

5 questions with Tahoe Truckee Community Organizations Active in Disaster

County of Placer

Even this week, with the Royal Fire, we've seen an example of the risk Tahoe faces when it comes to disasters. Nonprofits and community-based organizations are a key partner to the county when disaster strikes, often supporting vulnerable residents with disabilities or other challenges.

This week, Placer County Health and Human Services extended its fiscal commitment to support the Tahoe Truckee Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), which coordinates among nonprofit partners during disasters. Originally a two-year pilot program led by the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, the COAD is now headed into its third year with financial support from local jurisdictions and state grants.

Anne Rarick, the Tahoe-Truckee COAD manager, answered a few questions about the program:

Q: How did the Tahoe COAD come to be, and what is its mission?

Anne Rarick: The Tahoe COAD began in 2022 with the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, Office of Emergency Services in Placer and Nevada counties, Health and Human Services in Placer and Nevada counties, and the town of Truckee. Originally a two-year project, we're now moving into year three as we see it meeting a community need. In a nutshell, we organize non-governmental disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities. We work with our nonprofit and faith-based organizations, businesses and government agencies. The COAD acts as a liaison between our county partners and community-based organizations that are doing work on the ground during disasters. It's a national movement, and there are many COADs throughout California.

In this region, with our multi-jurisdictional dynamics, a lot of preparedness education is around the

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different emergency alert systems in Placer County, Nevada County and the town of Truckee – hence the recent launch of Tahoe Alerts to streamline folks’ access to alerts where they live, work and play. We provide education to ensure people are aware of the various systems, especially if they work in one area but live in another.

What are some ways the COAD supports the community during active incidents?

We work closely with 211 to gather unmet needs, and we encourage the public to call 211 for support during these incidents. We receive briefings from OES and distill that information, and then have a huddle with our COAD partners to identify any on-ground issues that need attention. For example, this week, a camp working with kids with disabilities was deciding whether to evacuate due to the Royal Fire, and we helped them connect with Placer County Health and Human Services to ensure they were aware and could provide support.

We also connect with larger volunteer organizations like the American Red Cross, Salvation Army and Lutheran Disaster Services, bringing them into the community if needed. This coordination helps make the response more efficient and effective.

Can you share a success story or achievement of the COAD that you’re proud of?

After the 2022-2023 winter storms, we partnered with state agencies and local organizations, including Sierra Community House, to give vital cash relief of about \$300,000 to over 500 families in need affected by the storms.

We’ve also had success with creative outreach strategies, like our Lotería game that’s designed around disaster preparedness. It’s a popular game in Mexico and the U.S., somewhat similar to Bingo. We’ve been able to give this to families to start a conversation in a way that resonates with them. It’s been really popular.

What are the COAD’s future goals for the next few years?

We are focusing on boosting community readiness through education on emergency alerts and family preparedness. We’re also focused on disaster insurance. Many people didn’t have insurance during the winter storms, so we’re working with United Policyholders to provide that education. Overall, we aim to

help communities, especially the most vulnerable, become more resilient to disasters.

What advice would you give to other communities starting COAD groups?

Build connections with local jurisdictions. Learn from agencies, including OES and HHS, to understand how incidents are run and translate that to your nonprofits. This helps alleviate anxiety, decrease duplication of services and make the response more efficient and effective. Connect with your local community foundation, which can play a significant role in disaster recovery. Listening to the community and being willing to pivot when needed is also crucial. Make sure your trusted partners — like CBOs, faith-based organizations and businesses — know what they need in a disaster, and help make those organizations more resilient so they can continue their work.