

2-1-1 Sonoma/ Valley Fire (Lake County, CA) 2015 Applicant to CDAA PNP Program for Cost Reimbursement

The Organization

2-1-1 Sonoma, a program of the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County, is an information and referral call center. It connects Sonoma County residents with non-emergency health, human, and disaster resources. Available by phone and searchable online 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, its comprehensive database connects residents to accurate and up-to-date information and services.

The Situation

The Valley Fire started at 1:24pm on Saturday, September 12, 2015, near the community of Cobb in Lake County. Beginning as a vegetation fire, it involved more than 4,000 firefighters and exceeded 74,000 acres. The fire grew rapidly and mandatory evacuations were issued. Residents had to flee quickly from their properties with little to no time to pack any belongings. The fire affected the counties of Lake, Napa and Sonoma and destroyed more than 1,900 structures, including more than 1,200 homes. Three evacuation centers were set up – at Kelseyville Presbyterian Church, the Napa County Fairgrounds in Calistoga and Highland Senior Center (near Clearlake). During the nearly two weeks that the fire raged, more than 1000 people converged on the fairgrounds in Calistoga and set up an ad hoc camp. Simultaneously, community donations to assist the evacuees poured in from the surrounding region.

The Request

In August 2015, the Lake County Office of Emergency Services (OES) requested 2-1-1 Sonoma to serve residents of Lake County by providing information and referral services throughout the Lake County Wildfire Response¹ (initially for the Rocky Fire, then the Jerusalem Fire, and lastly for the Valley Fire). 2-1-1 Sonoma offered verified information to the public and provided callers with PIO/EOC updates related to shelter locations, evacuations, road closures, health and safety alerts, donation drop off/pickup areas, missing persons/pets reports, volunteer opportunities, Local Assistance Center (LAC) locations and food resources. In addition, the call center administered over-the-phone damage assessment surveys and relayed the callers' responses to the OES for follow-up with the client.

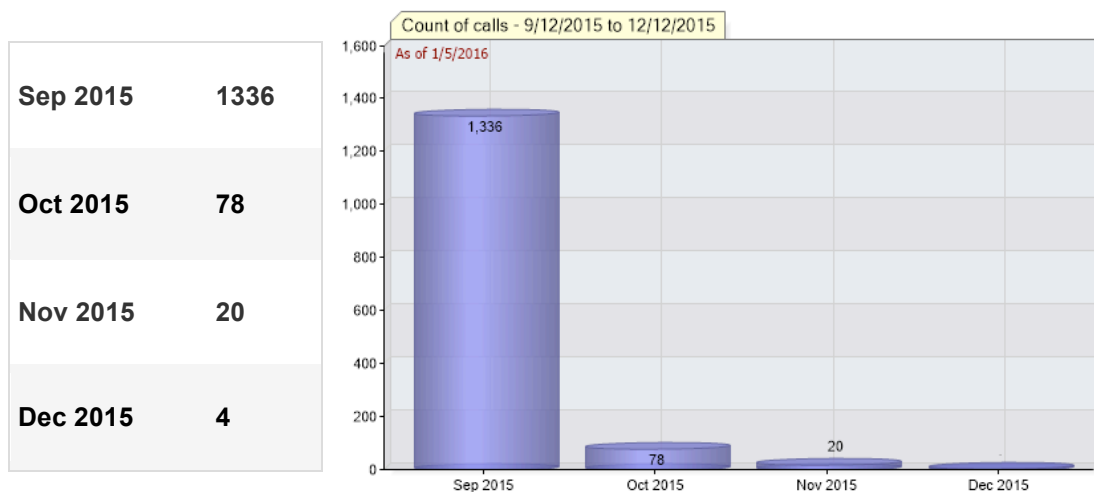
On September 12, when the Valley Fire broke out 2-1-1 Sonoma had already been activated and on-call to receive updates related to the Lake County fires. The Lake County PIO pushed news out to 2-1-1 Sonoma who then shared this information with callers. 2-1-1 Sonoma continued to serve Lake County as the County's "Public Assistance Telephone Line" throughout the Valley Fire response by adding news and disaster resources to its public website, www.211Sonoma.org, and offering information and

¹ 2-1-1 is a national program, and 2-1-1 Sonoma is part of the 2-1-1 CA network of service providers whose services reach 97% of the population throughout the state (as of Nov 2015). Lake County currently does not have a 2-1-1 program and therefore, requested 2-1-1 Sonoma's assistance.

referrals to callers or transferring callers directly the EOC Public Info Line for special concerns. 2-1-1 Sonoma modified the call center’s phone-line welcome greeting to inform callers that 2-1-1 Sonoma served Sonoma County residents as well as residents of Lake County and neighboring counties who had been affected by the wildfires.

