Community Engagement and Social Media Best Practices

Virtual Social Media Working Group and
DHS First Responders Group

September 2012

Homeland
Security
Science and Technology

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INTRODUCTION

Social media and collaborative technologies have become critical components of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. From the international response efforts after major tsunamis to hurricane recovery in major U.S. cities, officials now turn to social media technologies to share information and connect with the community during all phases of a crisis. Implementing these new technologies, however, requires responding agencies to adopt new communication strategies and methods of engagement.

Recognizing the need to address these challenges, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T) has established the Virtual Social Media Working Group (VSMWG). The mission of the VSMWG is to provide guidance and recommendations to the emergency preparedness and response community on the safe and sustainable use of social media technologies before, during, and after emergencies.

Drawn from a cross-section of subject matter experts from local tribal, state, territorial, and federal responders from across the United States, VSMWG members are establishing and collecting best practices and solutions that can be leveraged by responders of all disciplines throughout the nation's emergency response community. Below is a list of agencies to which the VSMWG members belong.

VSMWG Members' Agencies as of July 2012

- American Red Cross
- City of Baltimore [Maryland] Police
- Bellingham [Washington] Fire
- Boynton Beach [Florida] Police
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Public Health Preparedness
- City of Charlotte [North Carolina] Fire
- City of Charlottesville [Virginia] Fire
- Clark [Washington] Regional Emergency Services Agency
- Fairfax [Virginia] County Public Affairs
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- (FEMA) Office of External Affairs
- Fort Bend County [Texas] Health and Human Services
- Humanity Road
- New York City [New York] Office of Emergency Management

- City of Milwaukee [Wisconsin] Police
- Montgomery County [Maryland] Fire and Rescue
- Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] Office of Emergency Management
- Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] Department of Public Health
- Portland [Oregon] National Incident Management Organization, U.S. Forest Service
- Oregon Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)
- San Francisco [California] Department of Emergency Management
- Show Low [Arizona] Fire
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- University of Washington Office of Global Affairs

BACKGROUND

The VSMWG developed this document with input from the public safety community through online engagement hosted on the DHS First Responder Communities of Practice portal and through online discussions via other social media channels between January and June of 2012. This document is intended for use by all public safety disciplines and all agencies and organizations seeking to better understand and use social media and other web-based tools without having to "reinvent the wheel" or spend hours searching for examples, policy templates or other use cases.

PURPOSE

This document discusses best practices for the use of social media by public safety agencies of all disciplines and partner organizations for meaningful and successful engagement of community members and stakeholders.

It is a continuation of the VSMWG Social Media Strategy, which provides a high-level introduction to social media and its benefits for public safety. The examples and best practices provided by agencies already using social media can serve as a starting point for those developing an agency's social media strategy.

The purpose of this document is to:

- Define and discuss various goals for community engagement to enhance the efforts and secure the success of public safety agencies and partner organizations' labors;
- Discuss various reasons for community engagement and how they can inform and improve tool choice, activities, messaging, materials, and more;
- Outline challenges and considerations associated with community engagement; and
- Provide best practices and use cases to help agencies promote engagement and collaboration among community members and groups to improve public safety, preparedness, and resilience.

The examples included in this document are not intended to serve as an all-inclusive list, but rather serve to provide a brief list of agencies that use social media for community engagement to enhance public safety efforts. For more information on these topics and additional resources, please visit DHS First Responder Communities of Practice.

For the purpose of this document, the term, "community" refers to any individual who is living, working, or maintaining a vested interest for any reason in the safety and well-being, including the culture, economy, and business activities of a jurisdiction. The term, "community," may include individuals (families, friends, etc.), businesses (private, public, non-profit), volunteers, government officials and employees, and cultural and social groups.

Social media enables collaboration among all stakeholder groups. While engagement may occur for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, social media provides each with a voice and empowers them to participate in their own preparedness and ultimately the safety and well-being of the community as a whole. Leaders can participate as well, providing guidance, asking for and accepting feedback, ensuring

the accuracy of information shared, and responding to the needs of the community transparently and efficiently.

