Message Research
Executive Summary
October 13, 2011

Fellow earthquake preparedness messengers:

Thanks for your participation in our earthquake preparedness messaging workshops last spring, which were attended by hundreds of other like-minded folks in Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Inland Empire and San Diego. Our mission is straightforward: to coordinate earthquake preparedness programs and messaging that will demonstrably increase personal disaster preparedness actions among Californians. Your commitment to this cause is appreciated.

As you know, social scientists recently confirmed that California’s levels of earthquake preparedness are low. Their recommendations for increasing our state’s levels of earthquake preparedness included:

1. Communicating why it matters to become prepared and what people will get out of it;
2. Branding the message and not the messenger; and
3. Promoting a branded message through everyone, everywhere, all-of-the-time.

Based on these research results, the California Earthquake Authority (CEA) and the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) Earthquake and Tsunami Program joined forces to do marketing research that would help all earthquake preparedness stakeholders learn how we could come together to share a “branded” message. Specifically, we wanted to better understand how to transition us from having differing to shared messages that combine “what to do” with “why to do it.”

With the power of these combined research efforts now in your hands, imagine a future mutual programming goal focused on more people “preparing to survive and recover from California’s next damaging earthquake.”

To help you translate that dream into reality, this document seeks to accomplish two objectives:

1. Show how social science and marketing research results can work together to achieve that goal, and
2. Demonstrate how shared messaging concepts can be readily implemented on the street.

Strategically, think about how a “shared plan for different programs” could enable all of us—including news reporters, community leaders, universities, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and earthquake insurance companies—to utilize the same research-based messages in different, yet coordinated programming throughout the diverse earthquake preparedness arena.

To help you bring home this shared plan to your own constituencies, use this document not as a research result to put on a shelf, but as a working template for how you can take up shared messaging in your own earthquake preparedness programming.

Note how news reporters already have joined our shared cause. And see examples (on message) of how different members of the community emphasize “preparing to survive” the shaking, while the CEA similarly focuses on “preparing to recover” after the shaking stops.

For your communications during the upcoming ShakeOut earthquake drill, consider using these messages:

1. Preparing now will help your family survive and recover from California’s next damaging earthquake.
2. Taking simple steps to prepare will help you get back to normal faster after the next big quake strikes.
3. Preparing today will help your family be safe during and after the next damaging earthquake.

Thanks again for your commitment to this important cause and, above all else, for your thoughtful consideration of these related, research-based shared messaging opportunities. Through better coordination of messages and programs, per the professional recommendations to do so, we can make a difference.

Chris Nance
CEA Chief Communications Officer
Earthquake Country Alliance Advisory Committee

Kate Long
Cal EMA Earthquake and Tsunami Program Deputy
Earthquake Country Alliance Advisory Committee
Introduction

California Earthquake Authority (CEA) and California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) partnered to invest in message development market research, conducted by Harris Interactive, intended to build on prior academic research and guide the development of a communications strategy that will be persuasive and effective in moving California residents to a higher level of earthquake preparedness than currently exists. The ultimate goal is that, across the state, everyone engaged in earthquake preparedness, can use this strategy to evaluate existing or future messages and ensure that they are hitting on the most relevant elements, as discovered in the research.

CEA and Cal EMA recognized that prior academic research was valuable in identifying how prepared Californians are and made important recommendations about how and when to communicate to the public. These earlier research efforts led by sociologists Dr. Linda Bourque of the UCLA School of Public Health and Dr. Dennis Mileti of the University of Colorado at Boulder, described in greater detail below, form the foundation for the current engagement – development of an evidence-based standardized message, to be delivered in a consistent manner over multiple channels, over a long period of time, via a coordinated campaign among the various local, state and federal programs and agencies engaged in earthquake preparedness. These research projects identify the current state of readiness and provide significant recommendations as it relates to an overall communications strategy. However, neither of these research studies address a key component of any communications strategy – the actual message, “what to say,” that will be needed to move more Californians to take more readiness actions.

