



Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office Role in Disaster Responses

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What is VISHPO?

- The Virgin Islands State Historic Preservation Office is an office within the Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Preserves architectural, archaeological, and submerged cultural heritage of the Virgin Islands
- Supports informed decision-making during development and emergency response actions

"We ensure emergency actions do not unintentionally damage irreplaceable cultural resources."

Why This Matters

- Many historic and archaeological sites are located:
- Along **shorelines**
- In **nearshore waters**
- Within **industrial and port areas**
- Includes:
- Shipwrecks
- Submerged prehistoric sites
- Historic coastal structures

"Response actions such as staging, dredging, anchoring, debris removal, and shoreline cleanup can directly impact these resources."





Federal Framework

- **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)**
 - Federal Agencies Compliance with Section 106:
 - Identify historic properties
 - Assess effects
 - Resolve adverse impacts
- **👉 Applies to:**
 - Oil spill response
 - Hazard mitigation
 - Federally funded or permitted actions

Territorial Framework

- **Virgin Islands Antiquities & Cultural Properties Act**

- Section 954 Requires:

- Review of territorial government actions affecting historic resources
- Archaeological permitting
- Protection of burial sites

👉 **Important for local response coordination**

VISHPO Role



- Provide **Section 106 consultation** during emergency undertakings
- **Maintain:**
 - Cultural resource inventory
 - Archaeological site data
 - Historic building records
- **Advise on:**
 - Avoidance strategies
 - Minimization measures
 - Data recovery when unavoidable

👉 *"We are a regulatory partner AND a technical resource."*



Current Capabilities

- Cultural resource reports archive
- Site location data (Google Earth)
- Photographic and historical records
- Research library and documentation repository

👉 *"However... much of this is not yet fully digitized or easily deployable in real-time responses."*

Core Challenge

Limited Real-Time Data Accessibility

- Many records:
 - Paper-based
 - Static PDFs
 - Non-integrated mapping

Implications for CRRT:

- Slower consultation during emergencies
- Limited ability to:
 - Rapidly identify sensitive areas
 - Pre-plan avoidance zones
 - Integrate with GIS-based response systems

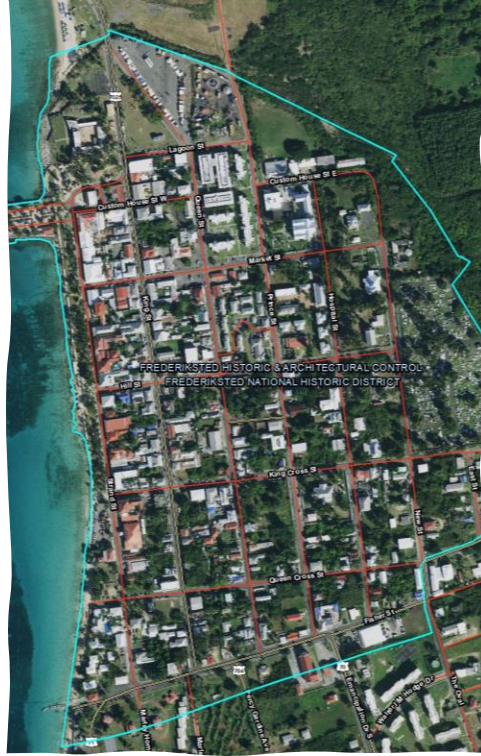
Digital Goals

Digital Transformation Goals

- GIS-based cultural resource database
- Secure, shareable geospatial layers:
 - Sensitive vs. non-sensitive data
- Integration with:
 - Emergency response platforms
 - Environmental sensitivity index (ESI) mapping

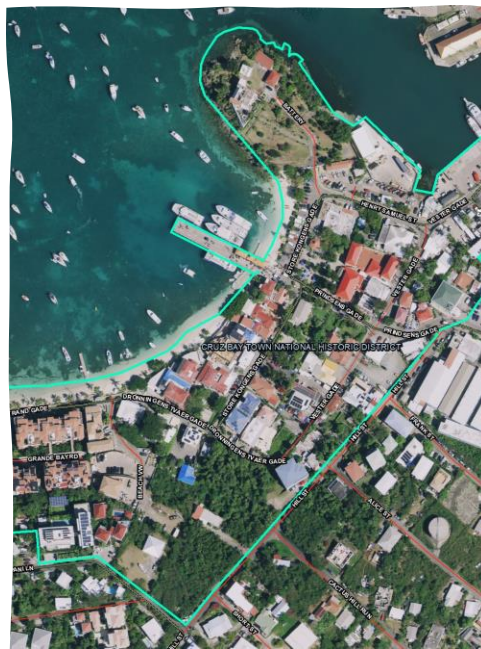
👉 *Goal: Put cultural resources on the same operational map as environmental assets.*