"WHOLE OF COMMUNITY"[1]

Recognizing that a government-centric approach to emergency management is often not enough to meet the challenges posed by a catastrophic incident, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) subscribes to a "Whole of Community" approach to emergency management.   This methodology reinforces coordination and collaboration among all resources of a collective team through all phases of a disaster in order to meet the needs of the entire community in all areas.

This "Whole of Community" team of emergency management partners includes FEMA and its federal partners, local, state, tribal, and territorial partners, non- governmental organizations like faith-based and non-profit groups, private sector industry, academia, individuals, families, and communities.

Engagement empowers all community partners to help in identifying the community's needs and existing resources that may be used to address them, ultimately improving our preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation capabilities. "Whole of Community" principles are:

- To understand and meet the actual needs of the whole community through community engagement;
- To engage and empower all parts of the community and better position stakeholders to plan for and meet the actual needs of the community.
- To strengthen the local capacity to deal with the consequences of all hazards; and
- To acknowledge and strengthen what works well in communities on a daily basis through existing structures and relationships present in the daily lives of individuals, families, businesses, and organizations before an incident.

"WHOLE OF COMMUNITY" AND SOCIAL MEDIA

When used strategically and on an ongoing basis, social media can enhance the "whole of community" model by providing a means to engage, solicit, and encourage input and feedback from the community on its needs, interests, and priorities. Social media can also help response organizations to educate, train, and identify and allocate resources appropriately. This allows them to leverage existing networks and community structure efficiently during an incident, providing a mechanism for individuals to participate in their own preparedness and safety.

GOALS OF ENGAGEMENT

Social media can help encourage the community to engage in sustained conversation on preparedness, helping them to become more resilient in disasters and other emergencies before they occur. It can

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[1] FEMA "Whole of Community."

also help increase an agency's visibility and credibility in the eyes of its community. This directly increases the likelihood the community will engage in dialogue and share information through official agency channels during an emergency.

Social media can also provide a means to tap into community and volunteer efforts, saving resources and time by leveraging existing networks, identifying existing resources, encouraging information sharing between the "whole of the community" and official response organizations, and helping to ensure that all information shared is immediate, accurate and up-to-date.

The VSMWG Social Media Strategy, published in January 2012, outlines the following benefits for using social media for community engagement. Specifically, social media can help to:

- Facilitate direct agency engagement within a community;
- Provide a means to maintain situational awareness about emergency events and partnership opportunities;
- Provide an additional method to disseminate emergency public information;
- Provide a method for evaluation of public information;
- Provide a means for the community to engage in problem solving; and
- Provide a means to meet and manage public expectations.

By identifying the goals and objectives for engaging the community via social media before diving in, response organizations can identify and choose the appropriate tools and activities to achieve success. While individual agencies and organizations may choose to participate in community engagement for a variety of reasons, the following represent a sample for discussion purposes.

To Encourage Individual Connectivity and Promote Community Resources

Social media provides a means for individuals to establish and maintain ongoing connectivity with others in the community, including friends, loved ones, colleagues, professional and community organizations, and response agencies. These connections establish a community network, which can be leveraged in emergencies to share life-saving information quickly, establish essential links between those who need help and those who have resources, etc.

Additionally, these connections encourage and may help to empower individuals to take an active role in their own safety. This can prove invaluable in increasing the visibility of available community resources and ultimately leads to a more prepared and resilient community.

To Build and Promote Agency or Organization Credibility

Pre-engaging the community through social media can help increase the visibility and credibility of an agency as a trusted, accurate, and authoritative information source. By establishing and maintaining community networks prior to a crisis, an agency will be able to rely upon pre-established network connections to ensure the community receives and shares important information throughout the course of an event.

Inversely, without establishing network connections prior to a crisis, information may not reach the intended audience, ultimately increasing the risk of the propagation of misinformation. For additional

information on the challenges associated with credibility, see **Brand Management and Awareness**.

