

**ENVISIONING A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF
DISASTER AID FOR ARTISTS**

**Report on a Forum
convened by**

**Americans for the Arts
and
The Craft Emergency Relief Fund**

**March 12, 2006
Washington, D.C.**

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Forum Participants

Dee Dee Acquisto, *MusiCares*

Theodore Berger, *New York Creates & Urban Artist Initiative/NYC*

Claudine Brown, *Nathan Cummings Foundation*

Cornelia Carey, *Craft Emergency Relief Fund*

Gerri Combs, *Southern Arts Federation*

Barbara Davis, *The Actors' Fund of America*

Ricardo Hernandez, *Texas Commission on the Arts*

John Kreidler, *Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley*

Veronique LeMelle, *Louisiana Division of the Arts*

Robert Lynch, *Americans for the Arts*

Fidelma McGinn, *Artist Trust*

Samuel Miller, *Leveraging Investments in Creativity*

Wendy Oxenhorn, *Jazz Foundation of America*

Patrice Walker Powell, *National Endowment for the Arts*

Lawrence Reger, *Heritage Preservation*

Carolyn Somers, *Joan Mitchell Foundation*

Herb Tam, *New York Foundation for the Arts*

MK Wegmann, *National Performance Network*

Malcolm White, *Mississippi Arts Commission*

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The forum was opened by hosts Robert Lynch, President and CEO of Americans for the Arts, and Cornelia Carey, Executive Director of the Craft Emergency Relief Fund, who welcomed participants to the three-hour discussion. Ricardo Hernandez, Executive Director of the Texas Commission on the Arts, served as program moderator.

Mr. Lynch stated the purpose of the forum was to consider ways art organizations could work collectively and collaboratively to better serve artists during times of emergencies. Ms. Carey described the need to develop goals and a master plan for the establishment of a national emergency assistance system for American artists. The system would address issues of preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.

The Model of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force

Lawrence Reger, President of Heritage Preservation, described the history and structure of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force which helps museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites safeguard their collections from disaster damage. The Task Force has been in existence eleven years and was formed in response to the Northridge Earthquake in California and the Midwest floods of 1993. It consists of forty members and Heritage Preservation serves as the Task Force secretariat.

The Task Force works principally with FEMA's Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources Program. Reger assumes that efforts to help individual artists would look to FEMA's Individual Assistance Program for support. However, he believes many of the Task Force's strategies could be used and adapted to serve artists, specifically in the areas of preparedness, mitigation, and response.

Reger stressed the importance of communications and information in carrying out the Task Force's mission. These key components are used to determine what kinds of help are needed when a disaster happens and also serve to organize support. Usually, information is conveyed using relatively straightforward methods such as telephones, e-mail, and websites. This did not prove true for Katrina, however, when standard methods of communications broke down and people with the best of intentions reported inaccurate facts, which only led to greater confusion.

Another aspect of communications and information is informing the public about what emergency assistance is available. The Task Force has worked hard over the years to address this need so resources will be available when a disaster strikes. Examples include *Resources for Recovery: Post-Disaster Aid for Cultural Institutions*, a guide to federal grant and loan programs with summary descriptions and contact information, and *Field Guide to Emergency Response* which helps institutions respond to a disaster even if they don't have a disaster plan in place.

Reger also emphasized the need for increased disaster planning, training for staffs and volunteers of cultural organizations, and the importance of ongoing commitment to emergency management within those organizations. He also cited the necessity of maintaining updated inventories of objects, equipment, and supplies, without which it is almost impossible to file insurance claims after a disaster happens.

He urged that the proposed artist emergency assistance system not focus solely on presidentially declared national disasters, but also on state and local emergencies such as the floods and tornadoes sweeping the Midwest even as the forum met.

Reger closed by giving forum participants the best advice the Heritage Emergency National Task Force received when it was created: "Make no small plans but begin with something doable and do it. That will demonstrate you are serious and can succeed in doing more."

Panel Reports: Emergency Relief for Artists - Lessons Learned

Malcolm White, Executive Director of the Mississippi Arts Commission, opened his remarks by describing "the world of hurt" inflicted by Hurricane Katrina on Mississippi artists, many of whom were left without homes, jobs, studios, or supplies, and were forced to move to other regions of the state or country due to the storm's devastation.