“The Study of Household Preparedness: Preparing California for Earthquakes,”(CEPS), supported by the Cal EMA, Seismic Safety Commission and California Volunteers, explored the preparedness behavior and information sources of 2,081 households in California between June and December 2008. In summary, this research found that multiple messages are in use at various levels of government and non-governmental agencies, California residents are not very well prepared for earthquakes, they use various sources of information to get preparedness information but few actively seek information, and they don’t talk much about this subject with family or friends. Of particular importance, is that these findings did not differ by geographic area within California or the risk level of the area in which people live.

During the same period, the Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence for Research on Terrorism and the START Center at the University of Maryland commissioned a meta-analysis of various hazard research and print publications in order to present “evidence based” applications for the practice of changing public behavior around disaster preparedness for all hazards: “Public Education Research Findings & Evidence Based Applications for Practice.” This mega-study’s findings cross-validated the key findings from the CEPS research, and took the discussion one step further, seeking to specify key factors and processes that lead the public to take readiness actions. This analytic modeling tested and retested a variety of theories and variables about what motivates public readiness to identify those factors that are most influential. The study
found that there is a general resistance to becoming prepared, with people generally holding the belief that they are safe and don’t need to know or do more than they are, a belief that held true when tested across various demographic groups such as gender, age, income, region, etc. Further, it found that messages related to “risk mitigation” were more influential than those about “risk perception” and that talking about specific steps people should take motivated readiness behavior.

Finally, consistent with the California research, the meta-analysis found that multiple messages from multiple channels (direct and indirect) were a critical element to motivating behavior change. In other words, both studies support a conclusion that regular delivery of preparedness information will lead to more action.

These research studies lead to the following conclusions which are the launching point for Harris Interactive’s current market research on message development.

- Develop a consensus for how to talk about readiness.
- Regarding content, a standardized, consistent message should be used. (Too many messages dilute the effectiveness of all of them and lead to inaction.) Note that this does not mean that message content and delivery should not be tailored to specific audience needs, but that tailoring should be subordinate to a coordinated message approach.
- Regarding dissemination, better coordination between all government and non-government agencies and programs engaged in preparedness will likely lead to greater penetration of the preparedness message.
- The more information sources sharing the common message, the better.
- Information should be disseminated on an ongoing, regular basis using a variety of communication channels.
- Information should tell people what they need to do, not just discuss the threat.
- Messages should communicate why it matters to become prepared and what people will get out of it.
- Encourage people to talk more about their readiness actions and behavior, and to share what they have done.
- To be effective, any campaign needs to be implemented over the long haul. Success will not happen with a one-shot, short-term effort.
- Readiness messages and progress should be measured using evidence-based methods and informed by research.

Among the most important recommendations made by Dr. Mileti is to “brand the message” and not the messenger, which the steps above will accomplish.
Harris’ market research sought to take these recommendations to the next level. The research discussed in these pages was developed with the goal of developing a blue-print or map to guide development of a message that can be adopted and used by the earthquake preparedness community with the ultimate goal of increasing the readiness levels of California residents.

Methodology

The overall framework guiding all phases of research was Harris Interactive’s VISTA™ (Values In STrategy Assessment) methodology. This proprietary research methodology focuses explicitly on understanding the human decision-making process. VISTA™ is a methodology which goes far beyond the traditional understanding of consumer benefits to identify the most personally compelling personal values in the decision-making process that must be “tapped into” in order to achieve a successful outcome. This approach allows us to identify and understand the underlying needs and motivations of California residents as it relates to readiness and preparedness. Just as important, the VISTA™ approach will show how these rational and emotional components are linked, detailing the complete decision-making process. The outcome of VISTA™ is a communications template, or map, depicting the decision-making thought process that gives us a blueprint for action – those important factors that motivate our target audience toward immediate and long-term action.

To build consumer benefit and value, we know that people will allow themselves to be persuaded with rational arguments about specific and salient features of messages and the functional benefits associated with them, but consumers are more likely to be motivated to act when these arguments tap into their emotions and personal values. The most effective messages make this complete linkage between the tangible components of the benefit being offered and the person.

Stated another way; the fundamental premise of strategic positioning is that you “persuade by reason and motivate through emotion.” Effective strategy hinges on making your “issue” positively and personally relevant to your key audiences. The only way to do this is to understand both the rational and emotional components of decision-making. In the case of earthquake preparedness, the goal was to ensure that communications met both goals: “what to do” and “why to do it.”

