

After the Storm: Establishing Library and Information Services from a Temporary Location

Hildy Dworkin, MLS

Library Director, NYC Human Resources Administration/ Department of Social Services

With Editorial Assistance From

Letitia Samuel, MLS

Library Research Assistant, NYC Human Resources Administration/ Department of Social Services

Abstract

The HRA McMillan Library provides services to the NYC Human Resources Administration/ Department of Social Services (HRA/DSS, aka HRA). Under the umbrella of the agency's Office of Evaluation and Research (OER) the library is located at the agency's headquarters in downtown Manhattan. HRA's building was badly damaged during Superstorm Sandy. It was unclear when the building would reopen.

In this paper I describe our experience in re-establishing services to a large population without access to our equipment and files. As much as the inclination was to forge ahead and resume as quickly as possible, it was important to remember the role the agency has in the restoration of New York City and to prioritize services accordingly.

Introduction

HRA is the New York City agency responsible for administering social services to all five boroughs of the city. The library is located at the agency's headquarters, but is available to any HRA staff member in any office, in any borough. This brings the potential patron base to 14,000. Realistically, we average a patron base of approximately 300 during a given year. We may also provide service to other New York City agencies and City Hall.

Due to the damage caused by Sandy and limited transportation, most HRA staff were not at their regular work locations for at least the first two weeks. By the third week after the storm we were assigned to a temporary location, but not an actual space to work. Finally, after several days of moving around, the three members of the library staff were finally given space in a conference room. However, we still did not have computers, phones, or any supplies. The rest of the OER team were assigned to a different location.

Background

HRA was the lead agency that provided assistance to victims of Sandy. We are public servants first—our work titles, second. The health and well-being of New Yorkers came before I could begin to figure out how to resume library service. We, with the rest of OER, were put on a special assignment. Once we had phones, we called victims of Sandy who had an initial visit to a disaster assistance center following up to ensure their immediate needs were met and disseminate information for additional assistance. After two weeks of calls and one month since the storm hit, we were finally able to think about the steps to restore some library services. Considering the magnitude of damage the storm left and the agency's significant role in aiding storm victims, it was important to choose selected services and evaluate the timing of resuming each service.

Before I returned to work I received an e-mail from my deputy commissioner who was concerned that library staff would have no work since the library was closed. I replied with a few specifics adding that "As long as Letitia [my library research assistant] and I have PCs that can access the network and web, we should still have plenty to do." Coming from a relatively large physical space with no access to files—paper or electronic, the challenge of continuing services was great.

Setting Priorities

Once we had PCs we realized that the software was out of date and had to request an upgrade. Normally this would take months or longer, but we received the upgrade right away. With this last obstacle cleared, I was ready to set priorities. My goal was to ensure that the library was visible and that it continued to be an integral part of HRA's operations. While we have an extensive print collection, the majority of services are handled electronically. It was vital that the notion of service was not solely based on the physical space and that the library did not fall victim to "out of sight, out of mind."

Getting Back to Basics

The question then was "where do we start?" Being dislocated affects us more than just not being able to be in our own space. It is disorienting—as if our "thinking" is tethered to the work space. We had no access to any documents. All library files (over 6,000) were not on a shared network drive, but resided in a shared *folder* on my hard drive. I thought it best to start with what we knew and what we had access to with little or no assistance from other agency departments:

- The library's catalog: we converted to a web-based catalog a little less than 2 years ago. Having access to all our holdings and patron records gave us a great head start.
- We had access to a network drive that we obtained for a special project. This became our new central location for library files.
- E-mail: I saved almost all e-mail I ever received since beginning this job in 1999. Old emails contain a wealth of information. Our agency began using Symantec Enterprise

Vault for e-mail archiving, but I was reluctant to sign up for it because I like to have everything I need at my fingertips. However, since some of my older e-mails were saved to my hard drive, I learned the hard way that it was to my advantage to make use of the vault to ensure that whatever I had was accessible. All 3 staff and a common library e-mail signed up for the vault. Even though the search function is limited, it was very good to have the e-mails available so they can be accessed via the network.

