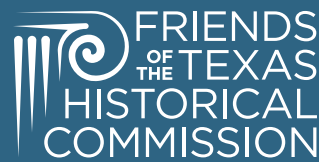


CRISIS AND TRAUMA  
RESPONSE TOOLKIT  
FOR CULTURAL WORKERS  
2023



# INTRODUCTION

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## THE CRISIS RESPONSE & TRAUMA RESPONSE TOOLKIT

The collection of materials in this toolkit are the results of an almost two-year process by cultural workers, community members, and experts to empower colleagues at cultural institutions to help communities and individuals impacted by trauma. Designed for cultural workers, this toolkit provides information about what trauma is, what impacts it can have in settings involving cultural organizations, and how these organizations can respond.

This toolkit is made possible with funding from a September 2020 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Studies through the CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act). The project team included Texas Historical Commission staff; community members at the Caddo Mounds State Historic Site in Alto, the Magoffin Home State Historic Site in El Paso, and the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site in Rockport; and the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission. Their willingness to share their experiences, talents, and time has created seeds of healing for others to grow in their institutions and communities.

## CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN TRYING TIMES

In the years immediately preceding the pandemic, several of our historic sites in Texas saw natural and manmade disasters that traumatized their communities. These events were Hurricane Harvey in August of 2017 that plowed into Fulton Mansion and made landfall at Rockport-Fulton and devastated large swathes of the Texas gulf coast community, an EF-3 tornado that tore through the Caddo Mounds and the nearby communities of Alto and Weeping Mary during the April 2019 Caddo Culture Day, and the horrific August 2019 hate crime targeting Mexican Americans at an El Paso Walmart. In each of these instances, museum and historic site staff struggled with healing themselves and their loved ones - but also saw the need of the community who turned to their institutions for respite from these events. In the immediate aftermath of these events and for days and months after, they provided programs and spaces for their communities, and as an institution, the THC worked to provide for the unique needs of its staff during these times.

## COVID-19 & COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

In March of 2020, a novel coronavirus quickly developed into a global pandemic, and the world began a journey together through devastating events that have defined an era. The impacts of the pandemic were felt differently by people across the world—a shared experience none of us could escape entirely. It challenged our understanding of our world and ourselves and prompted us to seek meaning in these experiences.

Other collective traumas in history such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, the Holocaust, and the Great Depression, all defined generations, were catalysts for changes in national policy, sentiments, and values, and continue to shape our society well past the traumatic events themselves. The COVID-19 pandemic caused stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and anger at the individual level. At the community level, these effects upend traditionally held values, foster distrust, and provoke violence. In this same time, we have also seen a growth of creativity and problem-solving, self-awareness, empathy, and stress management. Being able to identify and address the impacts of traumatic events can be positive for individuals and communities.



Caddo Mounds State Historic Site  
in Alto, Texas.

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Museums and historic sites faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of ways. Many closed for periods of time, and some have never reopened due to the economic impacts of those closures. Some realized that they were trusted anchors that communities experienced as places of peace, reflection, and interaction with the broader human experience that could help them make sense of the events we were living through.

Texas Historical Commission (THC) sites were among the first in the nation to reopen after lockdown in May 2020. Despite uncertainty and hysteria, when HSD sites opened their doors, our communities came in. Our sites became places to safely get out of the isolation, make connections, and find a sense of normalcy even when nothing was “normal.”

#### TRAINING FOR AND INTERPRETING CRISES AT CULTURAL SITES

These crisis events become part of the history of these sites, with visitors wanting and expecting to learn more and in some cases even sharing their own experiences about the events. At the same time, cultural workers at Texas historic sites also had to deal with the disorientation and even personal loss resulting from these events. With limited training in the internal and public-facing handling of these events, staff did the best they could.

Our site staff were well prepared with emergency plans to address impacts of these events on life safety, facilities, and collections, but not the psychological and emotional distress that came with them. They navigated through largely on instinct, and in many cases did well by the communities and teams but not without additional stress on themselves. This was particularly true when faced with visitors' questions about the events that have become an inexorable part of each site's story. Staff needed a framework for how to begin processing them into a meaningful narrative, even while the impacts of the events were still playing out. We recognized that while the human experience is at the core of our mission of storytelling and preservation, most of us were never trained to navigate human psychology.

We have come to realize the need for us at the Texas Historical Commission (THC) to be proactively and better prepared. The THC recognizes that institutions that invest in becoming trauma-informed are better positioned to navigate the complicated and far-reaching challenges of crises and collective trauma and can better provide support to the staff they depend on as well as the communities they serve.

#### BUILDING THE BRIDGE AS WE CROSS IT

The mission of the THC is captured in the idea that we are stewards of the real places that tell the real stories of Texas history. Without these stories, our sites and our artifacts are silent. At the core of our mission is the interaction between storyteller and listener based on their shared experience of being human. Caring for people is vital to us caring for our sites.

The value of history is that historic narratives often communicate strength, optimism, and strategies for coping that hold valuable lessons for how we can face the challenges of our present day. With a greater understanding of trauma, how it manifests, and how we can help process it, we not only gain a better understanding of our past but of how the events we live today can better inform the future.



Fulton Mansion State Historic Site  
in Rockport, Texas.

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## METHODOLOGY

In developing the Crisis and Trauma Response Toolkit, the project team identified a set of topics, related to crisis and trauma response that most resonated with the needs at cultural sites. Then the team identified and brought on board experts who could speak to each of these topics. These individuals—expert professionals in the fields of social work, psychology, therapy, art therapy, or museum leadership from across the country—provided the team with detailed presentation content to share with both the teams.

The toolkit development process was structured as “lab sessions” with the “development” team. The team viewed the presentations and then discussed specific recommendations for internal-facing staff training as well as external-facing programming. These recommendations were then shared with the “better use” team, which reviewed them and provided feedback for improvements to allow for broad applicability across cultural sites.

The final recommendations were incorporated into a chapter for each topic. Each chapter includes an educational video and a brief narrative synopsis of the content, a list of key terms, a discussion guide to foster conversation within the organization, a list of suggested trainings for staff, recommendations for working with impacted communities, and a reflection piece, written by a trauma survivor.

When we embarked on this project, we knew we were in for a lot of learning and that we needed to trust that we could build a bridge of healing between trauma and meaning—then cross it. There were missteps, reflection, and redirection as with any good learning process. The project took longer than we planned, and it took us down pathways we could never have anticipated. We present this final product as permanently incomplete, as the learning we hope it inspires should continue to evolve and inform, just as the stories of today become the histories of tomorrow.



Magoffin Home State Historic Site  
in El Paso, Texas.

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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this "Crisis and Trauma Response Toolkit" do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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As stated in the introduction, this toolkit is offered as "permanently incomplete" product and will be continually updated as new information and resources become available. The views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations shared in the video presentations are those of the presenting experts and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission.

While some of the video presentations are provided by licensed therapists, the training and programming recommendations, which came out of the "lab" sessions, are presented as suggested practices to be used by cultural workers at their discretion and NOT as therapy.

