



# Guide to Expanding Mitigation

MAKING THE CONNECTION WITH ARTS & CULTURE



FEMA

**RiskMAP**  
Increasing Resilience Together



Photo: The Gilbert F. White Memorial Flood Level Marker on Boulder Creek in Boulder, Colorado



Photo: Jersey Barriers Project, Belmar, New Jersey / Belmar Arts Council

Can you use the words “art” and “hazard mitigation” in the same sentence? Yes, you can! These words are not often connected, but a meaningful and powerful relationship does exist between art and hazard mitigation. Emergency managers have a long history of working with communities to reduce the risks disasters pose to homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure. Protecting our cultural resources and artistic expression begins with acknowledging that the arts are a key part of our communities, exploring how we can partner with artists to communicate risk, and building a culture of preparedness across the Nation.

Art is all around us – in murals, sculpture, literature, and music. It sparks conversation and bonds communities. In the wake of a disaster, the arts can be called upon to offer solace, comfort, and connection to help communities heal. They can be a symbol of resilience during recovery. Art can resonate deeply with people and inspire civic creativity that could otherwise be difficult to initiate.

This *Guide to Expanding Mitigation* explores how community officials can work with the arts and culture sector to support hazard mitigation, including the planning process. This guide is a starting place for community officials to initiate a conversation with arts and culture partners to make investments in mitigation relevant and risk information accessible, while building the knowledge and capacity of the entire community.



This *Guide to Expanding Mitigation* is part of a series highlighting innovative and emerging partnerships for mitigation.



Photo: Flood Mural, Rock Rapids, Iowa / Rock Rapids Arts Council



Photo: Rabanus Park in Fargo, North Dakota / Rachel Asleson for The Fargo Project (2016)

## TAKING RISK COMMUNICATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Traditionally, risk communication engagement involves meeting with stakeholders to better understand an issue, holding open house events to share resources with the public, and conducting online and social media engagement to promote the latest information. Messages are often based on the best available data, whether it's the number of homes at high risk of flooding or the cost of rebuilding a damaged home. These traditional engagement strategies may not connect with some people in a meaningful way.

It is critical to communicate risk in a way that is accessible and meaningful to all people by building in context that aligns with their experiences. That is where the arts come into play by communicating hazard vulnerability through storytelling and aesthetic experience. Using community art to link hazards with spaces and places contributes to a regional identity with which people intuitively associate. Something as simple as a mural on a flood barrier has the power to inspire conversations and build risk awareness, grow a community's intuitive understanding of place, and boost civic pride that can strengthen resilience-building efforts. By linking risks to everyday community concerns, we can meet people where they are and engage in timely and relevant conversations. Through art, community officials can share information about risks and vulnerability to hazards with a diverse audience in a non-confrontational manner and a comfortable environment.



Risk Communication is the process of communicating potential losses of life and property from hazards and how said losses might be reduced or prevented.

## ARTS AND CULTURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

For local officials involved in hazard mitigation, this guide provides many easy ways to engage the arts and culture sector within your community. Partnering with this sector can expand your engagement strategy with the goal of reducing risk at every level of society, from the individual citizen to the whole community.

As of 2017, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that arts and cultural production accounts for over \$804 billion (4.3 percent) of the U.S. economy, an impact larger than the transportation, tourism, or agriculture sectors. The arts sector contributes over 5 million jobs. This magnitude of impact demonstrates the influence artists can leverage when contributing to risk reduction efforts. It also shows the importance of identifying the mitigation needs of this valuable sector.

Resources at the end of this guide can help you make the economic case for incorporating the arts into your hazard mitigation efforts. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts created an interactive map with data that demonstrate the power of the arts to drive the national and state economies. You can reference it when making the case for the role of arts and culture in your community. There are also resources that you can share with local artists and art organizations. For example, following a disaster, the non profit organization Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+) provides emergency relief to studio artists.

A strong arts and culture sector can benefit both local economies and civil society. Concentrations of creative businesses are known to increase economic development and improve property value. Arts and cultural activities are also known to attract tourists, promote local pride, and increase civic engagement. Economic resilience and community cohesion are especially important in a post disaster environment.

