



2019

RECOVERING **TOGETHER**

SURVEY ANALYSIS

How libraries strengthen their communities following a disaster

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Introduction

The **NorthNet Library System (NLS)** represents 41 member libraries in Northern California across 29 counties. Over the past several years, multiple libraries in the NorthNet region have been forced to confront challenges posed by natural disasters. Devastating wildfires, floods, earthquakes and resulting evacuations have demonstrated the vital role that libraries play both as a public resource and foundation for community connection.

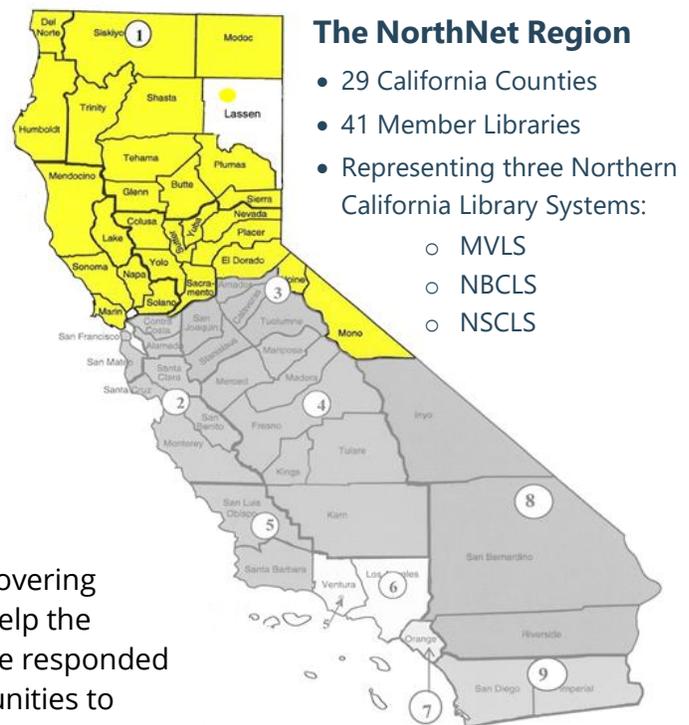
To better support libraries in our region and throughout the state, NLS has launched Recovering Together, an LSTA-grant-funded project to help the network learn more about how libraries have responded to natural disasters and helped their communities to recover in the months and years afterwards. Although much has been written about emergency preparedness, there is currently little guidance for libraries in the recovery phase. The Recovering Together project is looking at ways that libraries have helped to rebuild their communities, highlighting the work of dedicated staff and volunteers throughout the NLS region who have shown leadership and resolve in the face of daunting challenges. This survey is a first step at helping NLS members to reflect on their experiences, identify needs for the future and share resources.

During this project, with help from consultant Common Knowledge, NLS is:

- Collecting insights in a way that can be easily shared
- Creating a central resource for policies, practices and lessons learned
- Facilitating collaboration and coordination between libraries
- Improving readiness before another disaster

About Common Knowledge

Common Knowledge (ckgroup.org) helps organizations increase their capacity for positive community engagement through training, consulting services and culturally responsive field research and communications. Based in San Rafael, much of Common Knowledge's expertise in nonpartisan civic engagement, community engagement and employee engagement has been developed through projects with libraries and local governments throughout Northern California.



Project Plan

In the coming months, NLS and Common Knowledge will continue to build on the suggestions, reflections and insights identified through this survey. Next steps include:

- Conduct follow-up interviews with staff, volunteers and community members identified through this survey and through previous conversations
- Visit NLS libraries in person to learn more about the ways staff and volunteers are supporting their communities in ongoing recovery efforts
- Connect with libraries addressing disaster recovery in other parts of the state
- Create a new Recovering Together website that will synthesize best practices from throughout the region, tell the recovery stories of NLS member libraries and connect staff members and volunteers with resources that will support recovery planning before another disaster
- Identify ways to sustain the Recovering Together effort into the future, including through regional and statewide convenings

Recovering Together is guided by a Core Project Team representing multiple library systems within the NLS network. All NorthNet members are also invited to contribute their own resources and suggestions to the project planning Google Doc at tinyurl.com/recoveringtogether.