- Snail mail: luckily the mailroom from headquarters was in the same temporary location and we had storage space in the conference room. Our print materials could be cataloged and circulated.
- Internet exceptions: in order to continue some research activities we had to ensure that our exceptions were set so that we could visit sites without much interference from filters. I was able to accomplish this quickly because of the long-standing positive relationship I have developed with our IT security team.

This was just enough to start getting on the right track to resume some services. My library assistant was able to enter all our serials into the catalog. Concerned that there would not be enough storage space, it had been suggested that I suspend all subscriptions until we returned. I did not think this was the best solution. The frequency of many of our publications is monthly or less. I did not think we would accumulate more than a file box or two based on what we received in one month. There was also the fear of losing online access to those items for which we have combination print plus digital subscriptions. In addition, this was a great opportunity to resume routing services with what we had.

Subscription Management

Now that I had a handle on what we knew, it was time to Figure out what we needed. Subscription management is multifaceted and can be time consuming. We have 35 paid subscriptions—too few to justify using an outside book and subscriptions vendor; it would not be cost-effective for the library's operation. If we centralized purchasing all bibliographic materials agency-wide under the library, then it may result in net savings. That not being the case, it has to be managed in-house.

We had just begun creating a management system before the storm. The goal was to ensure I knew exactly what needed to be renewed in any given month and because of the varying expiration dates combined with the fact that processing payment varied depending on the cost of the item, we needed a tracking system.

The spreadsheet was simple (see Figure 1). Using colors to track the lifecycle of the subscription, at a glance I could see which were in process, which payment method was used, expiration dates, and contact information. It was simple, but contained a lot of information. In addition, another sheet in the workbook had a calendar to view the year at a glance indicating which month a subscription needed to be renewed.

Another spreadsheet was created for access containing our usernames and passwords, account information, and websites. I had another for the costs. Other documents contained patron and routing information.

In all it was a lot of information to recreate from memory. My library research assistant had created the original tracking spreadsheet and after some discussion she was able to create a new one containing all our periodical titles. In the meantime, my other assistant compiled a list of patrons who regularly received print materials. This was integrated into the subscription management workbook. At the same time, I searched hundreds of e-mails for account information, usernames and passwords, expiration dates, and anything else that would help us. We utilized the “forgot password/username” online to fill in the blanks. We took this opportunity to create more uniform passwords and usernames so that all staff had easier, faster access to the information. Since some of our purchases are paid by credit card, I needed to obtain that information as well since the card was locked in a secure location in the library. In addition, publishers were contacted for information. To those with outstanding invoices we informed them of our situation and that payment will be made as soon as possible.

The evolution of the subscription management workbook was one of the positive outcomes of being displaced. Today we have an efficient comprehensive tracking system (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