To Promote and Encourage Efficiency, Credibility and Transparency

Social media, when used with traditional communications and engagement tools and methods, can help increase efficiency by enabling agencies to target specific demographics, to search for and share specific information, and for archiving and records retention. Social media provides a platform from which agencies can remain transparent with the community and from where they can share information about activities, outcomes, questions, responses, and more.

Social media can help agencies to build credibility within the community by enabling ongoing relationship building, communications. Sharing best practices with stakeholder groups and community partners on preparedness activities and messaging, training and education, etc., can help agencies to establish a position of competence, professionalism, authority and dependability that can be of inestimable value in a crisis.

Transparency can also help to establish trust in the community on an ongoing basis. Sustained relationship building, in real life and enhanced via social media, increases the public's familiarity with, and its acceptance of, the agency brand as a credible resource.

To Encourage Multi-Directional Sharing of Essential Information

Communications methods have traditionally concentrated on one-way dissemination of information from response organizations to the public. With the rise in popularity of social media, however, individuals now send and receive information with each other on a daily basis and even more frequently during emergencies. Because the public engages in two-way information sharing via social media tools, so too should response organizations.

Social media provides a means for response agencies to encourage multi-directional sharing of essential information among community partners: individuals; volunteer groups, response partners, and others stakeholders.   Agencies and response organizations can not only disseminate and share essential life sharing information via social media, but can also identify, respond to, and correct misinformation and rumors, ensuring information shared among the community is accurate and up-to- date.

Finally, multi-directional collaboration encourages individuals and community groups to communicate with each other. This can encourage candor and empower the community to participate in its own preparedness, while allowing the government to remain a part of the process.

To Encourage Behavioral Change

Behavioral change is an essential aspect of successful preparedness campaigns and community resilience. To successfully create change, agencies should first identify the level at which the community understands and/or participates in preparedness activities (or whatever the behavior an organization wishes to encourage).

Response organizations can use social media to help identify behaviors needing change and to address that behavior through targeted education and proactive outreach. This can occur in both acute and long-term response planning and preparedness. For example, an agency might notice individuals

chatting about evacuation plans that are counter-intuitive to a hurricane's path, or against traffic restrictions, etc. Monitoring social media channels can help agencies catch inappropriate, inaccurate, or dangerous activities, enabling them to engage the individual directly, or quickly disseminate the correct information so that others can benefit as well.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Social media is not just a tool for emergency response, but one that can enhance traditional activities within all phases of the disaster lifecycle, from preparedness and mitigation to response and recovery. But to be able to successfully leverage new technologies during a disaster, there must be engagement beforehand and on a regular basis to establish credibility as a reliable source for information (and to familiarize the audience and community with their brand). Without frequent engagement and outreach, the community, including individuals and the media, may be less likely to seek and share information via agency social media channels.

The following are discussed in further detail in the VSMWG Next Steps Strategy[2], and should be addressed prior to development of a social media capability;

- Setting Expectations;
- Expecting the Unexpected;
- Conducting an Audience Assessment and Choosing the Right Tools;
- Crafting Appropriate Messaging; and
- Creative Participation.

Additional Considerations and Challenges

Creativity is necessary to engage individuals on a daily basis and in the times between crises. The following discussion offers several challenges associated with engaging and maintaining the interest of a community as well as recommendations for how to mitigate these concerns.

Brand Management and Awareness

Establishing and maintaining brand standardization, including social media profiles, logos, messaging styles, contact information, etc. across all agency-related social media profiles is essential to awareness, recognition, and familiarity. Additionally, developing a social media presence before the onset of a crisis or emergency event will establish a response agency as a credible and authoritative source amidst a sea of voices. It is also essential that agencies maintain both on and offline communications, and ensure that all communications are consistent across all information channels.

Conversely, a lack of brand standardization may allow others to pose as authoritative entities or inappropriately use the agency's brand. This may lead to confusion, continued dissemination of inaccurate information, and loss of credibility among community partners.

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[2] Available at FirstResponder.gov

Oversaturation of Information

Identifying and establishing the appropriate frequency for messaging, based on the community's needs and interests, balanced with the agency's available resources, is essential in engaging the community and maintaining ongoing interest. While providing interesting and engaging content is important, it is equally important to refrain from providing too much information, or too-frequent messaging. Oversaturation of information may result in the loss of the public's interest and willingness to participate in ongoing communications. Instituting a quota for messaging frequency may be detrimental as well; trivial information will not capture the community's interest and may deter them from paying attention in the future.

The frequency with which an agency publishes its messages should change depending on current conditions. For example, the public may not wish to receive multiple messages on a daily basis; however, during an emergency, the public may wish to receive messaging as often as possible. Agencies should consider simply asking the community for their preferences for messaging frequency, ultimately adjusting communications plans based on the feedback provided by the community and target demographics.

Lack of Interesting Content and/or Engaging Activities

Creative content is necessary to keep community members interested and engaged in agency activities over time. Sporadically posting links to a website or press release may not attract readers. Content should be creative, engaging and targeted and appropriate to the audience. Knowing the community and identifying areas of interest and concern will help in developing engaging content. Conversely, posting "teasers," or bits of information encouraging individuals to visit the organization's website may help to establish trust within the community; individuals may eventually visit the website on their own.

In addition to considering the audience, response organizations should consider the platform on which they choose to publish information as well. Etiquette and messaging type varies among social media platforms. It is essential that messages are appropriate for both the audience and the platform on which it is published.

Lack of Direction and/or Understanding of Online Activities

A clear call-to-action is an essential part of any website or social media platform. This will help to direct readers to other parts of the platform and to targeted activities, information, or directives. A call-to-action must be very clear, simple, and immediate; individuals will not sift through pages of content to find the answers or solutions they need; they will leave and search for information elsewhere.

Disjointed Online Presence and/or Lack of Standardized Messaging

Familiarity with the agency or organization's brand during non-disaster times will push individuals to seek information from agency channels after the emergency actually occurs. Conversely, disjointed, unprofessional and poorly executed formatting, or going silent after an emergency occurs due to lack of resources can be just as dangerous. Without ongoing updates or with an unfamiliar, non-standard look, the community will lose confidence and will seek out other information channels, often without concern for the source. Response organizations must consider and identify the necessary resources to maintain standardized communications throughout a disaster, and set expectations with the

community regarding communication type and frequency early and often.

Coordination among response partners is essential. Conflicting information from community organizations regarding evacuation information, boil water orders, etc. can cause confusion among the community and may result in an incorrect response or a lack of action.

Engaging the community both on and offline is also essential in maintaining situational awareness about the activities, interests, and needs of the community. Following community members, engaging in online discussions, and conducting stakeholder outreach can help establish credibility within the community. Information is often shared offline by the public before being reported via official communications channels.

Risks Associated with Social Data[3]

Law enforcement has been "crowd sourcing" information for a long time. 911 Call Centers and tip lines have enabled the community to share information and report crimes directly to law enforcement for many years. Social media provides a new platform or channel from which to solicit crowd-sourced information[4]; the mechanisms in place to verify and act upon this information need only be tweaked for considerations specific to social media. Even if agencies are not yet using social media in an official capacity due to concerns with the accuracy of information collected in this method, social media can still prove helpful in enhancing situational awareness by enabling the identification of trends in communications, activities, expectations, and information.

Social media can also be used to reduce the efforts associated with information sharing from the agency to the public and the media. For example, many agencies augment information sharing using social media to announce the release of new information published to the agency's website; for making short announcements, ongoing engagement with the media and community partners, and even online streaming of press events and community interest stories.

