Sierra Nevada Chapter American Red Cross

The equation is:

Computers plus Software plus People yields Results.

The Sierra Nevada Chapter of the American Red Cross achieved a high level of results in its Disaster Welfare Inquiries response by having managed to obtain a high level of capability in all three equation items: the computers, the software and the people.

The computers and software were the donation of the Sertoma Club in July 1989. This included a complete AT class IBM PC type computer and software for system, data base, word processing, and utilities. The software was carefully chosen to allow minimizing data entry operator training and to facilitate modification to application needs.

A key to the DWI response was the use of Borland's Reflex data base version 2.0. This is a flat file data base with very good menu and help systems that is designed to allow modifications on the fly without special programming. An input form and data base was designed based on the standard Red Cross DWI input form. This allowed data entry clerks a familiar form to fill in to get the inquiry data into the data base.

After data is collected, the next step is forwarding the request to the appropriate parties. This was done by creating a data base report that looked like the standard batch message that Red Cross sends via its Western Union store and forward message service. This report was examined with the word processor and broken into convenient sized chunks for sending. The next step was to use a telecommunications program to log onto the Western Union service and upload the prepared batch messages for transmission to the appropriate Red Cross sites.

Two other activities were enabled by the data being stored in a flexible data base. Thank you notes could be dispatched by mail as a follow up to the people who had placed DWI inquiries. Reports could be generated to show the activity that had taken place to help assess the management and resource load.

The key to the success of this operation was having capable machinery (the computers), with software suitable for the application and the people who could put it all together. The development of volunteer resources is what influenced the choice of software, what provided a pool of trained data entry clerks, and what resulted in system analysts and programmers who could understand the needs and resources to implement the required system in short order.

There have been many attempts in the past to implement effective automation of Red Cross Data needs. The Sierra Nevada Chapter response to the Loma Prieta Earthquake shows what can be achieved if all elements come together effectively.