

Research into what government agencies did in the midst of the World Trade Center crisis and the role of IT in response to the tragic events, can provide valuable lessons for improving crisis emergency management and planning. Equally important, the preparedness and interdependencies that emergency response warrants put in place human, organizational, and technological resources that may well benefit overall government operations in normal times.

This premise is at the heart of a study by the Center for Technology in Government and project partner Urban Logic, Inc., a nonprofit organization in New York City that focuses on partnerships to building strategic information resources. Urban Logic's president, Bruce Cahan, participated in the WTC emergency response at Pier 92 and continues to document the response, recovery, and rebuilding effort.

The project is funded by a \$100,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) Digital Government Program. The project team also includes CTG's University at Albany colleagues Giri Tayi, Management Science and Information Systems; Teresa Harrison, Communication; and Tom Stewart, Center for Policy Studies.

The opportunity to study the way government leaders, professionals, and their private and nonprofit sector partners responded to the World Trade Center attack and its aftermath, provides a unique and unrivaled research venue for increasing understanding of critical information- and technology-intensive functions of government.

The research will begin with those who worked at Pier 92, where New York City's Emergency Operations Center was established after its formal EOC was destroyed by the collapse of the World Trade Center. Starting at the "nerve center" of the response, rescue, and recovery effort, the study expects to be able to follow and document the network of relationships, information flows, and actions that represent a wide range of government responsibilities, and to identify the partners inside and outside government who played integral roles in the effort.

"While many studies have been conducted of the heroic emergency response in New York City," Cahan notes, "NSF has funded Urban Logic and CTG to study the long-lasting institutional and professional impacts as seen by a sample of key participants. Their resourcefulness and experiences may serve as precedent for re-engineering and reauthorizing future intergovernmental and public-private relationships and programs."

The project is interested in collecting as much information as possible from the September to November 2001 time period-when people worked together in an ad hoc manner-in order to identify "healthy adaptations" that may have enduring value. Research into what government agencies did in the midst of the crisis, and the role of IT in the events, can provide valuable lessons for improving crisis response and emergency management and planning. The research can also improve understanding of the place of IT in overall government operations in both crisis and normal operations.

"The underlying idea is to look at the experiences of many government professionals, not only emergency workers," explains Sharon Dawes, CTG Director. "I think there is general acknowledgment that government agencies performed admirably during the crisis, as they applied on-the-fly creativity to rebuild vital information tools."

"But the question in which we are most interested is what elements of that experience are now evident in ordinary times," she continues. "Has government, in general, improved its ability to perform as a result of the unprecedented events of September 11? Has the bar of status quo been raised?"

The project will focus on field research with the main data collection activities to include interviews with key government participants and analysis of related documents and records of action and events. This effort will involve individual and group interviews with government officials in New York City, Albany, and Washington D.C.