

THE LOS ANGELES EARTHQUAKE: GET READY PROJECT

Art Center College of Design

“LA HAS FAULTS”

Pilot Study and Public Awareness Campaign
for Earthquake Preparedness

Report to the California Seismic Safety Commission

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Intervention #1 : Introducing Ourselves At Macarther Park

INTRODUCTION

With *The Los Angeles Earthquake: Get Ready*, Art Center College of Design has developed a multifaceted initiative that focuses on conceiving new communication vehicles to disseminate important messages about earthquake mitigation throughout the culturally diverse mosaic of the Los Angeles Basin.

A key objective has been to search for appropriate means of outreach that can resonate at a grassroots level with some of the most underserved populations, who will be at great risk during and after a catastrophic event. Our contemporary digital context and the explosion of participatory media platforms and social networks are powerful channels for learning and civic engagement that the initiative is also tapping into, with the conviction that we can foster an unprecedented level of receptiveness to ideas that may galvanize the public to engage in preparedness as a matter of lifestyle and informed choice. The new paradigms for communication created by the project also aspire to provide a blueprint for mitigation efforts that are also vitally needed beyond Los Angeles, and statewide in California and beyond.

From January through May 2008, the initiative conducted a public awareness pilot study “LA HAS FAULTS,” that staged a series of design interventions to assess earthquake preparedness and recommend new communication strategies to reach a diverse cross-section of underserved communities in the MacArthur Park area of Los Angeles.

The study took place over a sixteen-week long investigation that was led by Sean Donahue, Director of Research, Humanities & Design Sciences and Faculty Member, Media Design Graduate Program, Art Center College of Design, along with a group of four core investigators/designers: Yee Chan (Graduate Media Design), Vera Valentine (Graphic Design, undergraduate), Hye Rin Kang (Environmental Design, undergraduate), and Ken Huang (Graphic Design, alumnus). The study was overseen by Anne Burdick, Chairman, Graduate Media Design Department, and Mariana Amatullo, Vice President, International Initiatives and Director, Designmattes at Art Center, and included the participation and expertise of a wide variety of community leaders, scientists, city officials and emergency preparedness personnel.

METHODOLOGIES FOR ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH

The Graduate Media Design Program at Art Center practices “human-centered design research,” a unique methodology that yields insight into people’s attitudes and perceived knowledge, in order then to communicate with them in meaningful ways. In order to develop messaging that works this methodology favors “cultural probes,” these are creative ways to extract the more ineffable feelings of the target community under study—the data that does not necessarily emerge from straightforward question-and-answer approach. It is a methodology that values play and exploration and is decisively open-ended and qualitative. However, combined with more traditional research from social scientists, the method is very effective in yielding recommendations to incorporate important information into habits and daily practices of individuals, inspiring and engaging a population to take action.

LA HAS FAULTS deployed these methodologies to assess earthquake readiness. The insights gained through this methodology of probing were used to design a responsive communication strategy as well as individual and community-led activities that would

advance preparedness efforts and foster behavior change, putting preparedness in our collective front-burner.

The project focused on the near-downtown district of Westlake. A densely populated and predominantly Latino community offering a range of social and cultural institutions and economic scenarios, it presented an ideal context in which to engage an important segment of the Los Angeles demographic, and study issues associated with urban residential living and access to resources.

The starting point for the team of investigators was to take official preparedness guidelines, directives, and resources and understand what layers of messaging and delivery could be construed to facilitate the reception of these messages and incite action.

Two distinct phases in the study were conceived with an overall bottom-up strategy that could be used as a model for engaging other communities in similar interventions.

PHASE 1: INTRODUCTION

To introduce the design group and the topic of earthquake preparedness to the community, the team conducted a large-scale design intervention in MacArthur Park, the social center of Westlake. The intervention event ran for a full day in April 2008. [exact date?]

The intervention consisted of 10-foot high letters that were constructed to spell out five different words. Built one at a time with each left standing for 30 minutes, these words, in English and Spanish, were intended to reflect familiar earthquake rhetoric while piquing the curiosity of passers-by. “Shake,” “Shift,” “Aware,” “Alerta,” and “Alto” were used as prompts to generate interest and start conversations with park visitors, passing commuters and local residents. The physical construction of the letters were important because it required community activity and teamwork. Once built, the words became a congregation space that invited people to rest, play, explore, or otherwise reside in the form. This outcome provided opportunities for the interview team to make connections with the community. An on-site documentary crew recorded perspectives and specific information resources were distributed to help prepare for and learn about earthquakes.

PHASE 2: STARTING A CONVERSATION

This phase relied on the power of presence. The team rented a retail space across from MacArthur Park for two weeks during the month of May 2008, and transformed it into a temporary community center. The space was designed to provide an environment that facilitated dialogue and fostered communication among civic leaders, residents, and service providers, acting as a conduit to identify and directly address the unique preparedness issues of this community. For example, the director of MacArthur Park and representatives from the Emergency Services Department were invited to discuss how to work through preparedness strategies that addressed the potential reality of scenarios in Westlake.

