergency preparedness plan, COOP or records emergency action plan (REAP)
- Policies and procedures for reducing risk (mitigation), preparedness, response and recover
- Trained personnel

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/

Response

Response is the immediate and short-term actions taken during and after an emergency or disaster to assess and address needs, including protection of health, safety and property, including records. Response time for records can be critical –the window to begin assessment can be as little as 72 hours after the disaster, before the records deteriorate beyond recovery.

Response actions should be established to the extent possible in disaster/emergency preparedness plans and might include:

- Assemble response team(s)
- Conduct initial collections damage assessment to identify immediate needs – removal, freezing, etc.
- Conduct initial facility damage assessment/health and safety issues assessment to identify immediate actions and who to call for assistance

Recovery	The Recovery phase involves the actions necessary to bring things back to normal to the extent possible, including full damage assessment, insurance claims, salvage and stabilization of records, and the resumption of business operations.

Recovery actions may address both short-term and long-term needs, such as:

- Resume critical operations at a pre-established location
- Address immediate collections needs, e.g. freezing wet records
- Address longer-term conservation needs
- Complete full facility and equipment damage/condition assessment and address repair/replacement needs – walls, carpeting, furniture, etc.
- Return treated collection materials to storage and availability

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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