

***dPlan™: The Online Disaster Planning Tool***

The concept for an online institutional disaster planning tool emerged from a meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) Preservation Advisory Committee in 2000. The MBLC, established in 1890, is the state library agency for Massachusetts. The Preservation Advisory Committee was composed of representatives from public and academic libraries, historical societies, and archives, as well as from the Boston Public Library, the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), and the Massachusetts Archives. The Committee was searching for a way to assist institutions that had gone through disaster preparedness training to be able to develop their own institutional disaster plan. Many people had taken the initial steps of gathering information for their plan but were stymied in actually completing it. After much discussion and research to determine if any tools existed that could be used to assist institutions (either in hard copy or online), it was decided to apply for funds to see if we could develop a tool on our own. The decision was to develop a planning process which would make it as easy as possible to create an institutional disaster plan: the “how to” would be provided; all the user would have to add was information specific to their institution. Ann Russell, then Executive Director of NEDCC, in conjunction with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, applied for and received an Institute of Library and Museum Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant to develop an online tool that could be used by institutions to develop their plans.

After three years of development, *dPlan* was officially launched nationally in June of 2006. Today, over 3,000 institutions use the free tool. *dPlan*, available at [www.dplan.org](http://www.dplan.org), specifically targets libraries and archives and their collections. Much of disaster planning is general or generic—countdown to a hurricane, supplies that should be stocked, preventive maintenance activities, and so on. In *dPlan*, this information resides behind the scenes. *dPlan*'s template asks users to enter information SPECIFIC to their institution—where the plywood is stored for covering windows in advance of a hurricane, local stores from which to purchase supplies, who is responsible for monitoring pest traps. There are numerous sections within the plan including risk assessment, staffing, collections, insurance, response, and supplies. What is important to note is that a significant amount of material in *dPlan* is invisible to the person using it (unless they do a print preview) until they print their plan. This is information that one would have to search in myriad locations at great expense of time and effort. The gist: *dPlan* supplies this information so users don't have to search for it. For example, when a user identifies the formats that constitute their collections (books, manuscripts, b/w photographs, microfilm, etc.), the final

printed version of their customized plan contains text for each format that describes the initial steps to take to recover these materials. When a user identifies the threats to which their institution might be subjected, a section appears in the printed version describing the threat and how to mitigate or prepare for it.

*dPlan-in-Depth* incorporates institutional information, including collections; staffing; planning; prevention, including risk assessment; response and recovery, including IT issues and salvage priorities; supplies and services; and staff training. This comprehensive version necessitates a fair amount of legwork to complete. However, if specific sections are printed out, they can be handed to respective departments, such as fire, police, maintenance, or the Department of Public Works, for each to complete so that the data can be input all at once. One of the advantages of *dPlan-in-Depth* is that it parallels the emergency management cycle of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. However, all this information can be overwhelming to smaller institutions.

After receiving feedback from *dPlan* workshop attendees, it became apparent that many institutions didn't have the resources (staff and/or time) to complete *dPlan-in-Depth*. As a result, *dPlan Lite* was developed to focus on response and recovery only. It was felt that it was far better to have a plan that focused on response and recovery than to have no plan at all. In the institutional information section, for example, the only two components are staffing and the collections; prevention contains only facilities information; and under response and recovery, each section is an abbreviated version of the *dPlan-in-Depth* section. The object of *dPlan Lite* is to make it easier for smaller institutions to be able to use the online tool to complete their plans.

One of the real strengths of these two plans is that they provide an easy, fill-in-the-blanks template that yields a customized institutional disaster plan. Moreover, the product is password protected, and it resides on a secure server in the Northeast that is also backed up outside of the region. Another positive is that the organization of the plan and the thought necessary to determine what should be included in the plan has already been done for the person completing it. In addition, it is possible for a main library to develop its disaster plan using *dPlan-in-Depth* and then clone the plan for its various branches with minor modifications specific to the branches. The Advisory Committee that created *dPlan* brought extensive experience writing disaster plans and responding to disasters in cultural institutions to the project. As a result, there was much discussion of what should and should not be included in the final product before a consensus was reached. Each section went through multiple revisions before the final version was created. Salvage techniques and best practices were vetted by NEDCC, a leader in preservation and conservation.

A weakness is that it can be a bit overwhelming to undertake *dPlan-in-Depth*. So much information is included that at times people start it and then have to put it aside. This is one reason why *dPlan Lite* was created. *dPlan* is a powerful tool that enables institutions to develop their institutional disaster plan. The final result is a plan that addresses all the components

necessary for a completed institutional disaster plan except a Continuity of Operations (COOP) section, which has become much more popular since *dPlan* was created. Future versions of *dPlan* will make formatting and printing of the plan much easier.

In spite of these problems, *dPlan Lite* and *dPlan-in-Depth* are two products that are highly recommended for archivists. They were designed with librarians and archivists in mind, and the information included applies to the holdings of these institutions. Disaster planning always seems to fall to the bottom of one's priority list. However, archivists have a moral responsibility—called *responsible custody*—to protect their collections from a disaster and be able to recover from one as soon as possible. Without a disaster plan this is extremely difficult, if not impossible. *dPlan*, in both its versions, provides a way for archivists to create a plan for their institution and holdings. Even if an institution chooses not to use *dPlan*, the tool can be used for comparison purposes to ensure that nothing has been overlooked in writing its plan.

*dPlan*<sup>™</sup> is available for free at [www.dplan.org](http://www.dplan.org).

© Gregor Trinkaus-Randall  
Preservation Specialist  
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners