

2016 CSAC Challenge Awards

TITLE: Improving Communication with Communities During Emergencies

OVERVIEW:

The San Diego County Public Health Services and Office of Emergency Services formed a network to share information with Limited English Proficient communities during emergencies.

PROBLEM OR CHALLENGE:

More than 400,000 San Diegans speak a language other than English at home and report that they speak English less than very well. Data from the California Health Interview Survey also illustrates that many non-native English speakers in San Diego are not prepared for an emergency. For example, the County of San Diego reports that during the 2011 San Diego County blackout, many residents with limited English did not get word through traditional media that schools were closed and may not have had access to information in their native languages. In order to address this concern, on May 28, 2013, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services (HHSA-PHS) and Office of Emergency Services (OES), in partnership with San Diego State University, hosted a one-day forum with local community leaders and community members to seek input on how to better share emergency information with Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities. The communities included those who spoke Spanish, Tagalog, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Vietnamese, Somali, and Karen. Through the use of interpreters, several focus groups were conducted and the communities' recommendations were compiled into a report that has been utilized to guide the formation of the present project.

SOLUTION:

In sum, the community leaders and members suggested that the most effective solution to improving communication with LEP communities would be to partner with trusted agencies to share information in various languages during emergencies. Taking this to heart, following the 2013 forum and ongoing to this day, the County of San Diego HHSA-PHS and OES conduct community presentations and one-on-one meetings with trusted agencies serving the aforementioned communities with the goal of requesting their help with disseminating critical information during emergencies in multiple languages. These partners form the County's "Partner Relay" which utilizes an online communication platform to share information.

ORIGINALITY:

Sharing information with LEP communities is a universal challenge. Unfortunately, agencies cannot rely on computer programs to translate sensitive information into multiple languages because any mistake could have serious consequences. Working with trusted community agencies to deliver information to LEP communities during emergencies is a national promising practice. San Diego County is one of the first Counties utilizing this approach and is having successful outcomes. Further, there is no standard prescription for creating a Partner Relay and relays will have unique strategies to respond to their communities' preferences. San Diego County utilizes an online information sharing platform, the social media site: *Ready San Diego Partner Connection*, supported by the OES. *Partner Connection* serves as a

central two-way communication forum for agencies to interact with the Emergency Operations Center during an emergency. The site is updated throughout the duration of an emergency and members have agreed to translate this information into various languages and share it with their communities.

BUDGET/COST/SAVINGS:

By joining the Partner Relay, members have agreed to assist the County by translating and disseminating information to LEP communities and there is no money exchanged. Staff time within Public Health Services and the Office of Emergency Services is utilized to coordinate the effort.

RESULTS:

From 2013 to present, over 300 community leaders have agreed to join the Partner Relay. Since July 2015, the County of San Diego HHSA-PHS and OES organized 7 emergency preparedness trainings and 3 communication drills for agencies serving the target communities. Over 200 individuals have participated representing government, clinical, educational, community-based, faith-based, and relief organizations. In addition, 9 respected community leaders have agreed to serve as “Community Champions,” and in this role they will provide feedback on the project, make recommendations for new partnerships and serve as key contacts during actual emergencies. Trainings and efforts to build the network and maintain these critical relationships will continue indefinitely.

PROJECT CONTACT: Justine Kozo, M.P.H., Chief, Office of Border Health, Health and Human Services Agency, 3851 Rosecrans Street, Suite 715, MS P575, San Diego, CA 92110, Phone: (619) 692-6656, Justine.Kozo@sdcounty.ca.gov