Figure 1-Original tracking sheet

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
	TITLE	P-Card#	RENEWAL DATE	Last Issue	Online Acc	SUMMARY/ NOTES	COST	PHONE NUMBER	E-MAIL/WEBSITE			
2	PRE-PAYMENT											
3	Administrative Prof. Today	P-card	April-13		?			800-543-2055	www.admin-pro.com			NOTES:
4	Administrative Age	P-card	July-13		Y	OCM	\$99.00					REMOVED FROM TH
5	American Economic Ass. Journals	P-card	August-13		Y	Is 7 Journal Database		800-818-7243	www.aeaweb.org			Crain's Insider - No
6	ARPA(Sage)	P-card	February-13		Y				www.sagepub.com			as a subscription b
7	Before & After	P-card	July-13		Y	OCM/3 print issues (21 articles in	\$48.00					10/16/2012. Balance
8	Challenge	720	September-12		Y			914-273-1800	www.mesharpe.com			transferred to Crain
9	Chief Leader	P-card	March-13		Y			212-962-2690	www.thechief-leader.com			
10	City Journal	P-card	August-13		Y	Published Quarterly		800-562-1973	www.city-journal.org			
11	City Limits	P-card	March-13		Y	Published Bi-monthly		1-877-231-7065	www.citylimits.org			
12	Communication Arts Magazine	P-card	July-13		Y	OCM/6 issues a year	\$33.00					
13	Comm. Brfngs.	P-card	February-13		Y			800-791-8699	www.communicationbrief-nqs.com			
14	Crain's Insider	P-card	February-12		Y			800-678-0595	www.crain.com			NEW ITEM FOR THIS
15	Crain's NY Bus. (READ NOTE)	P-card	September-12		Y			800-678-9595	www.crainnewyork.com			
16	Governing		October-12		Y		Free	202-862-8802	www.governing.com			RENEWAL
17	Harvard Bus. Review [print]	720	September-12		N/A			800-274-3214	www.hbr.org			PROCESS
18	Harvard Bus. Review [Electronic]	720	September-12		Y							COMPLETE FOR
19	How	P-card	August-13		Y			1-386-246-3365	www.howdesign.com			CURRENT FISCAL
20	Journal of H.I.V./AIDS	P-card	September-12		Y			800-354-1420	www.tandf.co.uk			YEAR
21	Journal of Marriage and Family [Electronic]	720	October-12		Y			800-835-6770	www.wiley.com			
22	Managing People at Work [Electronic]	P-card	October-12		Y			888.303.2373	www.mcmurry.com			
23	National Affairs	P-card	April-13		Y	On-line Renewal		888-827-5508	www.nationalaffairs.com			
24	Natl. Bln. on DV Prvnt.	P-card	October-12		Y			800-328-4880	www.west-thomson.com			
25	National Journal	720	May-12		Y			800-207-8001	www.nationaljournal.com			
26	Office Professional	P-card	December-12		Y		\$99.00	888.303.2373	www.mcmurry.com			
27	PAR[Electronic]	720	November-12		Y			800-835-6770	www.wiley.com			
28	PA Times	720	December-12		Y	no renewal notification - Unable to renew via web		202-585-4309 or 10	www.aspanet.com			
29	Print	P-card	November-12		Y			877-860-9145	www.printmag.com			
30	Regional Labor Review	720	September-12		Y	no renewal notification		516-463-5040	www.hofstra.edu			
31	Social Service Review	720	March-13		Y			877.705.1676	www.uchicago.edu/			

Figure 2-Renewal tracking

Subscriptions - Annex.xlsx [Shared] - Microsoft Excel

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H38 Invoice comes when items arrive/ may be able to use P-card (H.D.)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	RENEWAL PROCESS COMPLETE FOR CURRENT FISCAL YEAR	ITEM CURRENTLY BEING PROCESSED OR RENEWED	NEW ITEM for Fiscal Year	OVERDUE ITEM. NEEDS RENEWING		COLOR LEGEND		
2								
3	Title	P-Card/720	Print/Electronic	Renewal Date	Frequency	Cost	Last Expected Issue	Summary/Notes/Etc.
4	PRE-PAYMENT							
5	Administrative Prof. Today	P-Card	Print	Apr-13	monthly	\$79		
6	Advertising Age	P-Card	Both	Jul-13	weekly			DCM
7	American Economic Association - 7 Journals	P-Card	Electronic	Aug-13		\$735		1. The American Economic Review 2. The Journal of Economic Literature 3. The Journal of Economic Perspectives 4. Applied Economics 5. Economic Policy 6. Macroeconomics 7. Microeconomics
8	American Review of Public Administration (Sage)	P-Card		Feb-13	bi-monthly			
9	Before & After	P-Card	Both	Jul-13				DCM 3 print issues (24 articles in each issue)
10	Challenge (M.E. Sharpe)	P-Card	Both	Oct-13	monthly	\$396		
11	Chief Leader	P-Card	Both	Mar-14	weekly	\$40	Mar-14	
12	City Journal	P-Card	Print	Aug-13	quarterly	\$22		Some content is available on their website
13	City Limits	P-Card		Mar-13	bi-monthly			No longer in Print - see 1/29/13 email "City Limits"
14	Communication Arts Magazine	P-Card		Jul-13			May/June 2013	DCM 6 Issues a Year
15	Communication Briefings	P-Card		Feb-14	monthly	\$127	Apr-14	Fed tax id: 26-3682790

Ready

Figure 3-Calendar—the year at a glance.

