

Be Prepared: Cultural Institution Emergency Planning

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Abstract

In an effort to further enhance our Cultural Institution's emergency planning, I took the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive review of existing programs. By using established crisis intervention practices, crime prevention technique, and emergency management planning principles that address proper preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, I developed an "all-hazards" Campus Emergency Response Plan for our 66-acre campus. This plan has provided our Institution with a viable, centralized plan for administering our campus-wide security and safety programs.

Introduction of the Organization

The John and Mable Museum of Art and The Center for Performing Arts are affiliated with Florida State University

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is the largest museum/university complex in the Nation. The 66-acre estate is the legacy of John Ringling (1866-1936), one of the great business tycoons of his day. The Museum of Art, recognized as the State Art Museum of Florida, includes 21 galleries of internationally recognized European and American art with paintings by Rubens, Van Dyck, Poussin and other Baroque masters. In addition, the estate encompasses Ca' d' Zan, the recently restored 32-room Ringling mansion; the Circus Museum; the Rose Garden, and beautifully landscaped grounds overlooking Sarasota Bay. Additionally, the new Tibbals Learning Center and Visitor Pavilion complexes will open in January 2006, followed by the restored Asolo Theater, Seering Galleries, and Education Center over the next two years.

The Center for Performing Arts is the home of the professional Asolo Theater Company that performs in the Mertz Theater. This theater was brought to Sarasota from Dunfermline, Scotland. The Center is also home to the FSU Conservatory for Actor Training - Masters in Fine Arts Degree program. Student performances are held in the more intimate Cook Theater. And finally, the Sarasota Ballet conducts training classes and holds performances in the Mertz Theater.

Statement of the Problem / Initiative

Some safety and security initiatives existed, but gaps in the overall plan were discovered.

In order to tighten procedures and close these gaps, three specific areas needed to be addressed:

- Existing hiring procedures and background checks were very limited in scope, frequently required numerous re-submissions, took extremely long periods to complete, and usually resulted in a per/check expense (plus, frequently charged resubmission fees).
- Decentralized emergency planning needed to be consolidated into a campus wide comprehensive response plan.
- Due to the vulnerabilities of structures and the collection, coupled with a high threat potential for damage resulting from severe weather and tropical systems, the need for specific planning relating to major weather events was needed.

Design

Pre-Employment Screening Protocol:

Understanding that this protocol needed improvement, I initiated a comprehensive review of our Institution's pre-employment screening practices utilizing input from the Human Resources Department and analyzed it in accordance with the American Society of Industrial Security's (ASIS) - *Suggested Guidelines for Museum Security* established by the ASIS Standing Committee on Museum, Library, and Archive Security, a global authority on standardizing security operations worldwide.

This led to the creation a *Pre-Employment Screening Protocol* that included a standardized application process and implemented a thorough pre-employment background check that includes prior employment verifications, national criminal history checks, and applicant fingerprint identification. I identified a new electronic fingerprint scanning system from Cross Match Technologies, a Florida based electronics manufacture, that will now allow our Institution to submit fingerprint verification checks electronically to the FDLE/FBI using previously established protocols developed by our Human Resources Department.

In July 2004, the new scanning system was placed in to service at our Institution. To date, 143 sets of electronic fingerprints have been submitted to FDLE/FBI using this system. In only 3 instances, initial submissions were rejected. By use of this new scanning system, the previous rejection rate of nearly 40% of the old inked print card submissions has virtually been eliminated. Quantifying this cost savings would be challenging.

In addition to this non-quantifiable savings, the use of this system has eliminated the need for the an interim State of Florida criminal check, once needed for making a hiring offer contingent upon return of ink card fingerprint checks. The cost of \$25.50 per applicant for the State check has been eliminated. This is due to the fact that this scanning system now provides a national criminal history check in approximately four hours, where the old ink card submissions took 4-6 weeks, provided that initial submissions were not rejected. Since implementation, eliminating the \$25.50 per applicant fee (x 143 - to date submissions) has resulted in a \$3646.50 cost savings for our Institution. The on-going

cost savings continues to grow with every submission. Therefore, the implementation of this scanning system has and will continue to produce both measurable and non-quantifiable cost savings for the FSU-Ringling Cultural Center.

However, besides the cost savings, an extremely important facet of this system is that it has enabled our Institution to quickly obtain critical criminal history information, thereby eliminating the possibility that an applicant with a criminal history is brought in, thereby potentially placing employees, students, and guests in a precarious situation.

