

2020 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS || MENDOCINO COUNTY EMERGENCY RESPONSE CALL CENTER

OVERVIEW: Mendocino County developed a comprehensive, versatile Call Center program designed to serve as a prominent communication resource for Mendocino County residents during emergency response.

CHALLENGE: After responding to the devastating Redwood Complex Fire in 2017, the Mendocino County Executive Office and Sheriff's Office recognized the usefulness of activating a Call Center during emergency response. During the 2017 fire, Calls For Service were triaged via paper forms through the Call Center as Mendocino County Sheriff's Office performed welfare checks, fed animals behind evacuation lines, checked on property status and investigated missing person reports. The Call Center played a vital role in calming a worried and distraught community. Functioning as a valuable communication resource for residents during the fire, it was determined that a streamlined, comprehensive, and adaptable system was needed to respond to the seemingly recurring emergencies facing Mendocino County. Beginning in 2018, the two offices collaborated together to begin creating a more efficient, adaptable Call Center program that would be able to consistently respond to a variety of emergencies - whether it be fire, earthquake, flood, power outage or pandemic.

SOLUTION: Immediately following the 2017 fire, the County of Mendocino went to work creating efficiencies for the Call Center Program. Forms were standardized and the paper Triage process was automated. Working together, the Sheriff's Office and Executive Office then began using an early version of an online Call Taker form using Google Form software in 2018. This bypassed the previous reliance of documenting and triaging Calls For Service on paper and improved the speed at which information was disseminated to those in the field. Shortly thereafter and in preparation for a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) in 2019, the new comprehensive online Call Center program was approved for implementation and key positions were trained. In early 2020, the Call Center began using this online process using Google Form software to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Call Center staffing structure adapts to the needs of the incident and can function with minimal staff who fill dual roles, or can expand staffing to respond to a surge if appropriate. Dependent on the severity of the incident, staffing for the Call Center currently ranges from 4-13 employees. The Call Center program is overseen by a Call Center Manager who ensures the overall smooth function of the Call Center, and a Supervisor who supervises and assists the Call Takers in the room. Employees volunteer to serve in the Call Center as Call Takers to answer incoming calls, and a Triage Screener is responsible for distributing calls for service to the appropriate Emergency Operations Center (EOC) divisions. To ensure that a Call For Service has been completed, an Admin/Support position works with the various divisions to ensure Calls For Service have been completed, and a Data Liaison ultimately manages the data contained in the Call Center database. Comprehensive procedure manuals for each position allow for various positions to be staffed on a rotating schedule.

INNOVATION: Using Google Form software, the Call Center program was developed to efficiently handle incoming calls for service and triage that information to various divisions within the Emergency Operations Center. This program ensures consistent documentation by Call Takers directly into an online google form, which instantly feeds the data to a google spreadsheet, eliminating data entry redundancy. For \$40 per year, this google spreadsheet then automatically sends a “Call Center Ticket” with Call For Service information to an email account resulting in rapid triage to the appropriate division for response. The google spreadsheet itself also allows the Call Center to pull real-time metrics on various data points such as: geographic area of callers, types of Calls For Service, calls per day, and current number of outstanding Calls For Service. To prepare for every possibility, such as power outages and/or computer or internet malfunctions, the Call Center process includes a paper back-up version of the “Call Center Tickets” which can be distributed in person. This alternate method relies on Excel spreadsheets and prints a Triage Disposition stub through an automated mail merge procedure. Much of the Call Center structure and process remains the same with this alternative back-up method, resulting in a quick procedure transition should the incident require it.

RESULTS: After responding to the devastating Redwood Complex Fire in 2017, Mendocino County responded to the Mendocino Complex Fire in 2018, along with Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) and various fires in 2019. The Call Center program has proven to be efficient and versatile in responding to the ever changing needs of the COVID-19 emergency response. The electronic Google Form continues to be an invaluable triage tool during the pandemic where physical separation is necessary. The Call Center program has been in use since the Call Center was activated for COVID-19 response on March 3rd, fielding approximately 14,000 calls, with up to 325 calls per day. The Call Center continues to receive countless messages of gratitude from the public for the hard work and community service the Call Center provides to protect Mendocino County. Due to the versatility of the program, the Call Center is confidently prepared to respond to a multi-incident situation as COVID-19 response continues into the fire/PSPS season. Collaboration between the Executive Office and Sheriff’s Office has resulted in a program that addresses all facets of Call Center emergency response.

REPLICABILITY: The County of Mendocino is proud of the Call Center Program and its replicability within other organizations. A google account is required for this process but is easy to create. Google forms and accompanying google spreadsheets are free to use and there is a wide amount of information available online that help answer questions if they arise. Automated triage emails are a buy up option through Yet Another Mail Merge software but are budget friendly at a total of \$40.00 per calendar year. Using low cost software, the Call Center program is adaptable, flexible to the needs of the incident, efficient, and easy to use.

OPTIONAL SUBMISSION ATTACHMENTS: [Call Center Program Powerpoint](#), [Call Taker Google Form](#), [Triage Flowchart](#), [Reporting Sample](#)

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