



CASE STUDY

Community-wide Coordination During Covid-19: Insights for Complex Communications

Case example demonstrates that health care facilities and first responders can effectively communicate to respond to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic in innovative ways.

Coronavirus: A Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for health care organizations and the communities they support, including coordination with government agencies, first responders and workers at temporary remote locations. Complex communications for these unpredictable and dynamic healthcare emergency response ecosystems requires technology that is scalable and allows for ad hoc collaboration via voice, real-time video and data sharing.

This reviews the effective strategy put in place in the **State of New Hampshire** to manage inter-agency and public-private communications required for Covid-19 pandemic response. Consistent with emergency management best practices, the effective response strategy emphasized shared information

and collaboration. The innovative approach ensured expeditious communications with flexibility built in to adapt to a changing need for traditional collaborators and new agencies. Insights from New Hampshire's approach can help health care organizations and first responders to increase their agility and flexibility of communications to manage upcoming waves of the current and future pandemics.

Challenges: Covid-19 Pandemic Response

The Covid-19 pandemic is a clear example of the need to prepare for the unpredictable. The scale and speed of the viral spread demanded shifts in hospital operations, law enforcement practices and responsibilities for National Guards across states. The US Department of Homeland Security, through FEMA, provides guidance for managing these events in the **National Emergency Management System (NIMS)**, which defines a comprehensive whole community approach to incident management.

The first key communications challenge was the lack of interoperability among those charged with logistical control and security for fourteen field hospital locations



set up across the state. To achieve seamless communications between and among the New Hampshire National Guard and state and local emergency response personnel, the state deployed Mutualink Edge IWS to enable field personnel to interoperate via smartphone with headquarters personnel and each other.

A second challenge came as the state prepared to face the projected second wave, requiring a more robust and widespread response involving the New Hampshire Department of Safety, local and state first responders, numerous medical facilities and places of mass gathering (airports, colleges and universities, etc.). A related challenge was finding funding to ensure effective communications on a widespread scale. In addition, the urgency of timing and considerations regarding deployment without risking contamination of frontline staff in the local agencies while vendors installed hardware provided a layer of logistical challenge.

CARES Act and Other Funding

State and local leaders can take steps to capture the benefit of federal relief to fund projects that support emergency operations in relation to Covid-19 disaster response. The State of New Hampshire leveraged **CARES Act** funding to achieve seamless communications among those charged with Covid-19 emergency response and security logistics. The **Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021** extends the spending deadline for CARES Act funds to December 31, 2021.

In addition, US Department of Homeland Security funding is available through each state's administrative agency. Emergency Preparedness grants, the **Urban Area Security Initiative Program** and disaster-related funding provide examples of avenues to explore when considering funding sources for community communications supporting incident response. Finally, as the pandemic progresses and vaccinations become more widely available, the likelihood of post-disaster funding may provide additional funding sources in support of ongoing mitigation.

Results

Mutualink software and hardware is deployed in 120 locations throughout New Hampshire to quickly connect responders and medical units as a comprehensive interoperable community. This includes vaccination sites throughout the state to support seamless coordination and reporting of Covid-19 statistical data and vaccination information to the appropriate authorities.

The HIPAA-compliant system creates a communications network community with full voice interoperability to include radio, smartphone and push-to-talk bridging. With voice, video and data available in real time, first responders are better able to optimize emergency management and reduce the time needed to make decisions and take necessary action. And Mutualink's attention to ease of use helps make the platform accessible even during times of high stress.

GRAFTON COUNTY, NH

Deployed November 2014

*Lead agency for North
Country and Lakes Region
Trial and Exercise*

What is Mutualink:

*Mutualink is a secure communications technology **that strengthens communities by enabling seamless operational collaboration.***

- ✓ *Statewide LMR interoperability, regardless of radio*
- ✓ *LMR to PTT operability*
- ✓ *secure, real-time video sharing: security cameras, drones, etc.*
- ✓ *secure data share, location tracking, texting*
- ✓ *map layers of data visualization*
- ✓ *Firstnet approved. Carrier and network independent*