VISTA™ employs an interviewing technique called laddering. Laddering is a specialized technique where trained interviewers elicit the respondent’s decision-making process in such a way that rational and emotional factors are articulated and the links between these factors are identified. Typically, emotional consequences will connect conceptually with one or more personal values. People have logical reasons for their decisions, but they are also trying to satisfy deeper personal, emotional needs and values. Values are the ultimate roots from which behavior originates and what people are attempting to satisfy when they make life choice decisions. Roughly 25 “terminal values” have been identified in the literature and include:
The challenge is in understanding the mental pathways people follow between choices in a given decision and the values that are most important to them. Once the most dominant pathways to decision-making have been uncovered, powerful strategies can be developed to tap into those pathways. Each pathway in the resulting framework will include attributes, functional consequences, emotional consequences, and personal values, as defined below.

- **Attributes** are the facts and issue characteristics that people think about a product or issue, using preparedness as an example – *Having a box in their house with 2 to 3 days of snacks or water* – may be an action people take.

- **Functional consequences** are the rational implications of the attributes, elicited by asking what the benefit is to having 2-3 days of water and snacks on hand – *It means family members will have food and water for a few days.*

- At the **emotional consequence** level, the decision-making process becomes personally relevant, focusing on what about the functional consequence matters to the individual – *I will be able to take care of my family for the first few days after an earthquake.*

- Finally, the **values** level of the pathway addresses the enduring personally relevant needs that make a choice important – *It gives me peace of mind that I have done what I could.*

Specifically, the research involved a year-long engagement including three distinct phases of research, all of which were designed to incorporate elements of the VISTA approach. The phases included:
1. Two-hour, one-on-one interviews with 47 residents in Los Angeles and San Francisco, conducted in July 2010;

2. Focus groups to gather input from other important segments of the California population and test preliminary message themes
   a. Four focus groups in November 2010 in San Francisco (1), San Diego (2), and Eureka (1).
   b. Specific ethnicities were recruited in San Francisco (Asian-American) and San Diego (Hispanic); and

3. An online quantitative survey to verify, refine and be able to generalize findings in a reliable way
   a. Online survey among over 1500 California adults conducted in February and March 2011.
      The survey took approximately 37 minutes to complete and was conducted in English and Spanish.

Following the completion of the research, half-day workshops were held in five locations around the state: San Diego, Los Angeles, Inland Empire, San Francisco and Sacramento. Several hundred participants attended throughout the state and included professionals engaged in earthquake preparedness at all levels of government and community organizations. The goal of the workshops was to introduce this research, review the key findings and demonstrate how it can be applied to existing or new messages.
Development of Earthquake Preparedness Message Strategy

The research identified positive and personally relevant ways to communicate about earthquake preparedness. By addressing both functional attributes and personal values communications can better answer the question “what’s in it for me?”

The qualitative and quantitative research is summarized in the message strategy map below and identified two key pathways of communication; one focusing on the short-term survival of an earthquake and one focusing on the longer-term recovery. A third, more negative pathway, was also identified and will be discussed below.

The final map below illustrates these two pathways.

Earthquake Preparedness Message Map

The short-term “response” (the right hand side of the map) pathway begins, at an attribute level, with gathering and organizing supplies, contact information and putting together a family disaster plan. This leads people to feel they will be “ready and able,” the functional, specific benefit of having those supplies, when an earthquake strikes so that they can take care of their families. Family protection was a strong and motivating element during every phase of research and was true for every demographic group.
interviewed. At an emotional level, being ready leads to feeling in control and that one will survive (both immediately and over the longer term). And ultimately, this gives people confidence and peace of mind which are the values associated with the seemingly simple task of gathering emergency supplies.

On the left side of the map, the long term recovery pathway begins with concerns about one’s physical belongings and the structure itself leading to a benefit that one has mitigated their potential injury or damage, to themselves or their property. These actions and benefits lead to feelings of being in control and of survival which, like the short-term side of the map, leads to the values of peace of mind and confidence.

Importantly, when thinking about message development, regardless of where people start at the attribute level, the emotional consequences of survival and control and the values of peace of mind and confidence are the same. This suggests that all communications, regardless of the agency, program, product or service offered needs to communicate these emotions and values.