The Response

Lake County Press releases and social media directed the public to call 2-1-1 Sonoma’s 1-800-325-9604 phone number². The word spread quickly by word-of-mouth and soon 2-1-1 Sonoma’s call volume increased significantly throughout the weeks following the onset of the Valley Fire. To accommodate this influx of calls, employee shifts and local call center hours were modified to expand capacity. 2-1-1 Sonoma recruited extra staff to assist in the call center during the day and coordinated information sharing with the night/weekend 2-1-1 support call center in San Bernardino. External messaging on 2-1-1 Sonoma’s call queue greeting also directed callers to the 2-1-1 Sonoma and Lake County LAC websites for fire related updates. 2-1-1 staff familiarized themselves each day with new information from the CalFire incident pages, partner websites and Lake County OES social media pages. From a state level, 2-1-1 California disseminated updates to 2-1-1’s throughout the state and requested that 2-1-1’s refer callers within their jurisdictions to 2-1-1 Sonoma for all Valley Fire related inquiries. Throughout the duration of the Valley Fire Response, 2-1-1 Sonoma, supported by its night/weekend center in San Bernardino, served 1,438 callers affected or seeking resources related to the Valley Fires.



The PNP Process/Application

Sarah Finnigan, 2-1-1 Sonoma’s Program Manager (also currently serving as President of Sonoma County VOAD), and key leadership including the Board of Directors of the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County, prepared submittals for reimbursement of program costs related to services provided to Lake County. The organization applied for both the CDAA PNP program and for FEMA’s Public Assistance (PA) program for private nonprofits on Friday, November 6, 2015.

² By calling the 800 number, instead of dialing 2-1-1, callers outside of Sonoma County could easily access the 2-1-1 Sonoma call center, regardless of where the caller was calling from.

Specifically for the CDAA PNP claim, the following forms were submitted:

1. Payee Data Record – The form was filled out by the organization’s Finance Director
2. Authorized Agent Resolution – The PNP application submission was due before the next regularly scheduled board meeting. In lieu of calling an emergency Board Meeting, a request to the Board of Directors to name two authorized agents for the PNP application was made via email and key leadership. The Board voted via email to pass the resolution and an official member of the Board signed this form.
3. PNP Application – Before completing this form, a cost analysis had to be completed that included all costs incurred by the services offered throughout the duration of the response. These costs included administrative staff time, fees per call, overtime staff time, and contracted fees per calls related to Valley Fire activities. 2-1-1 Sonoma applied the same rate/call to their cost estimation as is the standard rate billed to the call center by its support call center in San Bernardino County.
4. Activities Claim form – This form was completed upon the end of service to Lake County. 2-1-1 Sonoma’s last recorded call related to the Valley Fire was answered on December 10, 2015. Actual costs were noted on the Activities Claim Form. This form required a representative from the associated Agency, County of Lake, and was emailed to the representative and returned with a signature.

In addition to these forms, the State also requested the following forms be completed and submitted:

- PNP Certification form
- Tax Exempt ID information
- Written proof (in email form or other) of Agency’s request for PNP’s services

The PNP Process/Key Dates

Request from EOC: August 3, 2015 (for Rocky Fire and continued service throughout wildfire response)

Governor’s Proclamation: September 13, 2015

Submission of PNP Application, Payee Data Record, Authorized Agent Resolution: November 6, 2015 (within 60 days of Governor’s proclamation)

Completion of Services: December 12, 2015

Submission of Activities Claim Form: January 8, 2016 (within 60 days of last day of service)

The filing process and coordination of paperwork lasted over a period of several weeks as many staff and partners were involved with the completion of all required documents and approvals. FEMA informed the organization that their PA claim was denied as the costs associated with 2-1-1 Sonoma’s services did not align with the reimbursement offered by the Public Assistance grant. However, by completing both the FEMA application and the CDAA PNP application, the organization garnered a better understanding of the parameters of both grants and the processes for applying for each. Both applications required the gathering of similar information and the assessment of costs.

At this time, 2-1-1 Sonoma is awaiting a decision from the State regarding its submittal.