

2020 Wildfire Response and Recovery

Note: We understand that the situation across the state is variable and that people are still in all stages of risk and evacuation. This is intended to assist people as they are ready.

From Oregon Heritage...We mourn with the people who lost friends and family, homes, businesses, community anchors, natural spaces, and historic places. We are grateful to the first responders, fire fighters, National Guard, public agencies, volunteers, and donors who worked to save people, properties, historic and natural resources, and support those displaced. You really show what community is.

Now as we start to emerge, recover, and reflect, we are seeing how important place is. In some cases, the communities and responders rallied to save places valued by locals. In others, we see the mourning for the loss of historic, natural, and community spaces that reflect the identity of the place. We saw people come together in the rush of evacuation and the aftermath.

It is important, now, to continue our mutual support. The recovery will be years in coming. Oregon's heritage organizations and keepers of historic places have a critical role. The museums, historic downtowns, and historic sites are part of your community's identity and they need them more than ever. Once you have your people housed and settled, take action. **If your organization's or main street's buildings and collections were lost or damaged, you are still important, so don't give up.** Work for your organization, but we encourage you to also make space for your organization to serve your community.

- Be at the table when your community considers how it will rebuild.
- Be a shoulder to people who continue to mourn and heal.
- Document this tragic event, so people in the future will understand.

And whether your organization is in a community that burned or was in an evacuation zone, or you were watching the news in heartbreak of others suffering, this is a time to reflect and prepare. Please do consider timing of your actions in deference to the feelings of those deeply affected by the fires.

Organizational recovery

Operations

Once your people are stabilized it is important to get to work. Here are some general resources and things to consider.

Not directly impacted, but you want to start planning?

- [Disaster Resilience](#)

Directly (loss of or damage to assets, evacuation issues) and Indirectly (smoke and evacuation issues)

- Get your board together
 - Vent
 - Establish immediate action items and assignments
 - Organizational condition assessment

- Asset condition assessment
 - Document with photos
 - Communications process
 - Federal and state resource agencies
 - Local government agencies
 - Public
 - Develop a timeline and process for long-term planning
- Look into general resources.
 - [Oregon Emergency Management](#)
 - [FEMA – Oregon Disaster Declaration](#)
- Contact your insurance company
- Assess your condition (staffing, volunteers, assets)
- Communicate with state and local officials (legislators, county elected officials, city officials & staff) about your organization’s condition and value.

Historic Asset Recovery

Main Streets, historic districts, museums, archives, genealogical societies, libraries, historic cemeteries and other heritage organizations have historic assets they will need to be addressed. Here are things to consider.

- Be sure you are cleared by officials to enter the historic property or collection facility.
- Wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment – We have all been breathing fire smoke, but interior fires have all kinds of toxic risks.
- Use caution as you move through the space and assess the damage.

Property – If your organization or downtown has lost or had damage to a property that is historic or significant to the community, here are things to consider.

- Lost

- Document the loss in your records.
 - Photograph the remains.
 - Collect photos of property prior to event to document features.
 - Collect oral history from current & former staff and volunteers.
 - Details of the property and past preservation efforts
 - Value of and experiences with the property
 - Collect oral history from the community
 - Value of and experiences with the property
- Should there be a replica or a monument? – Have a community conversation.
 - [Oregon Humanities](#) offers resources for community conversations including training and grants.
 - Take action on the decision – lead the planning, search for funding, etc.

- Damaged

- Promote the value, especially if it is one of few historic anchors remaining.
 - Collect stories of the community value for the places.
 - Document economic, livability, tourism values.

