

# **CITY OF LONG BEACH**

DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

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March 22, 2005

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
City of Long Beach  
California

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive and file a report on the selection of an emergency telephone notification system.

## **DISCUSSION**

Recent natural disasters in the United States and across the globe have demonstrated the need for local governments to prepare and implement effective public warning strategies. At the City Manager's request, the Technology Services Department has led an interdepartmental team in a review of telephone notification systems. This technology would increase the City's capability to provide emergency information by allowing us to place thousands of calls to the public in a short period of time. The City currently uses such outlets as KKJZ 88.1 FM, LBTv Channel 8, and the Internet to communicate with the community. This telephone notification system will augment the existing public communication tools.

A telephone notification system can be an effective communications tool in Long Beach with its ability to reach a large portion of the City's population. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, 97 percent of households in Long Beach have telephone service available at home. Recently, the potential effectiveness of telephone notification systems has been enhanced as State law now allows cities access to both listed and unlisted phone numbers from local telephone carriers. However, the use of the "911" telephone database is limited to emergency situations. After reviewing the offerings of several vendors, the team composed of representatives from Police, Fire, and Technology Services Departments, as well as the City Manager's Office, last week selected the system from Sigma Communications, Inc. (Sigma). The company's product is marketed under the name "Reverse 911." City staff is now in discussions to finalize an agreement with Sigma.

The system is designed to allow for easy activation of emergency messages. It can be used to broadcast emergency information to a precise geographic area or to an entire community. Examples of situations in which the system might be activated include hazardous material releases, flood warnings, missing persons, criminal activity notifications, terrorism incidents or other natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis.

Reverse 911 is designed to efficiently use telecommunications capacity based on the situation. In the vast majority of the situations requiring system activation, only a portion of the City would need to be contacted. The City would use its internal telephone infrastructure to initiate the calls. Based on the planned configuration, it is estimated that the system would be able to place about 3,000 calls per hour. There would be no incremental costs for placing the calls.

HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

March 22, 2005

Page 2

For a major incident in which the City would need to place a large number of calls in a short time period, the City would have access to Reverse 911's telephone line capacity. This is Reverse 911's "Mass Call" service. As part of the product review process, City staff contacted Baldwin County, Alabama, who used Mass Call during Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. The County reported that it placed 200,000 calls in six hours, or about 33,000 calls per hour. In an event requiring citywide notification, we anticipate placing approximately 200,000 calls. Reverse 911 charges \$.20 per call to use the service. It is important to note that should the Mass Call capability be activated in response to, or in anticipation of a federally-declared emergency, the cost for the telephone calls may be eligible for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

While Reverse 911's system is designed for communicating with the public, it also has employee notification capabilities. It includes a product called Mobilization Plus that would allow the City to contact a large number of employees immediately through various technologies, including cell phones, pagers, and blackberries. We would use Mobilization Plus in emergency call-out situations such as an activation of the emergency operations center. This additional capability of the Reverse 911 product is intended to improve City staff's response to emergency events.

Furthermore, Reverse 911 has an interactive survey capability. It would allow the City to obtain public feedback on important issues through automated telephone surveys. The public would use their touch-tone telephone to provide responses to survey questions.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

City staff estimates it would take 10 weeks to implement the Reverse 911 system following agreement completion.

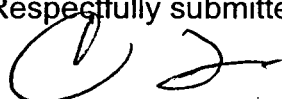
FISCAL IMPACT

The initial start up cost for the system would be approximately \$75,000, including installation and training. The acquisition of the Reverse 911 product will be funded through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) 2005 grant program. The City's purchase of the product supports the DHS objective of improving public emergency notification efforts. Annual ongoing vendor support and licensing fees for the system would be approximately \$12,500. In the event the City uses Mass Call, it would cost \$.20 per call, though this expense may be eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Approve recommendation.

Respectfully submitted,



CURTIS TANI  
DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

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APPROVED:



GERALD R. MILLER  
CITY MANAGER