2012				2013		
July	August	September	January	February	March	
Advertising Age	American Econ Ass. Journals	Challenge		ARPA SAGE	City Limits	
Before & After Communications Arts	How	Crain's NY Bus	NEW RENEWAL DATE - FY 14/15 - Jan 2015 Remaining Balance of Crain's Insider Rolled over October 2012	Crain's Insider	Chief Leader	
	City Journal	Harvard Business Review - Print		Comm Briefings	Hildy Dworkin: Moved to March FY13 only	
		Harvard Business Review - Online	Paid together - Will combine for fiscal Year 2013/2014	Social Service Review		
		Journal of HIV/AIDS				
		Regional Labor Review				
Last Year's Total →	\$200.00	\$786.46	\$1,133.97	\$254.00	\$272.66	
October	November	December	April	May	June	
Governing	PAR	PA Times	Administrative Prof Today	Nat'l Journal		
Nat'l Bttn. On DV Prvntn.	Journal of Marriage & Family	Immigration Procedures Handbook*	Nat'l Affairs	Immigration Procedures Handbook -		
Managing People at Work	Training	NY Family Law Statutes - Yellow Book*		NYCRR - Title 18*		
	Print	Office Professional	Hildy Dworkin: Paid 4/9/13	Immigration Briefings*		

Figure 4-Routing by name of publication

Subscriptions - Annex.xlsx [Shared] - Microsoft Excel

Home Insert Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Add-Ins Acrobat

Clipboard Font Alignment Number Conditional Formatting Styles Cells Insert Delete Format Sort & Find & Filter Select Editing

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C21 Allen, Christine/OSR

Subscription Routing List							
Crain's New York Business		Governing		Harvard Business Review		How	
Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location
Rhymer, Corea/Audit	180 Water - ??? Fl	Kraus-Friedberg, Gordon/Finance	180 Water	Pardus-Abbadessa, Fran/OCSE	2 Washington-22nd Fl.	Ress, Connie/OCM	180 Water St. 25th
Schantz, Susan/Finance	180 Water - ??? Fl	Ramirez, Sally/Finance	180 Water				
		Winston, Irita/Finance	180 Water				
		Drobenare, Helene/Finance	180 Water				
		Gaul, Katy/FIA	180 Water-6th Fl.				
		Patycka, Anna/OER	180 Water -25th Fl.				
Immigration Briefings		National Affairs		National Bltn on D.V.		National Journal	
Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location
Dworetzky, Joan/ORIA	180 Water	Cmmr. Doar	180 Water-25th Fl.	Thorne, Tracey/DVEIS	180 Water -24th Fl.	Dyjak, Kathryn/ Legislative Affairs	180 Water - 25th Fl.
						Smith, Pat/ First Dep. Cmmr.	180 Water - 25th Fl.
Print		Training		Government Technology		Communication Briefings	
Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location	Recipient/Office	Location
Ress, Connie/OCM	180 Water - 25th Fl.	Walker, Melinda/ORA		Kraus-Friedberg, Gordon/Finance	180 Water	Hayes, Phyllis/Finance	180 Water
		Glosband-Mendez, Julie/OSR	2 Washington-18th Fl.	Ramirez, Sally/Finance	180 Water	Russ, Regina/FIA	180 Water-20th Fl.
		McBarnette, Dawne/OCSE	2 Washington 22nd Fl.	Winston, Irita/Finance	180 Water	Nembhard, Wendy/Fl S	180 Water