BEST PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

The following section discusses examples of best practices collected and shared by members of the VSMWG and the public safety community. Examples included in this section are not intended to serve as an all-inclusive list. This document highlights the following examples and corresponding recommendations:

- **Crowdsourcing for creative problem solving** (Charity: Water #SMEM Exercise);
- **Online collaboration and multi-media information sharing** (Astoria [Oregon] Fire);
- **Developing creative and engaging content** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Zombie

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[3] Social data is considered any information provided by the public on a voluntary basis via a social (digital) channel.

[4] Social media does not serve as a replacement to traditional 911 methods, but does provide an additional means to gather information regarding the public's knowledge, activities, and expectations during an event and in non-disaster times.

Apocalypse Campaign);

- **Relationship building and community partnerships** (Clark County [Washington] Regional Services Agency and PHLUSH);
- **Volunteer Networks** (Humanity Road);
- **Text Campaigns** (Red Cross Text 90999 Campaign); and
- **Incentification and Gamification** (SF Heroes).

For more information on these topics and additional resources, please visit DHS First Responder Communities of Practice.

Crowdsourcing for Creative Problem Solving
Charity: Water #SMEM Exercise

On January 16, 2012, public safety professionals and others virtually gathered (organized by the hashtag #SMEM) to consider ways to help Charity: Water, a non- profit agency seeking to improve drinking water around the world. In the course of an hour, 52 participants came up with several different ways in which they could share information and take supportive action in support the charity and its mission. These included:

- Posting Original Content to Social Media Sites;
- Cross-Posting Content to Multiple Social Media Sites;
- Encouraging Content Sharing and Re-Posting;
- Posting Multi-Media Content (Video, Photos, etc.);
- Encouraging Submission of Campaign to Technical Awards and Online Contests (Crunchies, etc.);
- Playing Online Games (Charitii, Whyville, etc.);
- Encouraging Development of New Content (iReport, etc.);
- Providing Background Information on Agency Mission and Purpose;
- Celebrity Endorsements;
- Posting Content to Related Hashtags (#FollowFriday, #SMEM, etc.);
- Blog Banners and Photo Banners;
- Multi-Lingual Messaging;
- Traditional Email and Newsletters;
- Daily Papers (Aggregation of Tweets);
- Changing Profile Backgrounds (and Encouraging Audience To Do So);
- Encouraging Blog Subscriptions;
- In-Person Discussion and Relationship Building;
- Posting Downloadable Materials (Posters, etc.); and
- Incentives for Sharing Via Personal Networks.

Online Collaboration and Multi-Media Information Sharing
Astoria Fire December 2010

Tiffany Estes of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, in collaboration with the Astoria-Warrenton Chamber of Commerce and Scott Reuter of Astoria CERT, developed a blog to offer assistance to the people, businesses, and organizations displaced by the fire in Astoria, Oregon on December 16, 2010. Community members were encouraged to share information regarding available space, furniture, office equipment and other resources to assist in the relocation process. Community members could both post and seek information and resources from each other in one central location. The forum also provided information on how to contact the authorities and additional information, including information on a relief center, relief resources, relocation and recovery assistance, and links to official social media accounts, resource sheets, and dynamic maps to assist community members in reunification.

The response to the Astoria Fire in 2010 offered a great example of a robust social media campaign, including several aspects that may have helped to engage the community, including:

- Engaging multi-media content;
- Multiple social media profiles;
- Online discussion forum;
- Collaboration among community partners;
- Two-way communications for reporting and asking for help; and
- Dynamic mapping for visual awareness.

Developing Creative and Engaging Content
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Zombie Apocalypse

Following the 2011 Japan earthquake, CDC asked its Twitter followers what emergencies concerned them. The community responded with concerns about a variety of event types, including nuclear, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, and zombie attacks.   Responding to this interest and moving quickly to leverage the heightened interest in preparedness, CDC published a blog on how to be prepared for a zombie attack, combined with information on hurricane preparedness just in time for the start of the hurricane season.

CDC's blog averaged 1,000-3,000 views per month before the publication of the zombie preparedness blog, following which, the CDC blog averaged 2000 views per day, and nearly 4 million views by the one year anniversary (May 2012).