### DID YOU KNOW?

	NY	NJ
Value added to state's economy by the arts	\$114B	\$22B
Arts value added as share of state's economy	7.8%	3.9%
Arts employment	462k	133k

Source: National Endowment for the Arts, State Level Estimates of Arts and Cultural Employment, 2017



Photo: Masks in the Aftermath, U.S. Virgin Islands / William Steltzer

## ARTS AND CULTURE DURING RECOVERY AND BEYOND

The creative process can be a powerful recovery tool when basic essentials like food and shelter have been secured, but communities are still struggling to reconnect to their pre-disaster identity, reflect on what has happened, and express what they have been through. Introducing the creative process and artists into the mitigation process does not just have to involve, for example, bringing a musician into your community to raise funds for disaster recovery. Creative expression can kindle long-term healing and inspire a common vision for community recovery that helps tackle the monumental challenges of rebuilding homes or reconnecting essential services. These efforts help the Nation build a culture of preparedness.

The arts can be effective in disaster recovery by:

- Providing an opportunity for reflection;
- Reducing the risk of conflict caused by stress and the feeling of overwhelming hopelessness;
- Establishing new communities;
- Reconnecting old communities;
- Reducing feelings of isolation;
- Strengthening citizens' connection to place;
- Creating a shared sense of hope and optimism; and
- Channeling post-traumatic stress and anxiety into creative and productive community outcomes.

Beyond recovery, engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders is a crucial part of the mitigation planning process that bolsters community resilience. Cooperative relationships strengthen hazard mitigation plans and the ability of communities to implement mitigation goals. By bringing the arts and culture sectors into mitigation planning conversations, officials can identify projects that not only reduce risk, but also benefit the broader community. Artists can support hazard mitigation projects by leveraging ideas, talents, and funding streams to accomplish more together. Ultimately, resilient communities are connected communities; arts and culture stakeholders, in creating a sense of place and belonging, can bring people together, strengthen their bonds, and help them connect and protect each other before (and after) a disaster.

The first goal of FEMA's Strategic Plan is to *Build a Culture of Preparedness*.



Engaging with arts and culture partners can help achieve these guiding principles:

1. Trust – Develop trust by understanding the culture, context, and history of communities outside of disaster, as well as when an event occurs.
2. Inclusion – Bring the cultural perspectives of all stakeholders to the table.
3. Cross-cultural communication – Design communication efforts as cross-cultural encounters.
4. Support local practices and successes – Learn about the ways people are already prepared and enhance these efforts using culturally aware strategies.

## ARTISTS AS LOCAL CHAMPIONS

Artists are visionaries. Even amidst the challenges our communities face, they can imagine brighter possibilities. Artists are individuals with the innate ability to gather people in conversation and act as catalysts for change. Artists often work outside the constraints of government bureaucracy and policies, able to experiment freely and generate prototype ideas. With this in mind, local officials should consider artists as essential community partners in communicating and reducing risk through a variety of art forms. Each of the following sections describes different artistic mediums that can be used to communicate risk and mitigation.

### Public Art

Public art is any medium meant to be placed in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Public art includes art exhibited in a public space, including publicly accessible buildings. More important than its physical location is the relationship between the content and the audience, or what the art is saying and to whom. After time passes following the last disaster and hazard mitigation projects are implemented, a formerly heightened sense of risk is diminished and the public can quickly forget the importance of ongoing resiliency needs in the community. Public art presents an opportunity to remind people that risk is usually only reduced, not eliminated. It provides a space for our anxiety and fear without being invasive or direct. A permanent public art exhibit can remind us that we are vulnerable as both individuals and as communities, and there are actions we can take now to reduce those vulnerabilities and to build a culture of resilience and preparedness.

### Music

Musical performances have the power to bring communities together. For thousands of years, people have used music to tell stories and explain the mysteries of life; music is an avenue for connecting with the world. When it comes to mitigation, music has the potential to be an anthem for risk reduction. A rousing song behind your cause can solidify support and garner attention for overlooked projects or community goals. Music is another medium to disseminate necessary risk information in a way that engages people who may not otherwise be interested. In one example, following floods in the small town of Lyons, Colorado in 2013, six local musicians came together to perform songs that touched on a sense of resilience, hope, and community.