Comprehensive Emergency Response Plan:

Emergency management and response planning is a primary function within the security and safety programs on our campus. Therefore, development and maintenance of a Campus Emergency Response Plan is critical. After pulling together fragmented portions of plans from all departments across campus and addressing areas not covered, I developed a response plan using an “all-hazards” approach to crisis intervention planning for our 66-acre campus. This approach was developed in accordance with emergency management planning principles that address proper preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation of identified hazards and establishes an Incident Command System that clearly identifies a chain of command and liaison responsibilities during crisis events.

This plan provides a standardized response for all emergency situations on campus and serves as the primary training resource for Security Department employees. Additionally, it is used to educate other employees and students about how we are prepared to respond to various types of crisis situations and helps to clarify their role during the event.

Severe Weather Plan:

Prior to coming to this Institution, I served with Manatee County Emergency Management. While there, I had the opportunity to assist Manatee County with acquiring their Storm Ready Certification. With this knowledge, I initiated contact the National Weather Service (NWS) - Ruskin, in order to analyze how our campus could become affiliated with the Storm Ready Program. After discussing the matter with NWS, I began the process of verifying all the required points to obtain this certification for our campus. In mid-planning, we encountered the onslaught of the 2004 hurricanes. As a result of the various storm threats, the severe weather portion of our plan was fully activated once and partially twice. After-action debriefings revealed that our plan was viable, campus-wide response coordination was effective, and lines of communications both inter-departmentally and with Sarasota County EOC were well established.

In early December 2004, NWS and Sarasota County Emergency Management Officials came to our campus to conduct an on-site verification visit for the Storm Ready Supporter Partnership. Once completed, the FSU - Ringling Cultural Center's Hazardous Weather Plan was submitted to the West Central Florida Storm Ready Advisory Board. On December 21, 2004 the Board unanimously recognized The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art as the first Storm Ready Supporter in the State of Florida. But more impressive, our institution is now recognized by NWS as the first Cultural Institution in the Nation to be certified as Storm Ready. NWS Officials further pointed out that our institution was only the fourth entity nationwide to have acquired this certification.

Implementation:

- Completed analysis of current methods used during pre-employment screening. Identified deficiencies within the process and offered alternative methods to produce intended results. Researched options for electronic fingerprinting systems in order to eliminate rejection from law enforcement authorities. Identified Cross Match Technologies ID 500 Automated Fingerprint Scanning System. Implemented new Pre-Employment Screening Protocol for Institution and procured fingerprint scanning system to expedite national criminal history checks.
- Completed review of all emergency procedures currently used on campus. Identified deficiencies in planning and created response protocol solutions. Compiled a comprehensive Campus Emergency Response Plan for campus-wide reaction to crisis situations. Trained Security Supervisors and staff on response actions. Created centralized plan as a “living document” (i.e.: document that is designed to continuously evolve with the ever-changing campus environment).
- Completed analysis of current severe weather response actions. Compared current capabilities to the requirements for meeting criteria for recognition as a NWS Storm Ready Support. Identified deficiencies not meeting NWS standards and implemented changes to those identified areas. Submitted Hazardous Weather Plan to NWS for approval as a Storm Ready Supporter. Oversee on-going planning requirements to maintain this designation for our Institution.

Benefits:

- New Pre-Employment Screening Protocol and fingerprint scanning system has dramatically improved our prevention efforts of bring individuals with question

criminal backgrounds into employment positions. This action has substantially increased safety for employees, students, and guests, to include the many school-aged groups, visiting our Institution each year.

- Centralized emergency response protocols have benefited all employees, volunteers, and students who regularly spend time on campus by educating them to our response protocols for crisis events. This plan is used to educate staff and volunteers on response actions, inform students about what to expect and how to react during emergencies, and ultimately to inform everyone that a plan is in existence that prepares our campus to handle emergencies. Bare in mind, the portions of our plan that identify detailed security protocols for our Institution are kept confidential and only shared on a “need to know basis” with affected staff and others responsible for response actions.
- Receiving the endorsement as a Storm Ready Supporter has enabled us to promote that fact that we have a plan, it’s viable, and has been endorsed by the weather experts – the National Weather Service. For our Institution, this has provided a great opportunity for positive public relations by allowing us to convey to our stakeholders, fellow Cultural Institutions, and ultimately to the general public, that we not only understand the significance of, “Be Prepared: Cultural Institution Emergency Planning”, but in some regards, have set the standard and lead the way by being the first Cultural Institution in the Nation to have a plan recognized in this manner.