Key Findings

Experiences with Disaster Recovery (Questions 6–15)

Disasters and resulting periods of recovery have presented challenges and opportunities for NorthNet libraries in recent years. Most survey participants reported experiencing a disaster or emergency within the last four years, with wildfires (76%) and the related challenge of poor air quality (61%) being the most common. Evacuations (32%), floods (29%) and earthquakes (11%) were also frequent experiences throughout the region. The past two years – which have featured the most destructive and sizeable wildfires in the state’s history – have been particularly challenging for libraries in the NLS region. Respondents from Napa and Sonoma counties were likely to reference the 2017 Northern California wildfires. Participants from Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Shasta, Siskiyou and Tehama counties frequently referred to their experiences during the historically severe 2018 fire season.

76%
have experienced a
wildfire

The Library Role in Recovery:

Respondents highlighted a wide range of ways that library staff and volunteers have supported their communities following a disaster. Libraries were recognized for serving as a safe, supportive place for displaced residents and for providing much needed access to information and assistance.

Libraries have helped to connect affected community members with resources both in the immediate aftermath of a disaster to address pressing needs, such as shelter and air quality, as well as in the weeks and months that followed. Legal assistance, mental health supports, help finding housing and space for healing were all cited as being important ways libraries have helped with long-term recovery. Staff and volunteers were recognized for being flexible, creative and emotionally present when patrons needed them the most.

Libraries have also hosted workshops and offered passive programming aimed at promoting psychological recovery, relaxation and legal assistance. Additionally, respondents pointed to ways that libraries have helped their communities to collectively grieve and to express thanks to first responders. Diverse partnerships with county agencies, schools, nonprofits and faith-based organizations were also cited by many participants as important factors supporting recovery.

Libraries have also hosted workshops and offered passive programming aimed at promoting psychological recovery, relaxation and legal assistance. Additionally, respondents pointed to ways that libraries have helped their communities to collectively grieve and to express thanks to first responders. Diverse partnerships with county agencies, schools, nonprofits and faith-based organizations were also cited by many participants as important factors supporting recovery.

Common Challenges: The most common challenges during disaster recovery were mental health concerns among patrons, evacuations, mental health concerns among staff or volunteers, and loss of access to library facilities. Many participants commented on the emotional and psychological trauma experienced by library patrons, staff members and volunteers following a major disaster. Mental health supports, special programming and “being able to talk about what happened,” were cited as having important benefits for patrons as well as library staff and volunteers. Some respondents expressed frustration or regret that their libraries were not able to better prepare for a disaster. Survey participants also identified many things they wish they could have done differently when responding to a disaster, including:

- Expand access to library facilities and services
- Establish clearer protocols and policies to aid disaster response
- Offer training and drills for staff and volunteers
- Improve how donations are collected
- Improve communication among staff and volunteers
- Offer additional mental health supports for patrons, staff and volunteers



As a library staff we became a part of the front line of recovery,

as the library offers free internet use and that was vital for many people affected by the Camp Fire...The library itself offered refuge and peace for Camp Fire survivors.

— *Kathy Brazil, Library Assistant, Chico Branch of the Butte County Library*



Public service staff dealt with both their own losses and the losses of their community. Patrons came to us, full of grief and pain, to tell us about their loss and the loss of their library checkouts, and seeing so many patrons come in to tell us, all day, every day, for weeks, was devastating. I am very grateful for the support we staff were given during this time, but I still wish there had been some resources on how to deal with the amount of pain we faced every day following the fires.

— Rocio Linares, Circulation Clerk,
Northwest Regional Library Branch of the Sonoma County Library

Disaster and Recovery Preparedness (Questions 16–21)

Survey participants expressed a range of feelings when it came to their library's disaster and recovery preparedness. While 74 percent of respondents feel that preparing for a disaster is important, less than half said that their library has a disaster or emergency response plan in place (47%). Despite this discrepancy, a majority of respondents reported that their library is very prepared (8%) or somewhat prepared (48%) to respond to a disaster. A quarter do not feel prepared (23% feel their library is not very prepared and 2% feel their library is not at all prepared). 18 percent are not sure. Comments earlier in the survey also suggested that many staff members are unaware of organizational or countywide disaster plans or feel that planning has been inadequate.

