

TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK · COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CBO Disaster Planning Framework — Building Bridges Between Government and Underserved Communities

Client: Santa Cruz Operational Area, California · **Role:** Prime · **Status:** Completed

15+

Stakeholder interviews across rural, urban, and underserved communities

4

Jurisdictions coordinated in the Santa Cruz operational area

2

New structural EOC roles introduced — formalized, not advisory

1

Countywide CBO disaster response and communication framework

TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, CA

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

EQUITY & INCLUSION · AFN · LEP

The Situation

Emergency management runs on a simple assumption: when there's a disaster, people will follow official guidance. In Santa Cruz County, that assumption had a flaw. A significant portion of the county's population — rural farmworkers, undocumented residents, Spanish and Mixtec speakers, people with limited internet access — didn't have a reliable relationship with government institutions. You can't follow guidance you never received.

The existing EOC structure lacked a formal mechanism to reach these communities before or during a disaster. Community-based organizations were doing engagement work informally, on personal relationships, in ways that evaporated when staff turned over. The county needed something structural — a framework that embedded community engagement into the EOC itself, not bolted on afterward.

What We Did

TLR began with 15+ stakeholder interviews across the county's diverse population: urban, rural, linguistic minorities, undocumented communities, and the organizations that serve them. We weren't asking what the government wanted to tell these communities. We were asking what these communities needed from government, what trust actually looks like in their experience, and where the existing system had failed them in past events.

That research became the foundation for a countywide CBO disaster response and communication framework — a structured model defining how community-based organizations engage with county emergency management before, during, and after events. The framework wasn't advisory. It introduced two new structural EOC roles that formalized the CBO liaison function as a permanent part of the county's disaster response infrastructure, spanning all four jurisdictions in the Santa Cruz operational area.

"We weren't building a communications campaign. We were building the infrastructure that makes communication possible — before the emergency tests it."

ENGAGEMENT DETAILS

Client	Santa Cruz Operational Area, CA
TLR Role	Prime
Sector	Local Government
Status	Completed

KEY NUMBERS

Interviews	15+ stakeholders
Jurisdictions	4 coordinated
New EOC roles	2 structural
Framework	1 countywide document

COMMUNITIES SERVED

Rural · Urban · Undocumented · Limited English · Access & Functional Needs

KEY DELIVERABLES

Framework	CBO Disaster Response Framework
EOC Roles	2 new structural positions
Interviews	15+ stakeholders
Coverage	4 jurisdictions

What We Delivered

→ Countywide CBO Disaster Response and Communication Framework	– structured model for pre-, during-, and post-event community engagement across four jurisdictions
→ 15+ stakeholder interviews	– rural, urban, undocumented, and linguistic minority communities represented
→ Two new structural EOC roles	– formalized CBO liaison positions embedded in county emergency response structure
→ Coordination model across 4 jurisdictions	– consistent framework spanning the Santa Cruz operational area
→ Engagement protocols	– defined touchpoints and communication sequences for before, during, and after disaster events

What Changed

Community-based organizations now have a formal seat within Santa Cruz County's EOC structure – not as external stakeholders who receive notification after decisions are made, but as operational partners with defined roles and formalized access. The two new EOC positions make that relationship structural rather than dependent on individual relationships that evaporate when staff turns over.

The framework provides the county with a replicable, equitable model for multilingual, AFN-inclusive engagement in every future event. When the next disaster hits, the infrastructure for reaching underserved communities is already built. That's the difference between a communications campaign and trust infrastructure.

TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK · APPLIED

Trust built before the disaster is the only kind that works during one.

TLR's Trust Infrastructure framework addresses the question government agencies almost never ask: will communities engage? In Santa Cruz, the answer depended entirely on whether underserved communities had a reason to trust the institutions asking for their cooperation. This engagement touched all five Trust Infrastructure domains: foundational trust (relationship-building across diverse populations), communication infrastructure (multi-channel, multi-lingual reach), community partnerships (CBO formalization), information ecosystem (two-way flow), and equity and inclusion (structural access, not PR outreach). The two new EOC roles are what makes the work durable – they institutionalize the relationship so it doesn't depend on any single person maintaining it.