KEY FINDINGS

The research findings and outcomes of the public outreach accomplished during both of these phases of this pilot study with representatives from organizations such as for example the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles, the Asociacion de Salvadoreños en Los Angeles, Charles White Elementary, Mission Lirio De Los Valles, Los Angeles Pregnancy Services, L.A. County Office of Emergency Management, and the Institute for Urban Initiatives, were extremely rich and merit further exploration in order to build on the outcomes of this report.

An important segment of the community was well aware of basic preparedness steps to take; despite this knowledge they felt disempowered to make a difference and have any individual say to fair better during a significant earthquake. This led to inaction and an overall sense of frustration.

In some cases with immigrant families, many admitted they would be hesitant to take advantage of government sponsored resources in the aftermath of a quake due to illegal status and fear of deportation.



Intervention #1 : Shake.Shift.Aware



Community Conversations



Community Interviews



Introducing The Issues



A significant segment of the community articulated distrust and lack of confidence in government institutions and organizations, not deeming them as reliable sources of aid. When asked to cite sources they would appeal to, they referenced local religious and community-based organizations.

The community's identification with grass-roots groups was reinforced by the staff of local organizations, who clearly see themselves as first responders, and a key resource for their community. The paradox is that the staff of these community-based organizations reported not feeling adequately equipped with information materials and proper supplies to respond in the case of a disaster.

Local health centers (clinicas) and job placement businesses expressed interest in becoming centers for information about earthquake readiness. Some proposed the idea of establishing incentive-led mechanisms to increase broader participation among the community. For example, making mandatory to take training/awareness workshops and consume media materials (such as instructional videos about safety) as a prerequisite for specific services being sought by community members.

A majority of residents had already identified a location in the event that they would have to leave home in an emergency, and for many individuals in the community, that designated place was MacArthur Park. However no formal plan between MacArthur Park authorities and community members was in place to address this scenario.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the outcomes of the public awareness pilot study “LA HAS FAULTS,” the following are a few strategies for further interventions and campaigns that could be targeted as effective engagement opportunities with this community:

Utilize a community-centered, grass-roots/bottom-up approach to preparedness development and promotion. For example:

Survey the population to understand the communities preexisting issues and concerns and the existing organizations and service providers they would trust as a resource.

Use local merchant and service providers to create and distribute communications. For example video based instructions about preparedness could be broadcast at medical facilities or job placement agencies in the community.

Create local public-centered interventions as vehicles to raise awareness.

Create distribution, outreach and planning centers that are located at the heart of meeting points already established in the community. Make these centers venues to collect community perspectives and host community based planning/resource sessions.

Create an image based emergency preparedness resource kit. For example work with local stores and have the items in the kit be affordable, and resonate with the demographic of the target group.

Strengthen links and connection mechanisms between community-based organizations and governmental agencies

Establish effective communication relations between the local organizations and governmental agencies in order to ensure that adequate resources, materials, data and information are available to the community through these pillar organizations.

Move away from “one size fits all” communication materials and simply translating messaging into another language; instead invest in designing new communication materials and messaging with the specificity and cultural attributes of the community.

Foster opportunities where residents are actively engaged and guided to reflect about issues of preparedness and empowered to take individual responsibility.

CONCLUSION

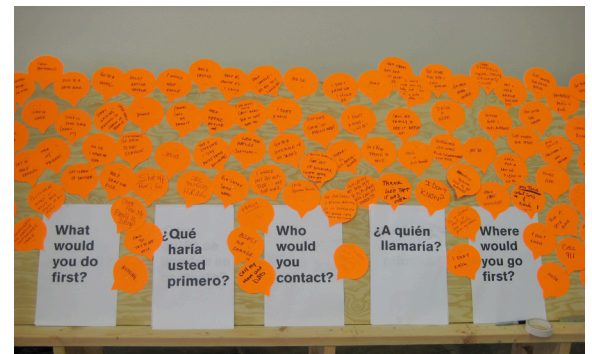
As one of the key components of Art Center's The Los Angeles Earthquake Get Ready Project, the Pilot Study and Public Awareness Campaign "LA HAS FAULTS," conducted from January to May 2008 in the MacArthur Park community of Los Angeles, was a very effective way to assess earthquake preparedness among this target community and develop new strategies for engagement and mitigation utilizing design-based research strategies and human-centered methodologies. Art Center is grateful for the leadership and support of this component of the initiative from the California Seismic Safety Commission. Based on the outcomes and findings, a subsequent phase of this pilot study could yield replicable and scalable campaign tools in other communities of Southern California that face similar earthquake mitigation challenges.



Community Planning Meetings



Participating in Community Events



Community Voices



Extending Into The Community, Literally



Intervention #2 : Dialogue Center



Intervention #2 : Dialogue Center, Opening For The Day