

Helping the Houston Arts and History Communities be Ready for the Next Disaster

Almost two years after the devastation from Hurricane Harvey, the cultural community's clearest lesson is this: the vast majority of artists, cultural practitioners, and arts and history organizations are unprepared for the next sudden or historic disruption. Building on the work of Harvey Arts Recovery, a volunteer collaborative established to help the greater Houston's cultural community recover after Hurricane Harvey, Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) is leading a new phase of work to ensure that Houston artists are ready and resilient when the next disaster hits—no matter the scale.

Immediate Support

Readying the community requires disaster resilience education for artists and arts and history nonprofits. Both in person and online education resources will help the greater Houston cultural community to prepare for—and more quickly recover from—the next disaster.

Training for Organizations and Individuals

From June through October 2018, Houston Arts Alliance held eight workshops throughout the region covering six counties (Brazoria, Fort Bend, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller). Contracting with Ellen Korpar, an Emergency Preparedness Consultant, and Tom Claerson, Project Director for the national initiative *Performing Arts Readiness*. Workshops offered focused training on disaster preparedness for Performing Arts Organizations. Between September and October, HAA hosted CERF+, the nation's leading emergency services organization for artists, to offer two workshops for individual artist's disaster preparation. Evaluation data shows 100% of attendees gained more understanding about disaster readiness.

At the start of November, the focus shifted to one-on-one consultations with Performing Arts Organizations. During these consultations, Ms. Korpar tailored a disaster preparedness plan for the specific organization. To date, twenty-three plans at twenty-three organizations have been written and operationalized with 40% of participants completing follow-up meetings with Ms. Korpar, a x% increase from her work in New Jersey.

Evergreen, Online Education

On March 5, 2019, HAA launched a new Disaster Resilience website for local artists and nonprofits. The website, ready.haatx.com, is the first of its kind in the nation. It takes complex information and makes it clear and digestible with short videos and easy-to-consume text-tips that cover what to do before, during, and after a disaster. The nine major topics include risk assessment, preparation for any and all hazards, calculating loss after a disaster, documenting inventory before a disaster, navigating insurance, cybersecurity, FEMA and local assistance, business continuity, and preservation. Three months after launch, the website has seen an audience of more than 1200 unique visitors.

A City-wide Symposium

HAA is currently in the process of planning and developing a one day Symposium that will convene members of the existing network of emergency-engaged professionals managed by both Texas Collections

Emergency Response Alliance and HAA. The July event will educate members of the network on disaster preparation and cement collaborative relationships among them. Session topics and speakers will include sample disaster plans and planning methods from local organizations and national best practices; the basics of disaster preparation for artists and arts organizations; and discussion of and planning for ongoing network activity and response.

Long Range Planning and Preparation

Houston Arts Alliance has secured private funding to run a robust, comprehensive one-year planning process to explore, document, and plan for the creation of disaster resilience among the greater Houston region's professional arts and historical community.

A Collective Approach for Optimum Impact

The plan's creation will be supervised by an Advisory Committee including dozens of cultural nonprofit leaders and artists, as well as funders and public-sector disaster professionals. This team will ensure the plan integrates into existing resilience structures and meets the needs of the whole artistic and historic community—from large institutions to small ones, individuals and organizations, rural, suburban and urban. The committee consists of twenty-seven members whose experience ranges from historic preservation to emergency management to individual arts practice. Members include a diversity of skills, self-identity, geography, and experience, ensuring they are able to properly represent the diverse and robust community the plan will represent.

Under Expert Direction

In December and January, HAA staff conducted a national search for an emergency management expert to run the planning process. The result of that search was Gary Friedel. Growing up in Dallas, Gary was raised to appreciate and participate in the arts, culture and historical communities. As an adult he pursued a career in fire and EMS, moving up through the ranks to Fire Chief and Emergency Manager. After serving as a first responder for over 25 years he is now taking his experiences responding to disasters and emergencies and putting them to work helping arts, culture, and historic preservation communities become more resilient.

The Results

HAA disaster staff and consultants will research the impacts of Hurricane Harvey to the arts, culture, and historic preservation communities in Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller Counties; the current capabilities of local, state and federal emergency management organizations to specifically address disruptions to arts, culture, and historic preservation communities; and the impacts of large-scale disasters on arts, culture, and historic preservation communities around the U.S. (i.e. Superstorm Sandy, Camp Fire, etc.). At the end of the twelve month research, HAA will produce a comprehensive strategic plan to improve disaster resiliency for the arts, culture, and historic preservation communities in the eight-county region.