In tandem with the publication of the first zombie blog on May 16, 2011, the CDC sent messages to their network and posted the link on their website. Two days later, information was pushed through multiple social media

channels (Facebook and Twitter), and calls were made to the media, to increase awareness of the content.

CDC's Facebook page launched one month prior to the publication of the Zombie blog, and grew to more than 5,000 fans within two months. While already at over one million followers, the CDC's Twitter account increased by more than an additional 11,000 followers after publication of the blog as well, while both "Zombie Apocalypse" and "CDC" became trending topics worldwide. CDC found that individuals were referred through links posted to Twitter the most, while Facebook was useful because they were able to track conversations about the blog as well as general preparedness behaviors.

Although CDC shared information about the blog with the mainstream media, the popularity of the blog grew as media picked up the story on their own through social media channels, sharing with their networks on their own. CDC's media plan now includes targeting mainstream media on Twitter by media outlets and reporters, who in return, follow CDC.

The success of the Zombie blog enabled CDC to continue creating materials on the topic to maintain the public's interest. CDC gave away more than 10,000 Zombie posters to emergency management agencies and community groups, etc., and even developed a graphic novel highlighting preparedness activities for a Zombie Apocalypse (or any emergency event). Other activities stemming from the success of the blog include partnership with the CDC Foundation to produce Zombie t-shirts and an invitation to speak to 40,000 attendees at Dragon*Con. On the one year anniversary of the publication of the blog, CDC put together short posts highlighting what others have done with the materials, how the idea has been used by multiple communities, and how the Zombie Apocalypse has helped increase the interest in preparedness across the country. Some additional points to consider:

- Social media was used throughout the entire Zombie Apocalypse campaign – from identifying the need for content, to launching, and promoting the materials to a variety of audiences;
- The Zombie Apocalypse campaign opened doors for partnerships and additional campaign materials, including a novella, posters, and t-shirts, gaining additional exposure and interest in the CDC's message; and
- The Zombie Apocalypse campaign initially cost $87 for stock photography; additional materials and efforts through social media did not require additional resources or cost.

Relationship Building and Community Partnerships

Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency (CRESA) Disaster Sanitation

In response to a request made by the local Citizen Corps and CERT groups for a class on disaster sanitation, CRESA (Clark [Washington] Regional Emergency Services Agency) evaluated local resources in order to identify training partners. Working with PHLUSH (Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human), the local fire and public health departments as well as other local agencies, CRESA developed a curriculum on managing sanitation during an emergency.

A panel of experts from local fire, public health, and emergency management led an advanced level preparedness discussion on how to deal with sanitation issues during a larger-scale disaster that interrupts water, utilities, sewer, or septic services. The goal of the class was to offer real tips and tools for how to prepare for this type of event.

CRESA and Clark County Citizen Corps offered the class one week before Christmas, and made an announcement via its blog, Facebook, and Twitter profiles. Within three days, the class's 85 spots were filled, and the class was deemed a success. CRESA also published a blog highlighting the class's success, available at http://cresa911.blogspot.com/2011/12/groovy-doo-doo.html.

Some additional points to consider:

- CRESA engaged community partners to identify topics of interest;
- CRESA leveraged only social media channels to publicize the class; local media picked up the story only after the class had been filled (and after noticing the information posted through the CRESA social media networks;
- CRESA followed up with a blog on the class and its success;
- A variety of demographics were reached via the social media channels, as illustrated in the class's attendees, from Boy Scout leaders to older citizens.

Volunteer Networks

Volunteer Efforts: Humanity Road (IMOK)

Following the Haitian earthquake in 2010, spontaneous digital volunteers helped direct information shared online and through various technologies including text messaging. Noticing trends in the message types, Doctoral students at Colorado University Boulder developed Tweak the Tweet, a program to capture and automate messaging through machine-readable syntax in order to map the data for situational awareness. A significant portion of earthquake-related messages served to confirm one's well-being, whether provided by someone reporting on their status, or someone in search of the status of another.

