



Collaborating Agencies Responding to Disasters

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SUMMARY

The central structure of the CARD-ACTIA preparedness initiative for 2007-08 has been the series of "Cluster Meetings"; preparedness classes presented to TAC members, serving as direct training and a vehicle for networking, sharing solutions and ideas, and building consensus. These cluster meetings were:

September 11, 2007: Introductory Kick-Off Meeting.

Attendees identified themselves and summarized their perspectives and concerns on the issue of preparedness. Tess Lengyel provided a background and overview of ACTIA's previous and existing involvement in emergency preparedness. Scott McCormick provided background and introductory overview of the preparedness response community/ies affecting Alameda County. This addressed the history and nature of CARD, the general structure of governmental response systems, and the State of California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). Jan McClellan, of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services, attended and spoke from County-level perspective, and answered questions from participants. Scott further identified a number of issue areas of particular relevance to providers of transportation services to vulnerable populations. The primary outcomes of the meeting were an introductory familiarity with issues and stakeholders in preparedness and identification of issues concerning TAC members for future investigation.

November 13, 2007: Review, Follow-Up and Incident Command System (ICS).

Scott provided a re-cap of previous meeting and previous relevant CARD and ACTIA actions. Scott introduced a new document created for ACTIA breaking "preparedness" into four distinctions. These include the familiar context of direct actions for your own state of readiness as well as: learning what is around you; educating those around you; and building connections to the system around you. The second segment of the meeting focused on the Incident Command System, which is central to SEMS and the similar National Incident Management System. The primary outcomes of the meeting were basic education on these topics and selection of future meeting topics.

January 28, 2008: Personal Emergency Preparedness

This meeting was CARD's standard training for direct personal preparedness. The class focused on each participant as an individual, without tying their personal preparedness to their work roles. It also, however, produced many observations for applying things learned in the class to helping riders become more prepared. The primary outcomes of the meeting were education, identification of options for ridership preparedness, and getting participants actually started on their personal preparedness steps.

February 19, 2008: Agency Emergency Preparedness, with a focus on transportation.



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This meeting was CARD's standard training for agency preparedness. As with all CARD classes, the emphasis in different sections shifted to adapt to the audience, and transportation issues received extra attention. The primary outcomes of the meeting were increased insight by participants into their needs and opportunities, distinctions and clarity turning "preparedness" into specific steps, and plans for action to take at the agency level.

April 8, 2008: Preparedness for Transit Providers

This class was created from scratch specifically for ACTIA, the first brand-new, full-sized CARD training created in quite a while. Scot wrote the bulk of the materials, drawing on insights from previous TAC cluster meetings; conversations with ACTIA staff and consultants, and participation in other transportation-preparedness-focused events, such as conferences sponsored by MTA and FTA. This class provided concrete examples of actions available to transportation providers, as well as breaking out information into manageable components and identifying issues to address. This class reflected the largest single component of the initiative by a wide margin, and was especially well-received, although attendance was smaller than usual. The primary outcomes of the meeting were concrete plans of action and increased inspiration to pursue them.

June 10, 2008: Building Connections: Networking, Relationships, Advocacy, Communications

For the final cluster meeting, CARD's Executive Director, Ana-Marie Jones, facilitated a conversation about TAC member's goals for the future, preparedness actions taken already, and channels for building strong connections to each other and to important fellow stakeholders. The primary outcomes of the meeting were an improved focus for future goals and possibilities, and specific tasks self-assigned by TAC members.

KEY POINTS

In the course of these cluster meetings, and outside research and involvement in transportation issues, several facts stood out:

- 1) TAC members have a strong preference for "nuts and bolts" information. They are a relatively lower need for inspiration to act and a relatively high demand for concrete specifics.
- 2) Emergency transportation for people with special needs has always been particularly challenging. It became clear throughout this initiative that TAC members, and presumably their organizations, share a strong desire to improve preparedness in that area, but frustration at a lack of concrete support for those efforts. Similarly, a nearly universal desire was for standards to be provided by some appropriate central or governing authority, to provide



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guidance for preparedness efforts. There was not, however, a strong response to the possibility of stepping up to create that standard in the absence of an official one.

3) These cluster meetings were well-attended overall by an impressively diverse and thorough representation of the special-needs-transportation community, but TAC participants were generally not in preparedness-focused roles at their agencies, which could limit their ability to put ideas in place.

4) Distinctions, issues and identities within the special-needs-transportation community maybe challenging for outsiders and are definitely not well-known. This can be a hindrance to education of outside partners and stakeholders.

5) Despite many differences in detail, there is a lot of room for solutions to be shared across different providers. While TAC members always seemed

happy to share information in meetings, there did not seem to be a strong motivation to deliberately set out to create and share solutions. One approach can be for a very motivated agency to take the lead and share its success, but perhaps a better approach for these agencies is to articulate agreements dividing up actions among different parties in a manner deemed appropriate.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS SUGGESTION FOR THE FUTURE

1) I strongly recommend continued meetings of the special-needs-transportation to address preparedness issues. I also recommend attempting to have this meeting include staff with the official job duty of addressing preparedness. This may mean a roster that overlaps with, but is not exactly the same as, TAC members.

2) I strongly recommend actions to help the special-needs-transportation community speak with one voice. This may take the form of an association, but it may also take other forms, such as the meetings described above or virtual connections (e.g., listserves). ACTIA may be in a position to fill this role, but it may not. It may require creating a new entity. It will require a combination of assertiveness, as somebody steps up to fill this role, and consensus, as all parties agree to involvement and representation

2b) CARD did create a listserv as part of this initiative, but it should ultimately be hosted by a more connected agency, such as ACTIA.

3) The April 8 class, Preparedness for Transit Providers, was well-received but had mediocre attendance. There is interest in providing this again. If you want to host another, I recommend that we take the time to implement several improvements to the material in preparation for that. The April 8 presentation was the first (and so far, only)



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delivery of this training, and the participation and feedback of TA members identified a number of things to enhance.

4) I recommend that future meetings and/or implementation of an association be used to springboard creating standards and sharable solutions. It has become clear over the 20-year course of CARD's pursuit of special-needs-preparedness that when strong and relevant solutions are not provided by government or other authorities, it can work very well for agencies directly involved in the issue to create them. What is more, the creation of these solutions is what often spark adoption by peers and authorities. TAC, ACTIA, and the collective agencies involved are in a position to lead others by example, and therefore to set standards that reflect their concerns and expert opinions.

5) Potential future partnership with CARD could be dedicated to creating these solutions. This would have to take the form of a consulting partnership, drawing on the expertise of both CARD and transportation providers. If this approach would make the difference for pushing action, then I recommend it.