

Emergency Preparedness for State Arts Agencies

October 26, 2024

Scenario Details for Small-Group Discussions

1. Isolated incident with social/cultural ramifications

A long-standing three-day music festival takes place in a mountain community in your state. You've been funding this event for decades, and it's a destination event but is really rooted in the history of the community. It's a popular site visit for your staff, of your program staff is attending with their partner and kids.

This year, on the second afternoon at the height of activity, an attendee suddenly breaks out with an angry verbal outburst, pulls out a knife and attacks several audience members with it before security is able to subdue and remove them, and get EMTs in to help the injured. There's a lot of panic but the festival staff does a good job of getting on the PA systems to suspend activities and get people safely off of the property. Your staff member wasn't injured, but they and their family witnessed the attack and calls you, very upset. Later, the public learns that two of those attacked have died; the others have serious, life-changing injuries.

- What is your immediate response to your staffer?
- What's your first step in connecting with the festival staff?
- Do you make any kind of public statement? How would you decide whether or not to do so, and what you would say?

Over the remainder of the weekend, with the festival cancelled, a makeshift memorial is created on the site, with people bringing flowers, candles and stuffed animals. The festival staff vows to bring the festival back in full the following year.

- In the next two weeks, what issues and questions might arise in your state around the idea of festival safety? What different groups or agencies or entities might your agency need to interact with, and how? How would you manage the needs of your entire staff?
- In the weeks and months following the attack, what might be your SAA role with the festival, with the community, with the public? What needs might arise in terms of community healing and addressing PTSD? What conversations about the role of the arts and music in healing might you be a part of? What resources could you bring to the healing process? What resources would you know of that you could help support?

2. Mitigation planning/Natural disaster

You operate in a state with a geography that is prone to a particular kind of natural disaster (ice storms, flooding, earthquakes, hurricanes...) Your constituents deal with these events as a fact of life and they generally have a rhythm to dealing with them: notify their staff and patrons, hunker down until the event is past, restart operations and do their own fundraising for rebuilding if necessary.

You recognize that better mitigation planning is the key to long-term sustainability. Mitigation projects can reduce the impact of future crises, and can be a way to “build back better” after damage has been done.

- What can mitigation look like for your arts community? How might you identify where mitigation/arts collaborations could be a great solution?
- Would mitigation/how could mitigation work into your existing programs? Project grants; general operating grants; professional development; technical assistance; community development; creative economies work; etc.
- Brainstorm on physical projects – hardening arts and cultural facilities against weather events; arts- and artist-led design of projects – share the Denver skate park example.
- How can the SAA use its leverage to get the arts involved when cities, counties, planning commissions are doing the mitigation planning? Who at the local community level could you work with or support in some way?

TALKING POINTS:

Recovery includes long term (months, perhaps years) – including finding post-disaster recovery and mitigation funds.

3. Infrastructure crisis

It's a Wednesday afternoon and one of your state's mid-size cities experiences a power outage. Everyone assumes it will soon be restored, but after a few hours it becomes evident that there has been a significant infrastructure failure due to ... [could be a heat wave, and ice storm, an act of domestic terrorism].

Your constituents that are affected include:

- Presenters and performing companies whose upcoming rehearsals, performances and classes need to be cancelled.
- Museums and nonprofit galleries who are stewards of materials and artwork which is environmentally-sensitive and now have no temperature or humidity controls
- Artists whose studios are out of power, materials are subject to environmental damage, revenue-driving activities are suspended.

How does the SAA respond and support the community? Things to think about:

- How do you communicate with those in the affected area?
- How do you assess/find out what's going on?
- What networks exist that you can activate or help respond?
- Who on your staff would be making these decisions? What internal steps would you need to take?
- Can/should you get people to the area? Ex. Getting sensitive artwork refrigerated/moved/stored? Getting preservationists/conservationists there?
- Do you know what resources and entities in the arts and cultural community exist that you can reach out to? (E.g. NCAPER, CAM Coaches, Heritage Emergency National Task Force, National Heritage Responders, state museum association, state presenters network etc.)?
- If this happened in a suburb or a rural community, what might be different about your process and actions?

4. Civil unrest

A police shooting takes place in the capital city in your state, also the home to your SAA offices, and there are lots of questions around the incident and the validity of the police response. The victim is in critical condition and there are both organized and spontaneous protests in a number of neighborhoods, and continue for over two weeks.

About a half-dozen organizations and spaces which your SAA funds are in the City center where the nightly protests are occurring. Their operations are being impacted: staff are nervous about coming in to work, audiences have to wend their way through the protests to get into the events/spaces. Also, a number of locally-based artists are among the protest movement's leaders, including several that are on your agency's teaching artist roster.

- Several of your grantee organizations have reached out, concerned about the economic impact on their events. How would you respond?
- Could you/would you fund activities to bring the arts community together to discuss the situation?
- Could you/would you fund activities that use the arts to bring the community together? (As an example, after the shooting of Freddie Gray, and uprisings in the streets caused many businesses to lock down, the Baltimore Symphony took to those streets and performed outdoors.)
- How do you determine what your agency's role is in supporting the community, and the organizations? Who should be part of that determination?
- In a published interview, one of the artists leading the protests is described as being an office State Arts Agency artist. You get some calls from the Governor's office and the press. What is your response and how do you determine what your response is?
- What could/would your agency provide in the weeks and months after the protests die down? What other agencies/entities would you partner with?