As noted, a more negative pathway was also identified. This pathway started with people admitting that they are in denial regarding earthquakes, that they procrastinate when it comes to getting more prepared and that in the course of their daily lives, other things become more important. This general malaise regarding earthquake preparedness leads people to feel that they have not done enough to be prepared and will not be ready when an earthquake strikes. Ultimately, this pathway results in low self-esteem and lack of peace of mind. While it is important to be aware of this pathway and recognize that a significant portion of the population fits into this framework, we strongly recommend against negative messaging inducing feelings of guilt.

**Recommendations for a Message Strategy**

Incorporating the earlier findings of Dr. Bourque and Dr. Mileti and the final strategy map, we recommend the following framework when evaluating existing communications or developing new ones.

- Do your communications touch on all levels of the strategy map?
- Talk about why preparedness is important to do (the emotional and value level), not just what they should do (attribute and functional consequence level). Every communication should connect the attribute (i.e., kit, disaster plan, etc) with the value associated with it (i.e., peace of mind, confidence).
- Emotions and values can and should be communicated using both words and images.
- Avoid using guilt as the emotional pull of communications. This puts people on a negative and self-defeating pathway that will take away their self-esteem and will lead them to the idea that preparation is futile and can't be done.
• Communicate often using a variety of mediums; short term or one-off campaigns will likely not produce the desired result.

• Communicate in a consistent manner. The emotions and values identified here will apply to the short and long terms aspects of earthquake preparedness so it’s important to have that guide communications.

• The emotional and value level findings are true across demographic groups, regardless of age, race/ethnicity or where one lives in California (i.e. more risky or less risky area).

• Specific campaign strategies (i.e. media buying, placement, etc) may need to be tailored for different populations but the main themes of the message - family protection, survival, control - are true across the board.

Creative Strategy in Action: Message Boxes

Ogilvy Public Relations was also retained to participate in this engagement to begin exploring what an actual message strategy would look like. Working directly from the research and focusing on the concepts of long and short term pathways identified, the message boxes below represent the initial, not final, ideas for a message strategy. The two message boxes on the following page show how the map developed from the research can be turned into an actionable strategy for use by emergency preparedness partners across the state. This is a messaging strategy that can be used as a strategic framework to have in hand as existing communications are reviewed or new ones developed, in whatever form they may take, for example, advertising, press releases, speeches, blogs, etc.

In these message boxes, it is the concept of survival that would drive the development of a specific advertisement, preparedness checklist, speech or other communication. The actual execution of a specific communication may or may not use this exact language, and may or may not use images but all communications should incorporate all elements of the message box in some fashion.
Earthquake Preparedness

*In-The-Moment Message Box*

**Attributes:**
- Emergency supplies

**Emotional Benefits:**
- In control,
- Survival

When you are prepared, you will feel more in control, won’t be as panicked and better able to act. You, your family will be: safer; and less likely to be injured.

**Personal Values:**
- Confidence,
- Peace-of-mind/
- Family safety

When an earthquake hits, your family will be counting on you to get them through the moment and to help them after the event. You will be confident and have greater peace-of-mind knowing that you are ready to act and have done all you can do to prepare.

**Functional Benefits:**
- Have what’s needed

Be the survival story.

Earthquake Preparedness

*Long-Term Protection*

**Attributes:**
- Actions – Insurance,
- Protect Structure

**Emotional Benefits:**
- In control,
- Less disruption

When you are prepared and ready, you will feel more in control. You will be better able to survive, suffer less damage and injury and better able to recover and move on.

**Personal Values:**
- Confidence,
- Peace-of-mind / Safety

When an earthquake hits, your family will be counting on you to get them through. You will be confident and have greater peace-of-mind knowing that you have done all you can do to prepare.

**Functional Benefits:**
- Protect property, No government assistance

Be the survival story.

Doing these things help to prepare for an earthquake:
- Contact your homeowners insurance agent; and
- Take steps to secure your structure/protect your belongs.

When people prepare homes for earthquake they will:
- Minimize damage; and
- Prevent financial ruin.
Strategy in Action: Preliminary Implementation

Since completion of the research and workshops in May 2010, the CEA has updated its own and shared advertising to more fully reflect the research results and has embarked on a campaign to spread this newly embraced, “common” message statewide.

