

**SAA Foundation
Board of Directors Meeting
July 14, 2025
Virtual Meeting**

**NDRFA Review Committee: Extend Application Period
(Prepared by Janet Carlton)**

Proposal

The SAA Foundation's National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives (NDRFA) Review Committee proposes to the Foundation Board that the application deadline following a disaster be extended to 18 months, from the existing period of 6 months.

Justification

Despite the many climate-based disasters in the last few years, applications to the fund are down. Since 2019, only 6 grants have been awarded totaling \$30,000 (each for the maximum amount of \$5,000).

Applying for a grant immediately after a disaster can be quite difficult. If it's a widespread disaster there are many other human needs that may come first, as well as diminished access to offices and basic utilities, including communication systems. This places an undue burden on responders hoping to apply for a grant.

In addition, the six-month deadline is contrary to recommended disaster response practice. As seen in the work NARA does with FEMA and DOI, stabilizing materials in the initial post-disaster salvage period is key, with actually treating them to follow later.

The present uncertainty of the future of FEMA and announced expectations that states will take over disaster response, can be expected to lead to wide variations in response and the kind of support that might be given to cultural resource institutions.

More detail and resources

As ICCROM has found and articulated in its literature based on experience in both natural disasters and in conflicts, cultural heritage is often disregarded by first responders as they are primarily concerned with humanitarian needs. ICCROM has increasingly supported the concept of First Aid response for cultural heritage that can be done by anyone with basic handling and packing training, especially when evacuation of collections is necessary.

FEMA, working with the Smithsonian, has introduced the *Save Your Family Treasures* program at Disaster Recovery Centers which emphasizes this First Aid approach to salvage and teaches the basics of stabilization. This is not conservation treatment, but allows for items of historical or sentimental significance to be stabilized so that it might be saved and possibly treated months or even years later by a professional. Although this program targets personal collections, its concepts are highly viable for small and medium institutions.

Situations faced when collections are damaged already face a complex number of problems. Not all institutions have staffing levels or funds to make an assessment and call in a vendor or specialist. Factoring in the possibility of limited access, or the need for evacuation of collections in the face of unsecure structures will add to the timeline of response for all institutions, large and small.

Resources

Save Your Family Treasures. Federal Emergency Management Agency. Accessed June 25, 2025. <https://www.fema.gov/disaster/recover/save-family-treasures>

First Aid to Cultural Heritage: Training Initiatives on Rapid Documentation. Accessed June 25, 2025. https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/first_aid_to_cultural_heritage_training.pdf

Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections. International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Accessed June 25, 2025. https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/Endangered-Heritage_0.pdf

Disaster Preparedness and Recovery. Alabama Department of Archives & History. Accessed June 25, 2025. <https://archives.alabama.gov/manage/disaster/>