

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The State of North Carolina faced unprecedented challenges when Hurricane Floyd roared through in the fall of 1999, demolishing communities and devastating lives. Long before that, however, the state had invested in technical infrastructure that reaches well beyond typical, computer-based information technologies. Furthermore, in the Agency for Public Telecommunications, the state had created a service agency staffed by experienced professionals who are not technologists, but whose job it is to apply whatever technologies will meet the clients' needs for public outreach or staff development and training. Along with that infrastructure and expertise, the state has begun to cultivate a culture that promotes the use of telecommunications technologies in the place of "business as usual." This unique combination allowed the state to respond far more quickly and more effectively than would otherwise have been possible to the crisis conditions created by Hurricane Floyd. The attached nomination explains, in detail, specifically what technologies were involved and how they were used.

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION  
N.C. AGENCY FOR PUBLIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS (APT)  
RESPONSE TO HURRICANE FLOYD**

**CATEGORY:** Governmental Technological Applications

**Background:** The agency for Public Telecommunications (APT), a division of the NC Department of Administration, was established in 1979 to provide telecommunications advice and production assistance to other public agencies. The Agency's targeted outcomes are to increase public participation in government to promote public access to government services, and to improve government efficiency through the appropriate use of telecommunications.

In meeting its mandate, APT uses multiple technologies to produce interactive teleconferences and original audio/video productions that assist clients with public outreach or staff development and training. In addition, through its Open Public Events Network (OPEN), APT connects public officials with citizens during call-in programs carried by about 60 N.C. cable systems as a public service to cable subscribers every Tuesday and Thursday evening in prime time.

**Technological Applications**

In September of 1999, as North Carolina Prepared for Hurricane Floyd and then moved, after the devastating storm, into the disaster relief and recovery phase, it was critical for the state to coordinate efficiently with federal officials and to provide information to the public as quickly as possible. APT provided telecommunications advice and production assistance using the most appropriate technology for each task:

Fiber

In cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the state's Information Technologies Section, APT established a daily fiber link from APT's Raleigh studio to FEMA headquarters in Washington, DC, to the Hurricane Tracking Center in Miami, and to several states in between. These face-to-face conferences enabled N.C. Emergency Management staff to hold planning meetings with their colleagues before the hurricane and to coordinate relief and recovery efforts after the storm struck.

Most significantly, during one of these fiber conferences just hours after the hurricane hit North Carolina, the Governor in Raleigh described early damage reports and appealed directly to the President at FEMA for help. The President responded on-the-spot with assurances of immediate assistance.

### Satellite and Microwave

In order to respond to the media and to get accurate information to the public as quickly as possible in the after of Hurricane Floyd, the Governor's Office used APT to produce "media tours," connecting the Governor in our Raleigh studio with reporters across the state and around the nation via microwave and satellite. In one marathon session, the Governor talked with 13 newsrooms, including CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, AP, and several local stations. Over the next week, he came back to APT six more times for satellite uplinks to the national networks and the Lehrer NewsHour. The N.C. Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety and N.C. Attorney General also used APT for their "media tours."

Five days after the storm's flooding devastated the eastern third of the state, the Governor used APT's studio and satellite uplink facilities to issue a powerful appeal for public donations and corporate contributions to a special fund for hurricane victims. Most of the state's major commercial stations carried this statewide address, live, on their six o'clock news. Some stations and public TV carried taped portions of the address at other times.

### Satellite to Cable

Two days before the hurricane struck, APT produced a special, two-hour call-in program via satellite on the Open Public Events Network (OPEN) for its cable affiliates. Two commercial television stations and a commercial radio network also took our signal and carried the first hour. Panelists in the Raleigh studio taking calls from the public included officials from the federal and state emergency management agencies, the Red Cross, the National Weather Service and the state's Department of Insurance. They responded to dozens of questions about the storm's likely path and the state's preparedness plan.

Afterwards, APT produced eight more, two-hour call-in programs via satellite and cable on OPEN so that public officials could provide the latest information about relief and State, federal and non-profit agency panelists talked with hundreds of callers about flood damage, shelter locations, federal grants and loans, insurance claims, road and bridge repairs, environmental contamination, potential criminal scams, public health issues, stress management, volunteer efforts, the Governor's appeal for donations, the recovery of private and public records, and other concerns that viewers raised.

### Digital Video

The state's Department of Agriculture sent staff into the field to assess flood damages suffered by North Carolina's framers, livestock operations, and the agribusiness community. Faced with the need to preserve a coherent record of images they had collected from multiple sources, they turned to APT. Our media services section quickly

compiled a concise, eight-minute video that not only shows the horrors of the flood and its impact, but also documents the success of the department's animal rescue efforts.

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### **Calculation of Savings/Quantitative Benefits**

There's simply no way to calculate the cost savings or quantitative benefits to state agencies or taxpayers from the use of the technologies APT provided

Instead, it is clear what would not have happened in the absence of these technologies. The Governor in Raleigh would not have met the President in Washington on the day of with national news anchors and local reporters live, on their morning and evening newscasts, day after day, without satellite connections. State emergency Management leaders would not have had daily, face-to-face discussions with their colleagues at FEMA and other locations all at once, if they had not had a fiber link. And, without regularly scheduled cable call-in programs, North Carolina Citizens would not have had immediate, direct access to state policy makers responding to their questions and concerns.

There is no valid way to measure the value of time, energy, creativity, and productivity that would have been wasted if public agency clients had not used the technological applications that are available to them through APT. In some cases, the work would not have been done at all; in others, it would not have been done as efficiently.

### **Relevancy to Other Agencies**

The Agency for Public Telecommunications is uniquely positioned to provide a valuable combination of services to other public agencies because of the tremendous investment North Carolina has made in technology over the years. It is part of APT's mission to inform other public agencies about the availability of these services; to find innovative ways clients can use technology for routine projects or during emergencies; and to support technological applications with professional production expertise as well as operations and engineering assistance. It is certainly possible that federal agencies and other states could build the technical infrastructure and create the culture necessary to take advantage of these technologies and to achieve similar results.

### **Conclusion**

APT's "Response to Hurricane Floyd" provides an outstanding example of how North Carolina uses available technologies alone and in combination, especially during a critical emergency. But it is not enough simply to have the technical infrastructure in place during routine situations or major disasters. What is also essential is an ability to envision the possibilities that only technological applications can offer, the confidence to let professionals handle technical details while agencies focus on their own strengths,

and a willingness to try new ways of doing the state's business. Our colleagues and clients did all of that, and North Carolina experienced multiple benefits as a result.