Digital volunteers searched through information to find reports such as these, re- sharing messages and adding the hashtag, "IMOK" to direct information through the Tweak the Tweet process. Volunteers also encouraged individuals to use the hashtag in original tweets as well.

Several digital volunteers organized to become Humanity Road, a non-profit organization whose mission is to educate the public before, during, and after disasters on how to survive, sustain, and reunite with loved ones. Humanity Road's volunteers collect, verify, and route online information during a disaster, and disseminate public safety information while directing the public to government and aid agencies providing disaster assistance.

Humanity Road volunteers have participated in several response efforts, including:

- Translating messaging shared online and via SMS from English to Creole and Spanish during the Haitian earthquake response in 2010;

- Collecting, confirming, and routing urgent needs to aid agencies and first responders;
- Relaying information to the public on where to find shelter, apply for aid, safety precautions, etc.; and
- Providing guidelines and recommendations to the public on tweeting during disasters and how to use the phone and send text messages.

With a background in telecommunications, the president of Humanity Road is familiar with mobile technologies and cellular infrastructure. This information helped to inform the development of Humanity Road's IMOK, RUOK text messaging campaign, in which Humanity Road volunteers advise the public to send text messages during a disaster in order to share status information. Text messages provide an additional means for information sharing because of the nature of the cellular infrastructure, specifically:

- Voice calls may fail when cellular traffic is congested or cellular towers are out of service;
- SMS requires less space on the cellular network than voice; and
- Once an SMS is sent, delivery attempts continue until success is achieved, even if hours have passed.

Humanity Road has found a willingness by the public to participate in the IMOK RUOK campaign and continues to engage individuals and encourage them to add the hashtag during ongoing events. Not only does the IMOK RUOK campaign encourage information sharing among community members, it also helps to relieve the cellular network by encouraging information sharing via other channels. Additional considerations identified by Humanity Road for engagement with the community via social media include:

- Development of relationships with local emergency response organizations that helps relay information between officials and the community;
- Training for volunteers in incident response is critical and the capacity to handle surges is essential; and
- Standard messaging, and operational materials including checklists, etc. are essential in assisting digital volunteers.

Text Campaigns

The American Red Cross and Text Campaigns

Following the Haitian earthquake in 2010, the State Department asked the Red Cross to initiate a mobile giving campaign. Within three hours, the American Red Cross had collaborated with MGive, a third party broker, to establish "TEXT HAITI to 90999." Agreements among all parties were signed after the launch. While mobile giving had been used since Hurricane Katrina, the popularity of the tool for donations did not take off until the 2008 hurricane season, and finally exploding after Haiti in 2010. Within the first 48 hours, information about the campaign had been re-tweeted 2.3 million times, and nearly 3 million dollars had been raised. Reasons the Red Cross may have been successful in leveraging mobile giving after Haiti include:

- The rise in popularity of mobile giving since 2005 may be attributed to the increase in popularity, familiarity, and accessibility of mobile technology;
- The American Red Cross maintains a positive image as a trusted agent in disaster response and recovery as well as having a strong network of individuals, partners, and donors, both on and offline;
- The American Red Cross initiated the campaign quickly and followed up with supporting process and paperwork afterwards;
- The American Red Cross's Social Media Director, Wendy Harman, maintains an active role both on and offline in social media, emergency response, and recovery and is a trusted and familiar point of contact for Red Cross activities;
- The American Red Cross remains transparent with regard to where money was sent, giving individuals the option to donate directly to Haiti, or to the American Red Cross in general; and
- The American Red Cross continues to engage the community through a variety of channels in order to maintain relationships and open communications.

The success of the American Red Cross's mobile giving campaign following the Haitian earthquake set the standard for future events, proven by the public's proclivity to donate via text in disasters ever since. For example, "Text 90999" was trending on Twitter following the Japan earthquake in 2011 before the American Red Cross officially launched their mobile giving campaign. The American Red Cross designated all money received, after a certain point, to be donations specific to the earthquake.