56%
**feel very or
somewhat
prepared**
to respond to a disaster

Elements Supporting Recovery: When asked to reflect on resources that might aid the library in disaster recovery, a majority indicated that their library has social media accounts to share information (71%) and a list of emergency contacts (54%). Less than a quarter of participants said that their library has:

- A designated disaster or emergency coordinator (24%)
- Training programs for library staff or volunteers (22%)
- A list of community partners that can assist with recovery (21%)
- Teams, committees or advisory groups tasked with coordinating disaster preparedness and recovery (17%)
- Predetermined recovery roles and responsibilities for staff or volunteers (15%)

Based on participant comments, there is room for growth when it comes to making sure all staff members feel prepared and confident that the library is well positioned to help lead

long-term recovery efforts. Libraries should reflect on their existing policies and consider the benefits of additional planning and staff engagement.

NLS Disaster Recovery Website and Resources (Questions 22–24)

Survey participants expressed support for many types of content on the new NLS Recovering Together website. Respondents said the following resources are all very important or somewhat important. The options below are listed in order of greatest to least interest:

- Disaster planning and preparation resources
- Sample disaster recovery plans
- List of vetted resources and people to call who can give you advice
- Best practices for strengthening community relationships before a disaster
- Self-care resources
- Case studies and examples from other libraries
- Support preparing volunteers for disaster recovery
- Sample staff meetings, formats for peer support or staff training templates

Content Formats: More than half of survey participants said they would like the new Recovering Together website to feature first-hand accounts from library staff or volunteers (64%), oral histories collected from disaster-affected communities (54%) and downloadable handouts or posters (53%). Half of respondents would also like the site to include audio stories or podcasts (50%). These recommendations will help to inform the design and features of the Recovering Together website, as it is developed in early 2020. Effort will be taken to ensure that the site is responsive to member interests and easily updated in the future.

Member Support and Suggested Interviews (Questions 24–30)

Many respondents said they would be willing to assist with upcoming phases of the Recovering Together project:

- 44 people offered to provide feedback on a draft version of the NLS disaster recovery website before it goes live next year
- 43 people gave NorthNet permission to share their survey responses with others via email, newsletters or the Recovering Together website
- 16 people would be willing to be interviewed for this project
- 17 people would be willing to mentor other library staff or share their post-disaster recovery story with NLS members
- 39 people indicated that their library has collected recovery stories or documented their community's disaster experiences in another way

Survey participants also suggested speaking to library staff members, volunteers and community leaders from the following library communities and organizations:

- Butte County Library
- Paradise Fire Adopt a Family Program
- Mendocino County Library
- Meriam Library at Chico State University
- Napa County Library
- Plumas County Library
- Shasta Public Libraries
- Siskiyou County Library

If you have additional suggestions for who to interview, please email William Cooley from Common Knowledge at wcooley@ckgroup.org.

Other Suggestions for NLS: Respondents expressed appreciation that NLS is raising awareness of disaster recovery and reiterated many of the lessons they have learned following a disaster. Participants mentioned that libraries need to remember that recovery is a long process and that libraries often operate within larger city or county governments. Others shared their hope for the future that libraries can help raise awareness and encourage community-wide training and preparedness.

Survey Participants

The Recovering Together survey was conducted online from mid-August to early September 2019. Survey participants were incredibly diverse, reflecting the entire range of library roles. A total of 144 people took the survey, including library staff members, directors, volunteers, commissioners, board members and administrative staff. Respondents were equally diverse in their experience levels, with participants having worked in libraries from one year to more than 30 years. The average respondent has worked as a library staff member or volunteer for 11 years.

Participants also represent libraries reaching across the NorthNet region, including more than 21 county, city and academic libraries. Many respondents come from communities that have been hard hit by wildfires during the 2017 and 2018 seasons, including Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sonoma and Tehama counties. NLS and Common Knowledge thank respondents for their participation and help promoting the survey.

Detailed Analysis

The following pages include additional details and analysis for each of the survey's 30 questions. Results are organized in order by question. Unless permission was given by a survey participant, quotes have been anonymized.

Questions 1 and 2 asked respondents for their name and email address. A total of 144 people participated in the survey. Question 3 asked respondents for their library or affiliation. Respondents represent more than 21 county, city and academic libraries – from Sonoma and Solano counties in the south, to Del Norte and Siskiyou counties in the north.