The Mississippi Arts Commission's five-year plan had no emergency management component, forcing the agency to immediately devise a response plan after Katrina struck. Efforts initially concentrated on establishing communications, through use of telephones and a website, to survey the needs of artists and arts organizations in the affected areas along the Gulf Coast, and developing specialized responses for individual arts disciplines.

The commission also began identifying sources of funding and soliciting contributions, only to find there was no legal mechanism in place for the agency to accept private contributions. The problem was solved by creating a partnership with the Southern Arts Federation in Atlanta. But White emphasized the importance of establishing a legal structure for receiving donations before a disaster happens, and making it part of an overall emergency response plan.

The commission next began redirecting state grant funds in order to move as much money as possible to storm victims. It also established collaborative working partnerships with

other groups in the arts and humanities fields, such as museums, libraries, archives, and historic preservation organizations. White stressed the effectiveness of these kinds of partnerships and the necessity of creating them before emergencies occur.

White described two important sources of emergency employment funding for artists, both administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Under the Workforce Investment Act, funds were made available to provide temporary jobs to individuals dislocated by Katrina. Those who lost their jobs due to the storm could be employed by public and nonprofit agencies to assist with recovery projects. Individuals can work up to six months or earn up to \$12,000, whichever comes first. Under this program, the Mississippi Arts Commission was able to add temporary staff, drawn from displaced artists, to help address the immediate needs of the arts community.

Through the Business Capitalization Program, also funded by the Labor Department, eligible participants who successfully complete a short-term training course are awarded a \$5,000 grant for the purchase of items necessary to run their businesses. A portion of this funding has been made available to the Mississippi Arts Commission for distribution to working artists. The commission is partnering with the Craftsmen's Guild of Mississippi to provide information and conduct outreach and recruitment, again underscoring the importance of collaborative working relationships.

John Kreidler, Executive Director of Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley, described the effects of the Loma Prieta Earthquake which caused massive destruction and loss of life in Northern California in October 1989. The largest monetary losses in the arts field were sustained by the Asian Arts Museum and the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. The museum suffered destruction of a few small objects that were, nevertheless, worth several million dollars. The theater was destroyed by a rooftop water tank that crashed through a ceiling.

The earthquake occurred in the middle of the fall performing arts season, thereby wiping out earned revenues and reducing contributed income for scores of dance companies, theaters, and musical ensembles. Relief efforts were mobilized within hours but there was no specific response for the arts.

The first concept of a specialized effort came from John Frohnmeyer, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Endowment was embroiled in the "culture wars" of the late 1980s and Frohnmeyer was looking for ways to show that NEA could be responsive to human needs. He offered the Bay Area a \$550,000 Challenge Grant which required a three-to-one match. (Frohnmeyer also made a simultaneous offer to South Carolina which had just suffered a severe hurricane.)

Northern California already had a close-knit group of foundations, corporations, and local government agencies friendly to the arts. The Arts Loan Fund quickly took responsibility for mobilizing an "Arts Recovery Fund" and members pledged two-thirds of the required

match (\$1.1 million) for NEA's Challenge Grant. A pledge of the remaining third was secured from the California Arts Council.

A steering committee was organized to assess needs and determined that 40 percent of the total funding should be granted to the American Conservatory Theatre, 45 percent to small arts organizations, and the remaining 15 percent to individual artists. Simple application procedures were developed and panel assembled.

Within five months, most of the funds had been disbursed, except those for the theater, due to the slowness of the California Arts Council in generating its share of the match. Ultimately, all funds totaling \$2.3 million were in hand. Individual artists, including writers and artists working in glass and ceramics, received grants of up to \$20,000.

Without question, the American Conservatory Theatre was saved by this effort, with FEMA funds eventually paying for a substantial portion of construction costs for the building itself.

