

Rising Together: Community Resilience and Public Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored the phenomenon of community resilience and how public libraries, as FEMA-designated essential community organizations, enhanced community resilience. These phenomena were studied by answering the following research questions:

1. What actions have public libraries taken during and after extreme events to support their communities?
2. What services have public libraries provided to their communities during and after extreme events?
3. What roles have public libraries played in their communities during and after extreme events?
4. How do public library directors/managers think public libraries enhance community resilience and build adaptive capacities?
5. How do disaster responders think public libraries enhance community resilience and build adaptive capacities?

Through a multi-method qualitative approach, this work utilized content analysis and interviews to determine the actions, roles, and services public libraries provided throughout disasters; as well as, how public libraries enhanced community resilience. This work bridges the gap between research and practice by being the first qualitative study in community resilience investigating the role of public libraries across multiple disaster types and settings. The results of this project identified and then verified the adaptive capacities public libraries exhibit to enhance community resilience. A couple of highlights from the findings include:

- The actions of libraries often shifted when faced with a disaster: hours of operation, policies about computer use, and changes in patron privileges.
- Every library director believed public libraries added to community resilience in four areas: economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence.

TOPICS

public libraries; critical librarianship; risk management; information needs