Participating libraries include:

- Butte County Library
- California State Library
- Downieville Station in Sierra County
- Del Norte County Library
- Folsom Public Library
- Lake County Library
- Mendocino County Library
- Meriam Library, CSU Chico
- Mill Valley Public Library
- Napa County Library
- Orland Free Library
- Placer County Library
- Plumas County Library
- Sausalito Public Library
- Shasta Public Libraries
- Siskiyou County Library
- Solano County Library
- Sonoma County Library
- Tehama County Library
- Willows Public Library
- Yolo County Library
- Yuba County Library

The largest number of responses came from Sonoma County library, which has roughly 200 staff members across 17 locations. The libraries with the largest number of responses included:

Library	Number of Responses
Sonoma County Library	48
Plumas County Library	19
Napa County Library	15
California State University, Chico	12
Butte County Library	10
Shasta Public Libraries	9
Yuba County Library	9

04

Library position or role

Those who took the survey represent a diverse range of professional and volunteer roles. Respondents include librarians, volunteers, junior library staff members, directors, county librarians, commissioners, and board members, as well as administrative and support staff.

Position or Role	Number of Responses
Librarians (Adult, Children and Youth Services, etc.)	29
Library Specialists and Technicians	23
Library Associates, Assistants and Aides	23
Volunteers	14
Managers and Supervisors	12
County Librarians, Assist County Librarians and City Librarians	10
Other: Staff in accounting, human resources, IT and maintenance	10
Directors and Assistant Directors	8
Commissioners and Board Members	6
Foundation and Friends of the Library Board Members	6
Coordinators	2
Academic Library Dean	1

05

How many years have you worked as a library staff member or volunteer?

Respondents were equally diverse in their experience levels, with participants having worked in libraries from one year to more than 30 years. The average respondent has worked as a library staff member or volunteer for 11 years. 53 respondents have worked in libraries for five years or fewer. 23 respondents have worked in libraries for 20-30 years. Four respondents have worked in libraries for more than 30 years.

06

What type of community-wide disasters or emergencies have you experienced while working at a library in the NorthNet region?

76 percent of respondents reported having experienced a wildfire while working at a library in the NorthNet region. 61 percent of respondents have experienced the related challenge of poor air quality. Evacuations (32%), floods (29%) and earthquakes (11%) were other common challenges. 12.5 percent of respondents reported having experience other disasters and emergencies, including mass shootings, arsons, and mudslides. 11 percent of respondents shared that they had not experienced a disaster or emergency.

BY THE NUMBERS

76%

have experienced a
wildfire

61%

have experienced
**poor air
quality**

32%

have experienced an
evacuation

29%

have experienced a
flood

12.5%

have experienced
**another
disaster**

11%

have experienced an
earthquake

11%

have not experienced
a disaster or emergency

07

When did your library's most recent disaster occur?

Among those who have experienced a disaster or emergency, nearly all of their most recent disaster experiences occurred within the last four years. It was common for participants to mention experiencing multiple disasters over the last several years. While respondents mentioned a range of experiences, the past two years have featured the most destructive and sizeable wildfires in the state's history. Examples from these two years were most frequent.

The 2017 Northern California wildfires were a common point of reference for libraries in Napa and Sonoma counties. Santa Rosa – home to four branches of the Sonoma County Library – was particularly hard hit by the Tubbs Fire, which, at the time, was the most destructive fire in California history. 2018 saw another historically severe fire season, which was referenced by libraries in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Shasta, Siskiyou and Tehama counties.

The Camp Fire in Butte County devastated the Town of Paradise and ended up being the most destructive fire to date in state history. Respondents from Butte County noted the severity of the Camp Fire, as well as additional wildfire impacts from the past three fire seasons. The Mendocino Complex Fire, which was the largest by acreage in state history, affected four counties, including Lake and Mendocino counties. The 2018 season also saw the Carr Fire in Shasta County, which was the sixth-most destructive fire in state history.

08

Following the disaster, what was the most important thing that helped your community recover?

Respondents pointed to a shared sense of togetherness and purpose, as well as support from diverse community sources as important factors in recovery. Access to resources was mentioned both in the immediate aftermath to address pressing needs, such as shelter and air quality, as well as in the weeks and months that followed. Legal assistance, mental health supports, help finding housing and space for healing were all cited as being important aspects of long-term recovery.

Given the devastating nature of the 2017 and 2018 fire seasons, some respondents also noted that their communities have not yet recovered. In Santa Rosa, which lost multiple neighborhoods, and in Butte County, where the town of Paradise suffered widespread destruction, recovery is ongoing. Despite "help and generosity of spirit...my communities have not recovered," said one respondent. "That will take years."