Kreidler summarized the lessons learned from the Loma Prieta Earthquake:

- Arts recovery efforts benefited substantially from the pre-existence of the Arts Loan Fund, a knowledgeable and well-connected group of arts funders. But there almost certainly would not have been a specialized effort for artists and arts organizations without the intervention of the National Endowment for the Arts;
- Money isn't everything. No one in the Bay Area had the capacity to counsel artists and arts organizations on the variety of disaster assistance available;
- Virtually all the artists and arts organizations in the Bay Area were unprepared, with the exception of the larger museums. Subsequent to the 1989 earthquake, building standards have been toughened in public assembly buildings and significant public funds have been, and still are, used to achieve compliance.

Veronique LeMelle, Executive Director of the Louisiana Division of the Arts, presented an overview of the impact of both Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita on the state's cultural community. Two major storms hitting within weeks of each other were not only incredibly devastating, but also unthinkable until 2005. Ironically, four days before Katrina, the arts division had unveiled an economic study showing culture to be one of the Louisiana's largest industries and the state's second largest employer.

Following the massive hurricanes, three regions of the state were able to respond immediately to the needs of artists and arts organizations. Dividing responsibilities to maximize impact, the capital of Baton Rouge took the role of coordinating response efforts; Lafayette assembled funds to employ artists at the local level; and Shreveport offered office and studio space to displaced artists and arts organizations, including the Arts Council of New Orleans.

The state arts agency adopted short-term plans to refocus its priorities and to convert all grants and contracts into relief funding. That plan was cleared on September 17, 2005. Two days later on September 19, all state funds were frozen and remain so until the present moment.

LeMelle detailed her agency's outreach efforts to national funding organizations, many of whom were represented at the forum. Like the Mississippi Arts Council, the Louisiana arts agency coordinated private donations through the Southern Arts Federation in Atlanta. LeMelle found, however, that much of the support came both too early and too late. Many Louisiana artists continue to need help today but that support is not happening.

LeMelle cited the need to coordinate funding and distribution networks and to have them located regionally. Before Katrina, 40 percent of the state's cultural market had been located in New Orleans, where 40 percent of the state's artists were employed. With the city essentially shut down after the hurricane, it was difficult both to locate those who needed help and to provide support through channels they had previously used. LeMelle urged top priority be given to creating a regional communications and information network, rather than having all resources concentrated in a single place.

She also urged that distribution centers and markets for the cultural community be organized on a regional, rather than local, basis. LeMelle felt such efforts would help ensure that states retain their cultural assets, rather than having them dispersed to other regions throughout the country.

The tragedy of the two hurricanes also forced the state arts agency to review its operating procedures. They found their grant application forms had previously provided inadequate information. From now on, applications will require more detailed responses so the state will have a database on all arts organizations with critical information as to who, what, and where they are. In addition, state funding for project support will be refocused to provide stabilization and capacity building for both artists and arts organizations.

Cornelia Carey, Executive Director of the Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) opened her presentation by reporting results related to risk exposure of a 2004 CERF survey of 1600 professional craft artists:

- Craft artists' median reported annual gross income was \$53,000 in 2003;
- Their annual net earnings averaged \$8,000.
- Only one-fourth of respondents had cash reserves for six months or more;
- Just over half reported they finance most or much of their debt with credit cards;
- Thirty percent had no fire insurance;
- Eighteen percent had no health insurance.

Carey noted Katrina and Rita provided unparalleled lessons for all those who focus their efforts on emergency relief. Perhaps one of the most important lessons is that no amount of money will be sufficient for recovery from a major disaster. No matter how much funding is raised and distributed, it will never be enough to put people's lives back together.

Carey said the best investment arts organizations can make is to help artists prepare for and mitigate the effects of disasters. Artists must be convinced to have disaster plans, to store copies of their portfolios offsite, to understand the ins and outs of insurance coverage, and to evaluate risks. They must also be encouraged to diversify their markets so they are not limited to one location. Carey observed that many artists along the Gulf Coast had what they thought was the good fortune to be able to sell their work locally. Now those galleries, shops, and shows are gone, some temporarily but some permanently.

Emergency relief providers must do more to mitigate the boom or bust cycle of their own budgets as disasters come and go. Organizations need to have cash on hand to be able to respond immediately. They must be agile and flexible and ready to react to the unique needs of each crisis. In addition, they need to work locally and partner with organizations on the ground in support of the work of first responders.