High Risk Coastal Zones

- Historic Districts shoreline exposure
- Coastal Archaeological sites



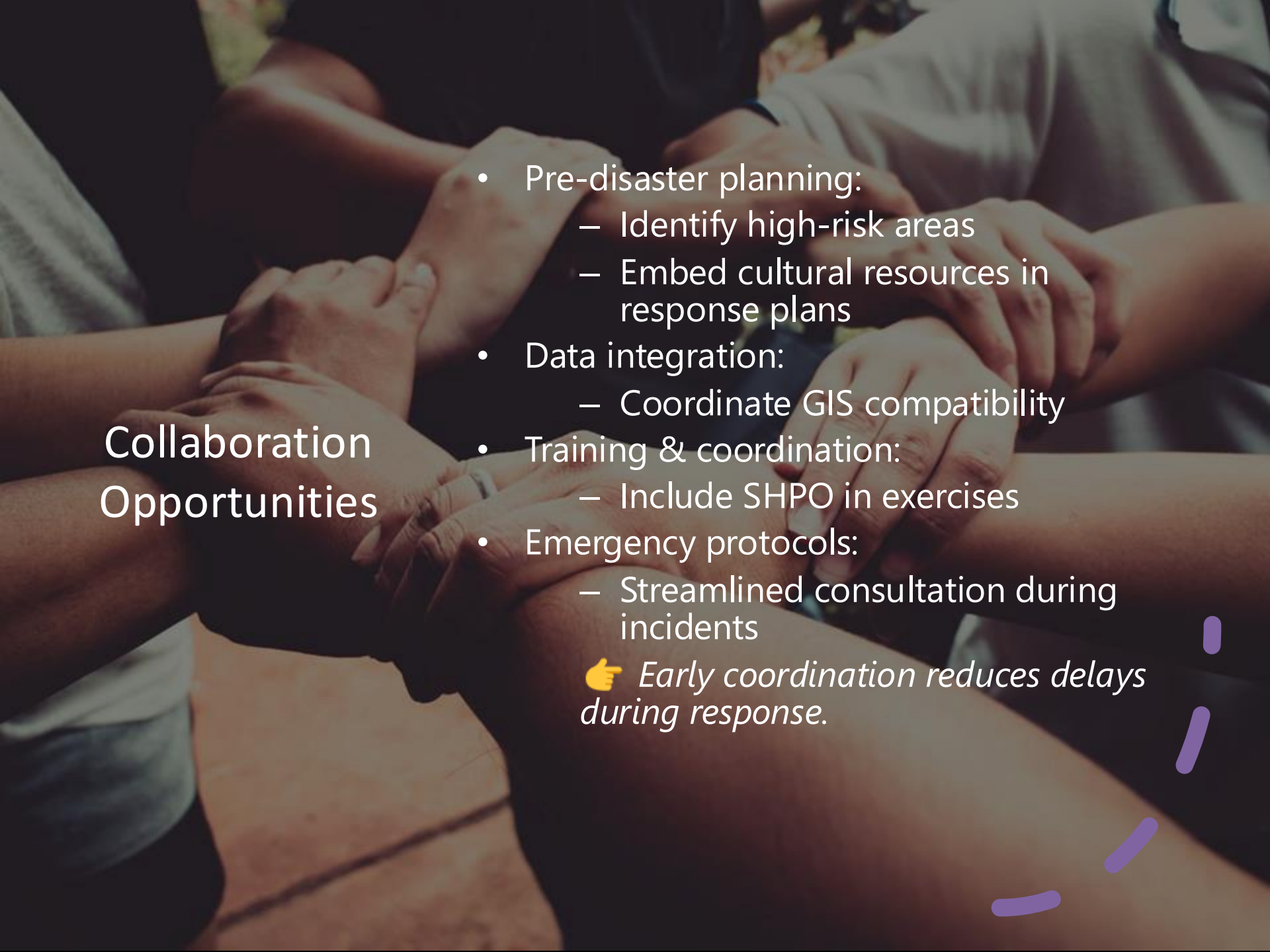
Archaeological Considerations

- Submerged and buried sites at risk
- “During a coastal spill response, staging equipment in an unvetted shoreline area could disturb a buried archaeological site or historic structure. Early coordination with SHPO allows responders to avoid those impacts without slowing operations.”



Spill Response Scenario

- Anchoring, staging, debris removal risks
- Anchoring impacts on submerged sites
- Shoreline staging over buried archaeology
- Debris removal risks



Collaboration Opportunities

- Pre-disaster planning:
 - Identify high-risk areas
 - Embed cultural resources in response plans
 - Data integration:
 - Coordinate GIS compatibility
 - Training & coordination:
 - Include SHPO in exercises
 - Emergency protocols:
 - Streamlined consultation during incidents
- 👉 *Early coordination reduces delays during response.*

Key Takeaways



Cultural resources are **at-risk during coastal disaster responses**



VISHPO is a **required regulatory partner (Federal & Local levels)**



Current systems limit **real-time data access**



We are actively working toward **digital integration**



Collaboration with CRRT improves **speed + compliance + protection**

Contact Us

“VISHPO maintains offices in St. Thomas (headquarters) and St. Croix to support territory-wide preservation review, consultation, and response coordination.”

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