

NASCIO AWARD NOM

STATE: California

AGENCY: California Department of Technology

AWARD CATEGORY: State CIO Office Special Recognition

PROJECT TITLE: CA.gov/LAfires: Rapid Response Digital Hub for Wildfire Recovery

PROJECT DATES: January 2025 – Ongoing

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Executive Summary

In January 2025, devastating wildfires swept through Los Angeles County, displacing thousands of residents and creating an urgent need for coordinated digital support. The California Department of Technology (CDT), under the leadership of the State CIO's office, partnered with the Office of Data and Innovation (ODI) to create [CA.gov/LAfires](https://www.ca.gov/LAfires). This digital portal, launched within 24 hours of the fire outbreak, provided a unified gateway to critical recovery services, real-time safety updates, and survivor resources.

The portal was continually updated through weekly sprints and urgent deployments, featuring trauma-informed design, multilingual content with human translation, interactive geospatial mapping, and a digital recovery dashboard. A statewide emergency banner campaign across hundreds of California government websites ensured residents quickly found accurate and actionable information. This model has since become a standard for digital disaster response and is directly informing the permanent digital disaster recovery model in development for the State of California.

IDEA

What problem or opportunity does the project address?

California's frequent wildfires highlight a chronic challenge: survivors struggle to find timely, reliable information across fragmented agency websites. In January 2025, more than 100,000 residents in Los Angeles County were affected, but no centralized digital access point existed to guide them through aid, safety updates, and recovery processes. This gap left people vulnerable to misinformation and unnecessary delays in receiving critical help.

CA.gov/LAfires was developed to eliminate this fragmentation, offering a one-stop digital resource for all recovery-related services, maps, alerts, and updates. This effort directly addressed long-standing gaps in California's disaster recovery strategy by putting survivor needs front and center.

Why does it matter?

Speed and clarity are essential in a disaster. The portal connected residents to FEMA assistance, housing and food support, debris removal permits, and mental health resources. Without it, thousands would have been forced to navigate recovery steps through scattered, inconsistent sources, prolonging their hardships.

The portal also helped relieve pressure on state staff and infrastructure. By reducing duplicative inquiries—calls, emails, and in-person visits—it saved significant government resources during a time of peak demand. Additionally, by offering human-translated materials, CA.gov/LAfires ensured that California's linguistically diverse population could access lifesaving information in their preferred languages.

What makes it different?

CA.gov/LAfires integrated trauma-informed design to deliver a calm, easy-to-understand user experience, recognizing the emotional toll of disasters. A statewide emergency banner alert, deployed across hundreds of California government websites, funneled residents directly to the portal no matter where they began their search for help.

The portal's real-time interactive maps and the digital recovery dashboard provided residents with transparency on both their immediate environment and broader recovery progress. The addition of human-powered translation, alongside machine translation, ensured accuracy and cultural relevance, supporting equitable access for all users.

What makes it universal?

The CA.gov/LAfires initiative exemplifies a model that other states can adopt to enhance their disaster response capabilities. It aligns seamlessly with [California's Digital Strategy](#), which emphasizes human-centered design, efficient scaling, promoting standards and best practices, and empowering partners.

By adhering to these focus areas, CA.gov/LAfires not only addressed immediate needs during the Los Angeles wildfires but also set a precedent for future digital service delivery. The portal's design prioritized user experience, ensuring that residents could easily access critical information and services. Its scalable architecture allowed for rapid deployment and continuous updates, reflecting the strategy's emphasis on agile development and iterative improvement.

Moreover, the initiative fostered collaboration across various state departments and external partners, embodying the strategy's goal of empowering partners to innovate and deliver effective solutions. By promoting standardized practices and leveraging shared resources, CA.gov/LAfires ensured consistency and reliability in the information provided to the public.

In essence, CA.gov/LAfires serves as a blueprint for how states can harness digital tools and collaborative frameworks to respond to emergencies effectively, ensuring that services are accessible, efficient, and centered around the needs of their residents.