In the spring of 2012, the American Red Cross launched the first digital operations center devoted to humanitarian response in Washington, D.C.[5] In tandem with the launch, the ARC also announced a digital volunteer program to enhance information sharing with the public during disasters as well. The ARC DOC provides a means to maintain situational awareness regarding topics, information, and needs discussed and identified via social media platforms, as well. Social Media is also used as an additional means to communicate directly with affected populations following a disaster.

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[5] American Red Cross and Dell Launch First-Of-Its-Kind Social Media Digital Operations Center for Humanitarian Relief Press Release March 7, 2012.

Incentives and Gamification

San Francisco Department of Emergency Management (SFDEM) and SF HEROES

The City of San Francisco is no stranger to the consequences of a major disaster. Its proximity to both the San Andreas and Hayward Fault Lines and memories of the devastating earthquake of 1906 and more recently the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake help to maintain a high level of interest in preparedness which are fueled every so often with the publication of a news story or anniversary of the events. These stories, speculating on when the "next big quake" might occur and how the aftermath might surpass that of the 1906 earthquake due to industrialization and population growth, help to justify and drive preparedness activities in the Bay Area.

A few years ago, the city's mayor, Gavin Newsom, motivated by a flurry of concern and hoping to create a new culture of preparedness, tasked the city's Department of Emergency Management to engage the community in innovative and creative ways. The department's Deputy Director, Rob Dudgeon, and his staff developed a strategy to drive preparedness by encouraging peer-to-peer engagement of emergency preparedness. SFDEM developed a comprehensive communications to guide the Department's preparedness outreach. The heart of the strategy is to leverage socially innovative approaches to promote a cultural adoption of preparedness in San Francisco by focusing its outreach efforts on identifying and using existing, trusted social networks.

Concurrently, social media began to emerge as a popular method for communication among residents and community partners, and as social networks grew, so did the opportunities to engage the community in new and creative ways.

Recognizing the popularity of social networking games like Farmville and Mafia Wars and how these games pushed collaboration and communication, SFDEM developed SF Heroes, an app that leverages community members' social networks, and focuses on preparedness. SF Heroes enables players to check in at events and locations to receive points and badges; activities and achievements are shared across the players' networks. Maps provide the location of local resources, events, and places, such as libraries, fire departments, and more. Individual players can enter personal information, such as the family meeting place, family contacts, pet sitter, physician contact information, etc., into the app, which also provides information on how to build a communications plan.

The SF Heroes App enables SFDEM to engage and educate the community in a meaningful and creative way while learning useful information about the community. Things to consider with regards to the development and release of the app are:

- San Francisco offers a unique environment in which to develop such a program, due to its population demographics and proclivity for technology solutions;
- Senior leadership promoted a cultural adoption of socially innovative technology including widespread use of CCSF government using social media and smart phone technology. The App, while developed by an outside developer, offers a backend content management system that enables the department to easily update and change content at will;
- The backend provides information on number of downloads, badges, and promotion;

- The app was user and purpose driven, versus design driven, which proved difficult at times, with regards to communication between the department and the technology developers;
- Data included in the app, such as the location of city buildings, etc. was pulled from previously collected public information. Organizations continue to provide and update the department with new information on their own; and
- The development of the app was not free; the department chose to allocate money dedicated to preparedness to the development of a new method for outreach and engagement.

CONCLUSION

Social media provides public safety agencies and response organizations with a means to easily and creatively engage the community through a variety of channels and activities. Social media tools also provide the community with a voice and a means to participate in their own preparedness.   This document defined and discussed various goals and purposes associated with leveraging social media for community engagement and how they can help inform tool choice, activities, messaging, materials, and more. It also outlined several challenges and considerations associated with community engagement, including brand management and awareness, information overload, the need for interesting content, direction, and standardized messaging, and the risks associated with social data. While the risks are important to note, the rewards associated with social media, specifically for community engagement, are great; public safety agencies should consider the tools in addition to traditional means in order to help build and maintain relationships with the community and response partners.