

CASE STUDY

IBM and United Way's 2-1-1 Technology

The Project

Mike Mendez of IBM, with the support of an IBM team, developed an IT system to help California officials cope with thousands of calls for assistance during the wildfires in Fall 2007.

The Opportunity

Every year, California's historic wildfires blaze across acres upon acres of land, destroying homes, taking lives, and leaving an aftermath of confusion and fear. In such times of crisis, people rely greatly on centralized recovery services, but call centers and relief organizations are often unequipped to handle the overflow of calls.



In October 2007, a series of wildfires burned an estimated 515,000 acres in southern California, destroying 2,000 homes, killing seven people, and injuring more than 120. The event ranks as one of the most devastating disasters in United States history. United Way's 2-1-1 call-in center in San Diego was overwhelmed during the fires, when they saw an increase from 650 to 35,000 daily calls, exceeded the available building power, and had to take over an empty church next door. There was an urgent need to develop a system to handle more calls and automate the paper process to better serve California residents in need.

IBM's Pro Bono Investment

As soon as the severity of the fires became obvious, the IBM Crisis Management Team for Southern California and IBM's senior location executives formed a team to assist with the crisis through technology-related solutions. They recognized the importance of local community disaster recovery services and sent IBM employee and On Demand Community volunteer Mike Mendez to San Diego's 2-1-1 center.

Working nearly nonstop for three days, Mike assessed the 2-1-1 line needs and helped develop critical capacity expansion. He met with the director of the San Diego 2-1-1 center to discuss options and risk and was able to move forward quickly with the help of the volunteer team and IBM's constant support.

The Impact

Working pro bono, Mike and the IBM team successfully built an infrastructure to double the call center and automate the paper process. Their expertise at assessing the situation and putting a plan into action served the 2-1-1 call center and area residents during the time of crisis and helped develop the center's capacity for the future.

About the Client

2-2-1 System provides people needing human services with information about the resources available to them for both everyday needs and for help in times of crisis. During and after disasters, 2-1-1 provides emergency assistance support so that communities can access critical resources and information to minimize harmful outcomes.



About the Company

IBM is a multinational computer technology and consulting corporation. Headquartered in Armonk, New York, IBM is the world's largest information technology employer, with eight laboratories worldwide and engineers and consultants in 170 countries. On Demand Community encourages and sustains corporate philanthropy through volunteerism by combining the skills of employees and retirees with access to IBM technology tools targeted for nonprofit community organizations and schools.

