

City of Ashland CERT Visioning



**Report to the City of Ashland
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City of Ashland CERT Visioning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The City of Ashland Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) held a visioning retreat in early February, 2006, to assess where we were as an organization, and explore where we wanted to go. This report to Ashland City Council gives a brief background of Ashland CERT, its relationship to the National organization, the motivations and goals of its membership locally, and the strategic direction the local organization is heading based on the consensus of our members.



BACKGROUND: The City of Ashland's Community Emergency Response Team was formed by Ashland Fire and Rescue in 1999, and by January, 2006 had trained 250 residents and had 168 active members. The CERT program prepares citizens to be ready for and respond safely to emergencies that overwhelm first responders. The curriculum and first CERT program was created by the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1986. In 1993, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) made the program available nationally. In 2002 CERT was incorporated into Citizen Corps, a unifying structure to organize community resources in emergencies. By 2004, CERT was in 50 states, 3 territories and 6 countries.

RATIONALE FOR VISIONING: In October, 2005, the City of Ashland's Community Emergency Response Team underwent a transition, as program staff Kirah Solomon and Nancy Goldman left and Lucy Edwards

and Julie McGrath were hired. Lucy and Julie recognized that Kirah, Nancy, and former CERT coordinator Michelle Argent, along with Ashland Fire and Rescue, had built a strong community organization of neighbors trained to take care of themselves and one another in emergencies. We also collectively recognized the challenge of maintaining a healthy volunteer organization, especially one whose primary purpose is to prepare to respond to the disaster we hope we will never see.

SURVEYING OUR MEMBERS: As we began our work with this vibrant group of individuals, we wanted to know what mattered to them. What issues did we collectively think important and worthy of pursuing in preparing ourselves and our community for emergencies?

With our volunteer team co-leaders, we devised a survey (November and December, 05) and sent it out to our membership of 168. By January 24, 2006, we had received 70 replies. (The total had increased to 77 by the time of our visioning retreat 2/3/06.)

ACTIVATION: On December 30, 2005, Ashland Fire and Rescue activated CERT for the first time in its history. Over a six hour period, 26 CERT volunteers from all 5 neighborhood teams deployed to Ashland's B-Street Yard to help residents and city workers make an estimated 4000-6000 sandbags. I mention this because it happened in the midst of our survey process and probably had an impact on our member's perception of the organization.



SURVEY RESULTS: What we learned (by 1/24) from the survey is that 81% of respondents had moderate to high level of interest currently in the CERT program. 90% recognized their potential community role as crucial in the event of an emergency or disaster, and 91% said in a real emergency they were ready and willing to take care of themselves and help their neighbors. In other words, these are the people who are willing to take the phone call at 2 in the morning and go out and help a neighbor or neighborhood in crisis.

MEMBERSHIP INTERESTS AND TIES: We also wanted to know what our membership was already doing, what their current community interests and involvements were, and how those might be authentically incorporated into what we as CERT do. One advantage to emergency preparation in a small community is that many residents are already linked to one another through an identifiable network of associations. If we need one another in

emergency, often we can draw on friends and colleagues and on our personal knowledge of the community. Teams work most effectively when they have had experience working together. We wanted to draw on that strength, and build upon it. From the survey we learned that 57% of respondents were interested or involved in medicine and health, 43% in communication technologies and media, 42% in issues that affect elderly, and 37% in energy self-reliance and clean energy. We also found high interest (27% or above) in sustainable development, education, and community.

VISIONING RETREAT: We provided our initial survey results to Joan Resnick and Ellen Craine of The Real Life Training Group, and met twice with them to prepare for the visioning retreat. Our goal was to determine the strategic direction for our organization, and put into place a plan and timeline to move forward.

The retreat was held Friday evening and all day Saturday, February 3 and 4, at Ashland First Baptist Church, 2004 Siskiyou Blvd. at Terra. About 30 people attended, most were CERT members or trainees, joined by a few interested community members.



GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS: We had a couple of goals going into the visioning. As program coordinator, I wanted our membership to help define this organization, what THEY think it is, and its mission and direction. I wanted us to have the opportunity to get to know one another, and have the experience of working together. Also, I wanted to identify specific projects and have a way to begin and continue work on them.

Together, we identified three main threads of our work, three strategic directions that held a high degree of consensus among CERT members.

1. Educating and Motivating the Community: One concern that emerged in our work together was the perception that many of our neighbors are not personally prepared with emergency supplies, and that they don't see a reason to prepare. We posed the questions: How do we get our neighbors prepared and ready for emergencies? How can we inform the community about CERT and what it has to offer? How do we increase awareness of the need for preparedness and the role of CERT?



2. Training and Developing Members: Once residents have gone through CERT Basic Training, how do we keep them involved? What training would be relevant to our members and to our community and useful to the Fire Department and city managers in a real disaster?
3. Advancing the Organization: This involves looking at the current structure of our organization analytically, identifying and articulating its mission and vision, revising aspects that need revision, looking at things like team structure, co-team leadership, neighborhood clusters, ways to organize ourselves that make sense and emerge authentically.

IMPLEMENTATION: Within each thread, above, we divided into groups and devised a 90-day and one year implementation plan. From those groups we have formed committees that are following up on the work. A media production group is working on increasing our visibility, CERT staff, co-leaders and trainers are working on the training and development piece, and a committee concerned with organizational advancement submitted a budget to AFR that included the fiscal implications of our strategic directions. This last group will keep us on task as we re-examine our mission, goals and structure.

EVALUATION: Thirteen of the 28 CERT members who participated in the visioning process and filled out evaluations, and indicated they were very satisfied with the process. The visioning gave us a real sense of areas where we have consensus and how we can move forward. In addition, CERT and Ashland Fire and Rescue staff recognized the powerful tools and template we were given in the visioning process to continue the work of structuring our organization effectively while we prepare Ashland residents to be ready and effective in emergencies.

FOLLOW-UP: Because this visioning process allowed us to articulate an implementation plan, our follow-up tasks are clear. At 90 days, we can look at what we had intended to accomplish and evaluate, revise, and set new goals. Also, we have been left with the template, which allows us to use this powerful tool to move forward. We hope to follow-up with our facilitators, and create the opportunity for visioning and goal setting each year.



APPENDICES

- CERT Implementation Plans
- CERT Survey Results 1/24/05
- CERT Deployment Debriefing