Relief organizations must recognize that after a significant disaster, people remain in the survivor mode longer than expected. It can take up to six months or a year before they can even think about getting back to work. Frequently, this is because they must contend with the loss of homes, power, community, etc. If an organization is not getting requests for assistance, it may be because their constituency is dealing with the most basic aspects of life. They may be waiting for a FEMA trailer, waiting for a ruined home to be torn down, trying to find an electrician. These people often don't have access to computers or phones. Going online or calling for assistance is not an option.

Carey noted that funding frequently begins to dry up when the disaster story is no longer front page news. But it can take six months to a year to begin rebuilding after a major disaster. Funders need to commit for the long haul.

Carey closed with a quote from Terrence Meerman that appeared in a recent edition of the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*: "The first step in developing a more thoughtful and effective response to disasters is to recognize that a disaster should not be defined by an unexpected event, but by the failure of a community to respond to that event".

Following the panel presentations, moderator Hernandez asked forum participants to discuss what steps their organizations could take in the event of another significant disaster. Much of the discussion centered on the need for a comprehensive emergency assistance system for artists and arts organizations. Comments are summarized in the following sections.

Issues to be Addressed

1. Integrating with Existing Networks

While forum members endorsed the idea of creating a national emergency assistance system, many spoke of the need to integrate the effort with broader emergency management programs already in existence.

M K Wegmann of the National Performance Network noted that artists do not live and work in separate communities. They have the same need for food, housing, schools, social services, etc. as the community as a whole. Many forum members echoed this sentiment and urged the arts community to engage in ongoing dialogue with federal, state, local and private agencies also working in the field of emergency relief. Forum members expressed concern that an emergency system to assist artists should not duplicate efforts already undertaken by other groups.

2. Working at the Local Level

Forum members also emphasized the importance of working with and through local organizations. Larry Reger had already observed that if all politics is local, in the case of emergencies, the most effective onsite help is usually local. Through years of experience, the Heritage Emergency National Task Force has learned that help from people in neighboring communities or states is always the most effective.

Ted Berger, Executive Director of New York Creates, suggested development of SWAT Teams, composed of individuals with specialized expertise in emergency management that could be sent to aid the cultural community in the event of a disaster. Teams could be set up on a regional basis utilizing state and local arts agencies.

Several participants noted that state and local arts agencies could also be used as clearinghouses for national response and recovery efforts. In addition, they can provide immediate relief to survivors in ways not imagined until a disaster strikes. Veronique LeMelle described how the Louisiana Division of the Arts' Post Office box was used to receive checks for artists displaced from their homes by Katrina who had no current mailing address.

Working collaboratively with the local community could also help identify artists who may not have established relationships with philanthropies or other funders. Traditional

and Native American artists and craftsmen, for example, often work outside existing networks and are sometimes overlooked during recovery efforts.

3. Creating Partnerships

Dee Dee Acquisto of MusiCares suggested identifying partners in the corporate and foundation communities who could provide financial and logistical support. Ted Berger also urged building strategic alliances with human service providers that are not arts specific.

Sam Miller of Leveraging Investments in Creativity reminded the forum not to overlook the role of academic institutions whose departments can serve as resources and that may already have a centralized information base.

4. Operating within Political & Government Frameworks

Forum members agreed the special needs and contributions of artists and arts organizations are often overlooked when an emergency occurs. As an example, MK Wegmann noted New Orleans cultural institutions were initially not invited to participate in designing the city's recovery plan. She suggested that all economic development programs have a cultural component and cautioned the forum not to underestimate the power of politics to stymie recovery efforts.

Ted Berger urged the arts community to engage in ongoing dialogue with government agencies involved in emergency management at the federal, state, and local levels and to advocate for legislative change where needed.

Lee Ann Powell of the Mississippi Arts Commission proposed that FEMA be asked to designate a staff liaison for the arts community, similar to the liaison that currently works with museums, libraries, archives, and historic sites.

5. Providing Job Opportunities

A number of participants spoke of the need for jobs, job training, and career counseling following a major emergency. Survival or day jobs for artists might be directly related to the disaster itself, such as distributing relief supplies, or be part of the recovery effort where artists could work as designers, planners, etc.

