



News

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Leverage Government

By Jeff Covert, ABCP

**“Ask not what your country can do for you,
ask what you can do for your country.”**

John F. Kennedy Inaugural address Jan 20, 1961

It is good business to ask both questions. Too frequently any consideration of local government is kept neatly in our plans under “Coordination with External Agencies” and possibly “Exercising.” Take another look at the professional practices and consider all the places where you can leverage public/private sector collaboration to increase your organization’s resilience to crisis. In a similar way your government can benefit from your increased participation in their plans and procedures.

When an event unfolds Americans demonstrate their pioneer spirit and circle the wagons to help each other. It is wise to take that posture now and have our plans reflect this reality.

Project Initiation and Management

There are some great courses, books, and documents describing how to bring a project to management and acquire sponsor support. Consider all the

alternatives and recognize that a meeting with management and the local SWAT team will not be boring. Ask the SWAT team member to describe some recent calls they made to businesses. Perhaps they could give a five-minute threat analysis on your location. “If I was a bad guy I would do the following to you.” A meeting with a large person, dressed in fatigues, and trained in special weapons and tactics will not go unnoticed. A little theater can help our cause at times.

Risk Evaluation & Control Threat Analysis

Law Enforcement does threat analysis work on the potential terrorism targets in their community. This is done as a matter of course and might have already been done from the parking lot without your knowledge. The threats that they have identified belong in your plans. If such an analysis has not been done consider inviting law

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enforcement to your site for a threat analysis.

Remember that terrorism has many faces. If you think about it, you will likely find a number of groups that may consider your organization opposed to theirs. If you still think that no one wants to attack your organization, remember that the Unabomber targeted advertising agency executives.

Control

The government likely will know a lot about incidents and events before you do. Government warnings and alerts give you additional precious time when they know something that might impact your organization. Consider asking to receive relevant alerts from police and fire departments. You only want information that may adversely impact your business and that likely has already been broadcast on radio dispatch.

There are some emerging intermediary organizations that send these alerts from government to business: RAINS-net in Portland, Oregon; ERN in Dallas; and NC4 in New York, Kansas, and California.

Building personal relationships with the police and fire departments is always a good idea. These relationships do have limitations and may not be a repeatable business process. The Sheriff of a small county may give you their mobile phone number after they get to know you. It is unlikely that you will ever get the Sheriff's home number in a large

metropolitan area. These relationships take years to develop to become assets and are susceptible to retirement, missed security meetings, and elections.

The best practice is to seek relationships and a structured mechanism for receiving police and fire alerts.

Business Impact Analysis

It is unlikely that your government can help you with your BIA, but you certainly can help the government. Assume the fire department draws a perimeter around your section of town. There could be a gas leak or any number of potential threats. How long the perimeter is blocked off and what is said about the threat can have a huge impact on your business. On April 29th, 2004 West Los Angeles area shopping malls were put on alert that there was a credible al Qaeda threat against them. The threat was uncorroborated and the police resumed normal patrols by the evening of April 29th. Shoppers are still wary of these areas and the merchants are considering legal action. To make matters worse, what is the tax base impact of these cities when their shopping centers have a large unplanned drop in business?

In some communities, large amounts of tax revenue come from office complexes, auto-malls, and shopping centers. The city would like to know how government warnings or perimeters might impact their tax revenues, but need

your help in generating a realistic BIA for the City.

Continuity Strategies

A National Guard tent is probably not your idea of alternative office space. This is a good topic of conversation with your local government emergency services people. Exactly what is their idea of resources available in a large-scale emergency? A simple building fire will not bring the National Guard tent.

Similarly, the local government may need your help in time of emergencies. After the Northridge earthquake of 1994, many Los Angeles residents refused to return to their homes. This fear resulted in large populations intending to sleep in local parks. January in Los Angeles can result in near-freezing temperatures. If the residents were not provided with some temporary shelter the elderly and infants likely would struggle to stay alive during the cold night. The National Guard could deliver their tents in a couple days. Then Mayor Richard Riordan, called private sector suppliers and had large wedding tents up in a number of parks complete with heaters before night fall. Generators, language-skills, and countless other assets are in your organization. It is helpful to your community to consider the assets you possess and under what circumstance you would allow these to be used for the community.

Emergency Response and

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Operations

There are a number of training opportunities from Federal and local government. FEMA and New York State offer a number of good online courses for ICS training. Some government training budgets have been reduced in recent years so it is wise to investigate what is available. The government is especially good for life and safety training.

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training also may be available to build some advanced skills among your staff. CERT trained people are called upon to help with mass casualty incidents, fire department assistance, and traffic management. If your employees take advantage of this training you will have the skills for your needs as well.

Some cities are adopting Business Liaison positions in their ICS plans. These liaison positions interact with key business leaders for distributing information and collecting business' situation reports. This Emergency Operation Center position typically exists under the Command section of an ICS structure and plan.

It is important to understand what the government will not do as well. If your organization receives a bomb threat, who needs to find the bomb? You will need to find it in most cases. Most law enforcement agencies do not have the manpower to search your facilities because of a threat. After you locate the oven timer with the dynamite, they will be happy to make a visit. Fire departments have

ladder trucks for high-rises, but the ladder trucks only reach ten stories high. If your building is taller, you need to have good fire suppression systems. The fire department will attempt a rescue in taller buildings, but putting out a fire in even a mid-rise building is unlikely.

Consider whether your recovery time objective has certain assumptions about government services. Confirm those assumptions with the appropriate agency. Think about transportation and roads. If you are assuming that people and resources can travel as they do today, perhaps you need to reconsider your assumptions. In times of crisis, what are the government priorities and time expectations. Do they support your assumptions?

Awareness Training

Training opportunities have been cited throughout this article. Remember the attention and power of having an elected official or police and fire member open your key training session. A small meal usually will be appreciated and training takes on a new significance when it includes these city personnel.

Exercising

Joint exercises make a lot of sense and are a practice that you already may be doing. If you have taken some of the steps listed in this article, it is likely that you will have additional areas to exercise and measure. Hopefully your local

government will request your assistance as well.

Crisis Communications

Having better information from your government may increase the effectiveness of your communications with employees and others. Your government likely will prefer to handle this task without the assistance of a private organization.

Coordination with External Agencies

Frequently this professional practice is where working with government is considered routine. There are likely a number of events, conferences, and meetings where collaboration between government and business can be furthered. Disaster Resistant California is an annual meeting where this collaboration takes place and there are many others. Open your definition of what the professional practices contain. Consider the role you can play with the government and they can play in your organization. Coordination is a wise practice. Coordination can span from simple awareness and a HAM radio license to joint planning and receiving emergency alerts as quickly as the mayor does.