09

Challenges after a disaster

The most common challenges reported were mental health concerns among patrons, evacuations, mental health concerns among staff or volunteers and loss of access to library facilities. During free-response portions of the survey, many respondents commented on the emotional and psychological trauma experienced by library patrons, staff members and volunteers following a major disaster. In the cases of recent wildfires, respondents said that the library often served as a “a safe, calm place for the public to gather” and that listening to patrons share their experiences was particularly meaningful. At the same time, these conversations and the shared experience of disaster takes a toll on staff and volunteers. Mental health supports, special programming and “being able to talk about what happened,” were cited as having important benefits for patrons, as well as library staff and volunteers.

Many respondents also commented on the difficulty posed by mandatory evacuations and facility closures. While acknowledging the need to prioritize safety considerations, many shared feelings of frustration that library buildings were not able to open sooner or that staff were not able to “get back to work” as quickly as other “essential” public employees.

10

Following the disaster, what did library staff and/or volunteers do that you are most proud of?

The survey highlighted a wide range of actions taken by members of the library community following a disaster. Common themes included cooperation and coordination among staff, as well as a spirit of togetherness. Respondents described feeling bonded by a shared sense of purpose, that we are “in this together.” A belief that the community was “coming together” to address a shared challenge was also common.

Several respondents drew attention to the sensitivity with which staff and volunteers approached their work in the days and weeks following a disaster. Staff were recognized for being flexible, creative and emotionally present when patrons needed them the most.



It felt like we saw our job as a way to witness the community moving through trauma. Branches had different practices to let community members share their experiences and connect or reconnect with others.

— Kyle O’Neil, Training Specialist,
Sonoma County Library

We “empathized with patrons and staff who had lost homes or had to evacuate,” said a participant. “Sometimes people just needed to talk and be heard, and sometimes to be comforted,” said another respondent. Staff volunteering and giving of their time and energy in other ways were also common themes. “Staff came in as volunteers to clear out the book drop, set-up tables of free books and activities and try and organize donations since the branches were officially closed.”

Compassionate leadership from branch managers and library directors was also highlighted as an important factor in helping libraries provide service during challenging circumstances. “Because our staff were so supported, we were able to pass on this strength and compassion to our community members,” said Courtney Klein, Librarian with Sonoma County’s Sebastopol Regional Library. Respondents also described ways that they helped their communities to collectively grieve and to express thanks to first responders. “My branch set up a table with small gifts for patrons, and a gratitude tree where patrons could leave behind notes on what they cherish or are thankful for, in the wake of the fires,” said Rocío Linares, Circulation Clerk with the Northwest Regional Library branch of the Sonoma County Library.



We participated as community meeting places, resources for information and numerous staff volunteered to work at the Local Assistance Center to help victims of the wildfire find local, state and federal agency support.

— Anthony Halstead, Assistant Director,
Napa County Library



[We] led with the heart and not the rule book.

Free replacement cards, generous fine waivers, no need to pay for lost books. All of this gave patrons one less thing to worry about.

— Mel Lightbody, County Librarian,
Butte County Library



As a library staff we became a part of the front line of recovery, as the library offers free internet use and that was vital for many people affected by the Camp Fire. As resources became available, it was very helpful to print out the materials as handouts.... A table with resource print outs, extra phone books (that we requested), maps, blank notepads, pens and a power charging strip stayed up for quite a few months. The library itself offered refuge and peace for Camp Fire survivors.

— Kathy Brazil, Library Assistant, Chico Branch of the Butte County Library

Survey participants described many ways that the library supported recovery efforts following a disaster. As a trusted source for information, several libraries helped to connect community members with resources and updates. With internet service disrupted and patrons unable to return to their homes, many respondents emphasized the importance of being able to provide print as well as digital resources. As messages were posted to the library's website or Facebook page, they were also printed. These print outs were pasted on bulletin boards and placed on information tables for community members to take. Multiple respondents mentioned the importance of "recovery workstations," where patrons could use computers, charge their electronic devices and easily access much-needed forms from the state or federal government. In Butte County, library staff also coordinated with vendors and the county to offer free printing of all forms.



Each library branch crafted a "Gratitude Tree" and prompted kids to express gratefulness on a leaf.