Taking another cue from the earlier CEPS research which found that roughly eight in ten California residents receive information about earthquake preparedness from television anchors or reporters and five in ten get information from radio hosts or reporters, CEA sponsored a dozen year-round general earthquake preparedness radio and television spots to run in the regions where workshops were held: San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Sacramento. Examples can be found in the first attachment.

All these spots were broadcast on different channels by different reporters. Most promising for future campaign efforts by CEA and other interested stakeholders, the media recognized the importance of using a common message and the content of the “message” communicated was the same across reporters and networks, regardless of whether it was broadcast on television or radio, with a practical and emotional focus on readiness, encouraging residents in their preparedness efforts so that there is a survival story to tell following the next big earthquake.

The second attachment is a ShakeOut-specific television ad created by the CEA to run statewide two weeks prior to the annual drill.

And the third attachment shows several examples of CEA’s advertising which, through words and images, clearly touches on all elements of the message boxes; the ads tell readers “what to do” (the actions to take and the benefit of those actions) as well as “why they should do it” (the emotional payoff and values associated with taking the action).

1 The italicized text in each ad reads as follows: After an earthquake, your personal strength can come from anywhere. Preparing for the next damaging earthquake can help you survive and recover. We’re here to make sure you’ll always have the strength to rebuild.
News Talent Earthquake Preparedness PSAs
(Prepare to Survive and Recover)
ShakeOut PSA
(Prepare to Survive)

**Video**

**Script**

**Firefighter:**
Preparing to survive and recover from California's next damaging earthquake will help keep all of us safe.

**Police Officer:**
Join millions of Californians from all 58 counties who will be participating this year in the Great California ShakeOut drill.

**Teacher:**
Be one of California's next earthquake survival stories. Learn how to "Drop, Cover and Hold on" during an earthquake.

**Business Person:**
Prepare today so you can get back to normal sooner after the next big quake strikes.

Go to [www.ShakeOut.org](http://www.ShakeOut.org) to register. And practice "Drop, Cover and Hold On" this year on October 20th at 10:20 a.m.
Our policy with the CEA gave us the financial strength to rebuild! And working with our homeowners insurance agent we got back to normal.

**Personal Values** – Peace-of-mind

**Emotional Benefits** – Survive / rebuild your life, move forward, done everything possible to prepare

**Functional Benefits** – Financial resources to rebuild

**Attributes** – EQ insurance

Co-promotes the Great California ShakeOut
2011 Earthquake Preparedness Message-Researched PSAs and Ad

Los Angeles News-Talent PSAs

Los Angeles KTLA (FOX) Dave Malkoff
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

Los Angeles KCBS (CBS) – Josh Rubenstein
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

Los Angeles KTLK (Clear Channel Radio AM 1150) To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

San Diego News-Talent PSAs

San Diego KSWB (FOX) Loren Nancarrow
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

San Diego KFMB (CBS) Roy Robertson
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

San Diego KOGO (Clear Channel Radio AM 600) To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

San Francisco News-Talent PSAs

San Francisco KPIX (CBS) Brian Hackney
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

San Francisco KTVU (FOX) Rosy Chu
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

San Francisco KNEW (Clear Channel Radio AM 600) To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

Sacramento News-Talent PSAs

Sacramento KOVR (CBS) Laura Skirde
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

Sacramento KTXL (FOX) Ana Daetz
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

Sacramento KFBK (Clear Channel Radio AM 1530) To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

ShakeOut Statewide TV and Radio PSAs

https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

To hear audio click on the download button in the right-top corner
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVYZOwNhMTExYWNmOS00NDk0LQ4NJltY2FhNi4MWQzWmYz&hl=en_US

CEA TV Ad
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0BwnbjEZhSWYVZmJWQ1YjgtMjgwMG00NTZhLWlyZjEzljg5NJhNTk0YmNk&hl=en_US

CEA CEO PSA Northern California
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US

CEA CEO PSA Southern California
https://docs.google.com/leaf?id=0B0KLUtLY3cu6OGMyZvYTatYjgwMl0ODM3dLTzZGYt2QwYjMwMjiYTRei&hl=en_US