IMPLEMENTATION

What was the roadmap?

The roadmap prioritized a swift launch and robust coordination to sustain momentum and continuous improvement. The immediate goal was to deploy a minimum viable product within 24 hours of the wildfire outbreak, delivering core functionality such as service listings, evacuation maps, and shelter details to meet urgent survivor needs.

By week two, a formal working group was established between CDT, ODI, and the Government Operations Agency to coordinate ongoing efforts, set shared priorities, and ensure unified messaging and service delivery. This group set up regular taskforce meetings to align on emerging needs, provide executive visibility, and maintain strategic oversight across all stakeholders.

The project operated on an agile development framework, with consistent weekly sprint deliverables and the flexibility to execute off-cycle urgent updates whenever new information or critical survivor needs arose. Robust product management practices ensured that all deliverables were fully tracked and visible to leadership, with detailed reporting shared on a daily and weekly basis.

A strong emphasis was placed on continuous improvement through detailed analytics analysis. Usage patterns, engagement metrics, and real-time feedback were regularly reviewed to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancement. This data-driven approach allowed the team to respond proactively to user needs and maintain a high standard of service throughout the recovery period.

Who was involved?

The project was a collaborative effort by CDT's Web Services, Enterprise Architecture, and Critical Services teams, working closely with ODI's Service Delivery, Research, and Data teams. The Governor's Office, Government Operations Agency, CalOES, FEMA, and local government agencies played key roles in ensuring accuracy and alignment. Accenture supported product management, research, and design, while Microsoft Azure provided the cloud infrastructure.

Stakeholder buy-in was achieved through daily briefings and collaborative planning sessions. Human-centered research at Disaster Recovery Centers and online ensured that survivor feedback directly shaped ongoing improvements. Dedicated translators reviewed machine-translated content to guarantee accuracy across multiple languages.

How did you do it?

The project required a rapid, all-hands approach. Agile teams worked in weekly sprint cycles, dedicating over 1,000 staff hours per week in the first month. Emergency funding was leveraged alongside existing cloud service contracts to minimize ramp-up time.

We put people first, talking to both public servants and survivors to understand the important problems that we needed to solve. Research was done daily and escalated to decision makers, and helped inform executive actions and digital content updates.

The technical architecture emphasized security, scalability, and interoperability, allowing seamless integration of real-time data such as evacuation alerts and service status. The emergency banner system was deployed within days of the launch to drive awareness and traffic to the portal.

IMPACT

What did the project make better?

Prior to CA.gov/LAfires, wildfire survivors faced disjointed and inconsistent access to recovery resources, resulting in confusion and delays. The portal streamlined the process, creating a single, reliable source of truth that offered real-time updates and a comprehensive suite of services.

The portal also improved operational efficiency within the state and partnership with local governments. By consolidating services and offering clear, up-to-date information, it helped reduce the workload on call centers and frontline staff, allowing government resources to be deployed more effectively.

How do you know?

The results speak for themselves:

- More than 750,000 page views and 500,000 unique visitors in the first two months.
- A 30 percent reduction in support calls and in-person inquiries at Disaster Recovery Centers.
- A 92 percent user satisfaction rate reported in surveys.
- An estimated 100,000 visits generated by the statewide emergency banner campaign.
- Over 50 enhancements delivered in the first month, informed by user feedback and social media sentiment analysis.

Multilingual usage data showed strong engagement across California's diverse population, confirming the value of human translation efforts for equitable access.

What now?

CA.gov/LAfires remains active and continues to be maintained and enhanced. Plans are underway to broaden its scope for use in other types of disasters, such as floods and earthquakes. The project has become a cornerstone of California's resilience strategy and a national model for how digital services can enhance disaster recovery.

The initial investment has already paid dividends in improved safety, constituent satisfaction, and government efficiency, with ongoing investment ensuring California remains prepared for the next crisis.