At Sebastopol Library we have created comforting passive activities on adult tables such as adult coloring, origami, knitting/crocheting, puzzles, and a poem station.

— Courtney Klein, Librarian, Sebastopol Regional Library, Sonoma County Library

Multiple responses highlighted the library's role as a meeting place in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and in the weeks and months that followed. "In the first days of the disaster, the library played some afternoon movies and put out some games and coloring for families," said Kathy Brazil, part-time Library Assistant at the Chico Branch of the Butte County Library. "Displaced teachers, parents and students met in the children's room. A displaced book club, homeowners' association and an art club reserved our library meeting room to continue to have a place for their meetings."

To aid in long-term recovery, libraries also hosted various kinds of workshops for those affected. They offered programs supporting mental health and coordinated with agency partners to refer patrons to relevant support services. Passive programming to support psychological recovery, relaxation and legal assistance were also mentioned by multiple respondents. Other programming included efforts to collect oral histories and digital collections to document community experiences. One such program, the [California Wildfires Story Project](#), was produced by StoryCenter in partnership with the California State Library and several NorthNet member libraries, including libraries from Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Shasta, Sonoma and Yolo counties.

12

What do you wish could have been done differently?

The survey identified a wide range of things library staff and volunteers wish they could have done differently when responding to a community-wide disaster. Many expressed that they wish they could have done more. Others indicated that they thought the disaster presented a missed opportunity. Common themes included:

Expand Access to Library Facilities and Services

Multiple respondents shared their desire to keep the library open during a disaster or to open it more quickly once the initial disaster abates. Many suggested offering extended hours in the aftermath of a disaster or coordinating internally to offer services outside of traditional library locations. "I wish we could have mobilized our staff better to do things such as hold storytime in evacuation shelters or volunteer to distribute food," said Jaime Anderson, Collection Services Division Manager with the Sonoma County Library. "Some staff were volunteering of their own accord, but we didn't have any organized presence as the Library."

Establish Clearer Protocols and Policies

Many respondents reflected on gaps in existing disaster plans or a lack of comprehensive planning. Plans should describe what to do through different phases of recovery and go beyond the standard "emergency binder," said one respondent. "I wish that I had built recovery efforts into my library's strategic plan for the future," noted one county librarian.

Offer Training and Drills for Staff and Volunteers

Disaster plans must also be communicated across branches and staff levels, which presents an additional challenge. As one respondent pointed out, a countywide disaster plan is only useful if all county employees are made aware of it. "I think a countywide annual departmental training might benefit all staff to learn what resources in what departments are available to assist the community in the event of a disaster," said Kathy Brazil, a Library Assistant with the Chico Branch of the Butte County Library.



I wish we'd been more intentional in outreach and programming

afterward. I wonder how much the understandable desire to "get back to normal" pushed us to avoid some incredible connections and opportunities.

— Kyle O'Neil, Training Specialist,
Sonoma County Library

Improve How Donations are Collected

In the aftermath of a disaster, it is natural for community members to want to help. People wanting to donate money, books or other materials presented a challenge for the library, noted multiple respondents. Creating clearer donation procedures and coordinating with community partners before a disaster could ensure that what is donated is of value and that donations are collected more effectively.

Improve Communication Among Staff and Volunteers

Contacting library staff and volunteers following a disaster was another area for improvement, said multiple respondents. “Our servers were down, so we had no internal communication at all,” said one respondent. “We mostly made do with Facebook and staff who happened to have each other's phone numbers, but email would have been extremely helpful.” Having updated emergency contact information for staff was also mentioned.

Offer Additional Mental Health Supports for Patrons and Staff

Reaffirming answers provided earlier in the survey, many respondents described the need for increased mental health supports for patrons and staff. Respondents talked about the need to develop more robust collections and resources focused on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and disaster recovery. “I wish we'd had more support for the kids who were afraid and didn't understand,” was a representative comment. Materials on PTSD and recovering from traumatic events were also sparse, outside of books geared toward military audiences, the respondent noted.

Multiple survey participants also reiterated the need to support psychological recovery among library staff. Bringing in mental health professionals, offering group counseling sessions and teaching staff to recognize psychological distress were recommended.