Ted Berger noted the Department of Labor's now-defunct CETA Program funds work programs for all kinds of people, not just artists, after a disaster. A website and telephone hotline could be set up to direct artists to agencies or programs providing job assistance. Similarly, a website/hotline could be used as a link to other emergency services such as cash assistance, housing, etc.

6. Encouraging Flexibility and Long Term Commitment

Claudine Brown of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, together with several representatives of other funding organizations, spoke of the need to revise institutional policies and guidelines to respond more quickly and effectively in the face of a disaster, as well as to provide multi-year funding when needed.

Sam Miller also addressed the need for multi-year commitments and noted that local mechanisms must be in place to receive and distribute large amounts of money. Ted Berger suggested funders consider a range of short, mid-term, and long-term investments in recovery efforts.

Miller also pointed out that board members of funding organizations must be more thoroughly educated about emergency needs and the necessity of ongoing commitments in the years after a disaster has occurred.

7. Establishing a Funding Database

Forum members discussed the need to establish a database to track grants and contributions so funders will not all be supporting the same artists or arts organizations. Claudine Brown suggested such a database would help identify who needs help, what type of help, and what other organizations are providing support in the same community. In addition, it is important that funders be able to identify existing community resources to avoid duplication of efforts and to more effectively integrate their support with local programs.

8. Defining “Disaster”

Artist Trust Executive Director Fidelma McGinn raised the question of defining an emergency. Barbara Davis of the Actors Fund advised not worrying about a definition because most emergencies are easy to recognize. Ted Berger added that emergencies happen every day, which is why a system for dealing with them needs to already be in place.

Most forum members seemed to agree with Larry’s Reger’s earlier suggestion that an emergency assistance system for the arts community not be limited to presidentially declared disasters. The proposed system should be flexible enough to respond to any type of emergency, even if the federal government does not become involved.

Available Resources

Gerri Combs, Executive Director of the Southern Arts Federation, said her organization and its Board remain committed to continuing emergency work and serving as a clearinghouse, but it is time to ratchet up efforts at the national level. Her sentiments were echoed by other forum members who support a more comprehensive effort.

Many organizations, such as the Actors Fund, MusiCares, and the Jazz Foundation of America, are engaged in ongoing human services to the music, performing arts, and entertainment fields and can incorporate emergency relief into their existing structures. But other organizations and foundations must alter or redesign their policies to allow more flexibility in addressing emergency needs.

Wendy Oxenhorn, Executive Director of the Jazz Foundation, extended an offer from the Foundation's president, who is also president of E-Trade Financial, to help in creating a national task force on emergency assistance for artists.

Barbara Davis said the Actors Fund could provide advice and expertise in setting up and maintaining a website and 24-hour hotline, as well as partner with other service organizations and major unions to get out information about the new system and sources of emergency support for artists.

National Endowment for the Arts representative Patrice Walker Powell pledged the agency's continuing commitment to sustaining existing structures of emergency support by working through and with state and local arts agencies.

Fidelma McGinn observed there are many websites, including ones sponsored by organizations at the forum table that can serve as resources in disseminating information about emergency assistance. But accessing the information can sometimes be confusing. She suggested that developing help in navigating such sites would be more effective than simply providing a website address.

Bob Lynch of Americans for the Arts offered use of AFTA's advocacy network to lobby for legislative initiatives and for appointment of a FEMA liaison to the arts community. AFTA can also offer emergency management information and training to local arts agencies, as well as provide information about grants, marketing and presenting strategies for artists, services such as insurance, work space, venues for sales, etc.

Lynch also suggested that artists and arts organizations obtain a Dunn & Bradstreet number. These numbers could be used to create a national map that would enable support groups to locate artists and arts organizations in the event of an emergency.

Next Steps

Bob Lynch and Cornelia Carey closed the meeting with a pledge to assemble a task force to define the next steps in establishing a national system of emergency assistance for the arts community. These steps will include:

- Determining a mechanism to establish a national clearinghouse on emergency management;
- Providing an outline for the review of policy, legislation, and guidelines to allow more flexibility in responding to disasters;
- Developing relationships with federal, state, and local government emergency management agencies;
- Preparing the arts constituency to be prepared for the next disaster.