Song from 2013 Lyons, Colorado Floods  
Title: Little Rain  
Original Release Date: 5/6/14  
Release Date: 5/6/14  
Label: The Watergirls  
Copyright: 2014 Sally Truitt  
Duration: 2:26 minutes



Photo: Interim Flood Protection Measures (IFPM) Mural Arts Program in New York City

### Performance Art & Forum Theater

Performance art combines the visual arts with dramatic performance. Forum theater is an interactive performance between actors and the audience. In this process, the audience can suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage to change the outcome of what they are seeing. The goal is to bring audience members into the performance to shape conversations and ideas in a more collective forum. Performance art and forum theater offer a whole new method of public engagement. Traditional public engagement and outreach involves presenting risk information data in a public meeting and then asking for the public's thoughts and comments. Communicating risk through a theater performance can democratize engagement in a meaningful way by speaking to individuals and officials more personally and on their own terms.

### Creative Placemaking

Placemaking is a multifaceted approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces. Placemaking capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential with the intention of creating public spaces that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being. Placemaking is both a process and a philosophy that uses urban design principles. It can be either official and government-led, or community-driven tactical urbanism—an approach that uses short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions at the neighborhood scale. Too often, mitigation projects are identified, prioritized, and implemented with little to no concern for their impact on the community and their place within the cultural identity. The principles of creative placemaking can ensure that hazard mitigation projects and plans are not only effective at reducing risk but are culturally relevant and feasible within a community.

## RESOURCES FOR ENGAGING THE ARTS AND CULTURE COMMUNITY

A first step to connect with the arts community is to engage your local or regional arts council. A link can be found here: [nasaa-arts.org/](http://nasaa-arts.org/). Several national organizations can provide greater understanding about the arts and culture community, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, Americans for the Arts, ArtPlace America, and the National Consortium for Creative Placemaking. There are also countless local organizations that may be a good resource as emergency managers begin strategizing ways to engage with stakeholders. In FEMA Region II, some examples of these organizations include the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and Creative New Jersey.

### FEMA Hazard Mitigation Planning

[fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning](http://fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning)

*Review standards and guidance for the planning process.*

### What is Mitigation?

[www.fema.gov/what-mitigation](http://www.fema.gov/what-mitigation)

*Learn more about how FEMA defines mitigation.*

### Natural Hazards Center Observer, Volume XXXIX, Issue 6: Art and Disaster (July 2015)

[hazards.colorado.edu/observer/archives](http://hazards.colorado.edu/observer/archives)

*Learn more about how art contributes to communities during a disaster.*

### National Endowment for the Arts, How to Do Creative Placemaking (January 2017)

[www.arts.gov/publications/how-do-creative-placemaking](http://www.arts.gov/publications/how-do-creative-placemaking)

*Review case studies and ideas for how arts can play a role in making communities successful.*

### National Coalition for Arts Preparedness and Emergency Response, Cultural Placekeeping Guide (2017)

[www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Cultural-Placekeeping-Guide.pdf](http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Cultural-Placekeeping-Guide.pdf)

*Guidance on creating a network in the creative community for emergency action.*

### CERF+ Safety Net

[cerfplus.org/cerf-responds-to-disasters/](http://cerfplus.org/cerf-responds-to-disasters/)

*An organization that helps artists who are recovering from recent disasters.*

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## ENGAGE WITH US

Are you a state, territorial, tribal, or local official interested in making the connection between art and hazard mitigation? Are you an arts organization or artist interested in connecting with local officials to reduce risk from hazards? Please contact us at [FEMA-R2-MT-Planning@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:FEMA-R2-MT-Planning@fema.dhs.gov).

## Hurricane Aftermath

by Aminah Saleem

*(Survivor of Hurricanes Irma & Maria, U.S. Virgin Islands)*

This thing they call hurricane aftermath,  
Is not like any math I know.

Not algebra, geometry, nor multiplication.

Wait. I know. It's more like subtraction.

Take away all everyday conveniences and what do I have?

Zero.

Then, I must figure out a whole new way of living.

I get it!

Aftermath, is the result of a new exponent in a math equation called life.

Just like any other math equation, I must solve it,  
so I can move forward.

Hurricane aftermath takes critical thinking  
but once I get the flow, I'll be okay.

I will figure it out because failing is not an option.

Okay! In life, you must do the math.

Find solutions to problems after a hardball is thrown at you,  
Making you wonder how to pick up the pieces and stay sane.

Yes, hurricane aftermath is like math.

It is always hard, but you feel good when you ace the test.