Public service staff dealt with both their own losses and the losses of their community. Patrons came to us, full of grief and pain, to tell us about their loss and the loss of their library checkouts, and seeing so many patrons come in to tell us, all day, every day, for weeks, was devastating. I am very grateful for the support we staff were given during this time, but I still wish there had been some resources on how to deal with the amount of pain we faced every day following the fires.

— Rocío Linares, Circulation Clerk,
Northwest Regional Library Branch of the Sonoma County Library

13

Factors supporting recovery

In the days and weeks following a disaster, the most important factors supporting recovery were a strong culture of support internally and support from library leadership, respondents said. The most important factors included (in descending order from most to least important):

- Support internally between staff members or volunteers
- Support from library director or senior leadership
- Support from patrons or community members
- Support from city or county leadership
- Support from library board, foundation or friends of the library
- Partnerships with community organizations
- Partnerships with local or state agencies
- Support from the California State Library

Respondents also described receiving support from unions, who organized funds to assist library staff members affected by disasters, as well as library peers. Following the 2018 fires in Butte County, library communities from other counties and states provided donations and financial support, as well.

14

Allies or community partners who helped support recovery

Participants identified a diverse range of allies and community partners who provided support during community recovery, including:

- Community centers
- Community foundations
- County offices of education
- County offices of health
- Fire departments, Cal Fire, FEMA
- First Five
- Food Banks
- Homeless assistance programs
- Red Cross (local and regional)
- The United Way
- Unions

Multiple respondents also highlighted the importance of individual community members who volunteered, donated materials or provided financial support.

15

Communication channels

All communication channels were viewed as important, with the library Facebook page, local media, text messages and the library website being the most important channels for sharing updates with the community. Earlier in the survey, when reflecting on what they wish they could have done differently, several respondents mentioned the need for improved communication between staff and volunteers. Respondents noted investments in early-alert systems, text messaging services and library Facebook pages as positive efforts to enhance communication in the future. Multiple respondents also suggested that more could be done to educate the community about the library's role and services before a disaster.

16

When it comes to responding to a disaster, how prepared is your library?

A majority of respondents reported that their library is very prepared (8%) or somewhat prepared (48%) to respond to a disaster. A quarter do not feel prepared (23% feel their library is not very prepared and 2% feel their library is not at all prepared). 18 percent are not sure. Earlier in the survey, some respondents expressed frustration or regret that their libraries were not able to better prepare for a disaster. A few suggested that their library does not have a disaster plan or that existing plans need to be updated. How plans are created, updated and communicated to staff will all be topics for follow-up interviews.

17

Does your library have a disaster plan?

40 percent of respondents said that their library has a disaster plan. 15 percent indicated that their library does not have a plan. The largest group of respondents, 45 percent, are not sure if their library has a disaster plan.

Comments earlier in the survey indicate that many staff members are unaware of organizational or countywide disaster planning or feel that planning has been inadequate. During follow-up interviews, NLS and Common Knowledge will investigate efforts to engage staff in planning and ways that libraries are raising awareness of these plans.

18

In the context of all your library's priorities, how important is preparing for a disaster and the resulting recovery?

The majority of respondents said that preparing for a disaster and the resulting recovery is very important (41%) or somewhat important (33%) in the context of their library's priorities. Very few respondents felt that disaster preparation was not very important (5%) or not at all important (3%). 17 percent of respondents indicated that they were not sure. This topic will be explored further through follow-up interviews.

19

Elements in place to assist with disaster recovery

While 74% of respondents agreed that disaster planning is important, a much smaller number of survey participants indicated that their library has multiple elements in place to assist with disaster recovery. A majority of respondents indicated that their library has social media accounts to share information (71%) and a list of emergency contacts (54%). Slightly less than half of respondents said that their library disaster or emergency response plans (47%) and several shared that they were not sure. The survey indicated that the following planning and recovery resources were less prevalent:

- Communication plans (27%)
- A designated disaster or emergency coordinator (24%)
- Training programs for library staff or volunteers (22%)
- A list of community partners that can assist with recovery (21%)
- Teams, committees or advisory groups tasked with coordinating disaster preparedness and recovery (17%)
- Predetermined recovery roles and responsibilities for staff or volunteers (15%)
- A list of stakeholders and community resources (15%)
- A library strategic plan or master plan that incorporates disaster resilience and recovery (14%)
- Community engagement plans (10%)

These and other resources supporting disaster preparedness will be investigated further during follow-up interviews.