- Share the value with officials and the public to garner support and volunteers.
 - Include these values in funding requests.
 - Reference plans or community visioning that include the value of historic places.
 - Access the resources for structural assessment and preservation repair estimates.
 - Use the [Secretary of the Interiors Standards](#) for the estimates.
 - Insurance
 - FEMA, OEM, private foundations, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Restore Oregon
 - Seek resources to preserve it.
 - Insurance
 - FEMA, OEM, private foundations, Oregon Heritage
 - Update the community on progress.
- **Collections** – If your organization houses a historic collection or library of heritage resources, here are things to consider.
- Lost
 - Work to create a new facility for collections.
 - Document and collect related to the disaster:
 - Photographs, oral history, objects, etc. from the community
 - Collect oral history from current & former staff and volunteers.
 - Details of the collection and the past preservation efforts
 - Value of and experiences with the collection
 - Develop a new collecting plan & actively collect
 - Consider more recent history.
 - Reach out of your community to people who have moved, but may have local history.
 - Damaged
 - If you have a disaster response plan, use it now.
 - Use your disaster wheel for salvage steps and view these [resources](#).
 - Establish security and safety, so you can get volunteers to work.
 - Don't go in to the smoke affected or damaged building until you have a plan.
 - Get appropriate Personal Protective Equipment.
 - Touch nothing, until assessed. There are many kinds of smoke and they should be treated differently.
 - Assess damage.
 - Find helpful assessment checklists [here](#).
 - Evaluate condition and type of damage.
 - Prioritize the collections to start with – condition, extent of damage, historical significance.
 - Establish a work space and prepare materials. Or estimate materials and seek funding for them.
 - Train volunteers.

- Separate wet materials from dry and dry the wet materials as soon as possible.
- Promote the value of the collection to get community support, volunteers and funding.
- Update the community on progress.

Be at the community table.

Heritage resources are part of the fabric of a community. Here are some actions to consider in supporting community recovery.

- Assign volunteers or board members to attend city and community planning meetings.
- Offer historic materials, photos, maps, etc. to assist in documenting what was lost.
- Lead the conversation about and action on historic places.
 - o [Oregon Humanities](#) offers resources for community conversations including training and grants.
 - o Damaged
 - Are they critical to the community? Are they one of few historic anchors remaining? Do they tie into community identity? How many resources should be used to save them?
 - Take action on the decision – lead the planning, search for funding, etc.
 - Help find the resources for structural assessment and repair estimates.
 - o Lost
 - Were they critical to the community? Did they link to community identity? Should there be a replica, monument or interpretation?
 - Take action on the decision – lead the planning, search for funding, etc.
 - Help find the resources for documentation, interpretation, and commemoration.
 - o Document the loss in your records.
- Ensure that historic places are considered in the redevelopment plans.
 - o Gather community support for historic places
 - o Rally volunteers to notify planners and show up to meetings
 - o Provide talking points about the value of these places.
- If needed and you have space, offer meeting space for people, organizations, community groups, that lost their space.

Be shoulder for healing.

Identity and anchoring are critical for recovery. Here ways to consider helping people heal.

- If your place is intact and safe, allow it to be a sanctuary for people to retreat.
- Organize downtown meet-ups in-person or virtually.
- Hold a small business forum in-person or virtually.
- Provide the history of local fires and how the community recovered, this helps provide hope – share on social media, through other organizations, in downtown windows.
- Provide a workshop on preserving their damaged cherished items.

- Provide the memories they lost – you may have year books, family history, photos, and other items related to their history and what they lost.
 - o Look for funding to provide free copies of photos and documents.
 - o Share the stories past and more recent stories through your social media, rotating exhibits, exhibits at public places that remain.
- Document their experience.
 - o Hold small group shares about the experience.
 - Recruit a counselor to be there.
 - Ask to record, but allow them not to. This is for healing and documenting.

Document the event

Whether for commemoration, or to help people process, documenting the event is critical. Here are actions to consider.

- Hold listening sessions & record them.
- Collect oral histories.
- Collect objects that represent the community (business signs, community structures, etc.)
- Hire or recruit a volunteer photographer to document the damage.
- Track community response and mutual support.
- Document the local businesses – impact & recovery
- Document the recovery process – planning meetings, organizations, plans, etc.