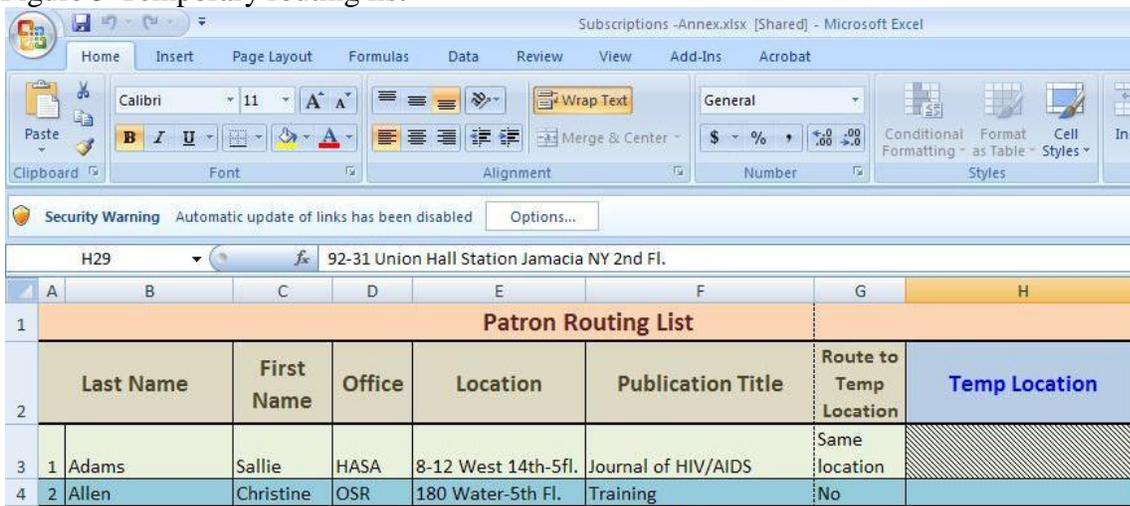
Calendar Subscription Info Access Info Routing Sheet Patron Routing Sheet1

Ready

Restoring Library Operations

Accomplished in just 10 business days, we had enough account information and access to our publications to resume services. With more than one of the agency's buildings closed, employees were scattered. We did not know who had e-mail access, but that was the best way to try and reach them. We sent an e-mail to each patron who received 1 or more periodicals regularly. The e-mail contained the publications the patron received and a chart to enter their temporary location address and phone number if they had one. We included a box to check "yes" or "no" indicating whether or not they wanted to receive the items at their temporary location. We even utilized our new and improved subscription management workbook to add a sheet containing the responses (see Figure 5).

Figure 5-Temporary routing list



Patron Routing List							
	Last Name	First Name	Office	Location	Publication Title	Route to Temp Location	Temp Location
1							
2							
3	1	Adams	Sallie	HASA	8-12 West 14th-5fl.	Journal of HIV/AIDS	Same location
4	2	Allen	Christine	OSR	180 Water-5th Fl.	Training	

At the same time, with the help of my deputy commissioner, an e-mail was sent to all senior staff indicating that the library was back in operation. I included links to our digital library, e-mail, and specific lists. We also needed to locate and contact those departments with which we conduct business regularly—especially finance and contracts.

Right after we resumed services, one-time entry was permitted into the building to retrieve some materials we needed—files, supplies, etc. This enabled us to build upon what we already did.

Summary and Conclusions

Some Advantages and Lessons Learned

There was a positive side to being displaced. Since we were in a conference room with staff from other departments, we took the time to market the library and gained some new patrons and learned what was lacking in their information needs. It gave us the time to listen.

Without the day-to-day routine and people walking in and out of the library we had more time to devote to special projects. In collaboration with our IT department, a library portal is being

developed to enhance our digital presence in the agency. This was a good time to schedule planning meetings with IT and conduct our own library-related research in order to see what other libraries have done and learn all we could about the tools.

Having less available to us enabled us to think beyond our regular routines. We created a better organized space for shared files. I had time to brainstorm about library policies and procedures with my assistant. We seemed to say often “oh, when we get back we can do that!”

Discussions around disaster preparedness for libraries seem to concentrate on the actual space. We were lucky that there was no physical damage to the library. Also, when the library is within a larger institution, there may not be plans specific to the library. After 9/11 I did not have the opportunity to contribute to the agency’s disaster preparedness plans. Since our agency is vital to the well-being of the citizens of New York City, the priority naturally is to plan for those operations that affect services to the public.

It is important then for the librarian to take the responsibility of ensuring continuity of services to the staff. As much as we have all heard “back up your files” I only applied this to important information in case of system failure that affected network and Internet access. Many of our backup files are print. I never considered we would be without access to those files. It was lucky we had a ready-made shared drive at our disposal.

A few weeks after we resumed services, we were moved to another temporary location. All the work we did allowed us to move with little or no disruption of services. We reaped the benefits of our newly organized shared drive and other improvements. We remained there for an additional six weeks before returning to headquarters. The experience gave us the time to create more efficient procedures that we were able to implement immediately.