20

How well-positioned do you think your library is to help lead long-term recovery efforts for your community?

Respondents indicated a range of perspectives when it came to how well their library is positioned to help lead long-term recovery efforts. A small number of participants feel that their library is very prepared (6%), while the largest group feel their library is somewhat prepared (39%). Others feel that their library is not very prepared (24%) or not at all prepared (9%). Slightly more than 1/5 of respondents said that they were not sure (21%). Follow-up interviews will help NLS and Common Knowledge to learn more about the factors that contribute to these perspectives.

21

What, if any, outside agencies and organizations do you plan to partner with to help support your community following a disaster?

Respondents identified a diverse array of groups that they plan to partner with following a disaster, including:

- Animal shelters
- Cal Fire
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- California State Library
- City councils
- Community centers
- Community colleges
- Community foundations
- County administrator's office
- County agencies
- County department of social services
- County department of health
- County emergency operations center
- Faith-based organizations
- FEMA
- First Five
- First Five
- Food banks
- Housing authority
- Human services department
- Humane society
- Local community colleges
- National Parks Service
- Mental health nonprofits
- Offices of emergency services
- Offices of emergency management
- Rotary
- Salvation Army
- School districts
- Service dog nonprofits
- Tribal reservations
- Volunteer fire departments
- Women's clubs

In addition to identifying partners who can assist with recovery, participants also spoke to the importance of having a “seat at the table,” when countywide disaster plans are underway. Napa County “recently completed a recertification of [it’s Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan],” said Napa County Library Assistant Director Anthony Halstead. “They worked with all other jurisdictions – towns, cities, other anchor institutions. The library was a participating member in this and will benefit from it.”

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What information or resources should be part of the new Recovering Together website?

Survey participants expressed support for the entire range of information and resources presented. Respondents said the following resources are all very important or somewhat important. The options below are listed in order of greatest to least interest:

- Disaster planning and preparation resources
- Sample disaster recovery plans
- List of vetted resources and people to call who can give you advice
- Best practices for strengthening community relationships before a disaster
- Self-care resources
- Case studies and examples from other libraries
- Support preparing volunteers for disaster recovery
- Sample staff meetings, formats for peer support or staff training templates

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Which of the following formats would you like to see on the Recovering Together website?

More than half of survey participants said they would like the new Recovering Together website to feature first-hand accounts from library staff or volunteers (64%), oral histories collected from disaster-affected communities (54%) and downloadable handouts or posters (53%). Half of respondents would like the site to include audio stories or podcasts (50%). Other options, such as videos (47%), blog posts (37%) or links to media clips (31%) received less support but were still noted by some respondents as being helpful to include.

These recommendations will help to inform the design and features of the Recovering Together website, as it is developed in early 2020. Effort will be taken to ensure that the site is responsive to member interests and easily updated in the future.

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NLS member support

Respondents were also asked if they would be willing to assist with upcoming phases of the Recovering Together project.

- 44 people offered to provide feedback on a draft version of the NLS disaster recovery website before it goes live next year
- 43 people gave NorthNet permission to share their survey responses with others via email, newsletters or the Recovering Together website
- 16 people would be willing to be interviewed for this project
- 17 people would be willing to mentor other library staff or share their post-disaster recovery story with NLS members
- 39 people indicated that their library has collected recovery stories or documented their community's disaster experiences in another way

NorthNet members are also invited to contribute their own resources and suggestions to the project planning Google Doc at tinyurl.com/recoveringtogether.

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Recommended interviews

Survey participants suggested speaking to library staff members, volunteers and community leaders from the following library communities and organizations:

- Butte County Library
- Paradise Fire Adopt a Family Program
- Mendocino County Library
- Meriam Library at Chico State University
- Napa County Library
- Plumas County Library
- Shasta Public Libraries
- Siskiyou County Library

Please share additional interview suggestions with William Cooley at wcooley@ckgroup.org.

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Other suggestions for NLS

Respondents expressed appreciation that NLS is raising awareness of disaster recovery and reiterated many of the lessons they have learned following a disaster. Participants mentioned that libraries need to remember that recovery is a long process and that the library often operates within larger city or county governments. Others shared their hopes for the future that libraries can help raise awareness and encourage community-wide training and preparedness.

To learn more about Recovering Together or the NorthNet Library System, please visit the NorthNet website at northnetlibs.org.



Common Knowledge