

Super Bowl LVI: Coordinating the Joint Information Center

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Brief Report

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Abstract

Objective: The Super Bowl is one of the biggest annual sporting events that creates unique challenges for public health preparedness. The objective of this brief is to discuss the successes and challenges of the Joint Information Center (JIC) during Super Bowl LVI.

Methods: This study analyzed the JIC within 4 realms: pre-activation planning, public safety and alert messaging, communication, and credentialing and access.

Results: Pre-activation planning was not attended by all agencies, which made it difficult for effective communication during the activation period. Innovative platforms and social media themes were successfully deployed to enhance inter-operational communications and public safety messaging. Lastly, delayed credentialing and access to the Super Bowl Stadium decreased the ability to have context to safety preparedness.

Conclusions: This study recommends that many of the JIC's successes should be translated to future mass-gathering events. Additionally, we urge that all agencies participate during pre-activation and activation periods to enhance safety operations and communications moving forward.

Ever since 9/11, there has been heightened importance regarding disaster response, security, and preparedness efforts. Mass gatherings present a complex situation for law enforcement and public health agencies due to higher density of injury/illness for gathered participants and increased workload for protection agencies.¹ However, mass gathering events that have been scheduled in advance present a unique opportunity for effective preparedness planning in a coordinated manner.

The Super Bowl is one of the biggest annual sporting events in the United States, averaging 70,000 attendees per year, not including city locals.² Los Angeles was bestowed the title of Super Bowl host city for 2022. Super Bowl events were scheduled throughout Los Angeles during the week leading up to Game Day on February 13, 2022, at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, CA.

Formal planning for the Super Bowl began more than a year before “Game Day” under the structure of a Unified Command Center. A Unified Command Center is responsible for cross-jurisdictional and multi-agency coordination regarding preparedness and response. Under Unified Command, there were 3 centers: Inglewood Emergency Operations Center, Joint Operations Center, and Joint Information Center (JIC).

Objectives

The JIC was a multi-agency operations center where agency specific Public Information Officers (PIO) collaborated, coordinated, and disseminated timely and consistent information to the public related to Super Bowl events. The JIC was spearheaded by the Inglewood Police Department and Alert SouthBay. The JIC was operational between February 5 to February 14, 2022. There was a total of 32 PIOs within the JIC and widespread, diverse agency participation.

The JIC had 2 main control objectives. First, they sought to use social media, JIC agency resources, and community partners to provide current situational awareness and event information. Second, the JIC wanted to maintain streamlined public safety operations through continuous communication with the community and event organizers before and throughout the event. This brief serves to discuss the successes and challenges with achieving these control objectives for Super Bowl LVI. Additionally, we will propose recommendations that can be applied to future JIC operations for mass gathering sporting events.

Pre-activation Planning

The beginning phases of Unified Command planning began over a year before Super Bowl LVI. Agency representatives were first invited through the Visiting Public Safety Officer Program (VPSO) to attend the preceding Super Bowl as exposure to their upcoming responsibilities.

The VPSO program is centered around operations and law enforcement; therefore, many PIOs did not attend the preceding Super Bowl or have exposure to JIC before their own pre-activation planning.

The first official meeting for the JIC took place in September 2021. It was quickly realized that there was no handbook passed down from prior Super Bowls defining the responsibilities, roles, and operational expectations of the JIC. The Deputy Branch Director created an official Super Bowl JIC guidebook that outlined roles and responsibilities for all agencies working within the JIC. This guidebook designated the JIC as the sole information hub for all Super Bowl-related events. It also described proper communication and messaging of information flowing in and out of the JIC, operational logistics, and jurisdictional alert and warning plans.

In the process of pre-activation planning, the JIC also realized the large footprint that they would need to cover. Although the Super Bowl was going to take place at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, there were going to be sanctioned and nonsanctioned events occurring throughout Los Angeles County with all major highways and the major airport affected. This would require effective cross-jurisdictional communication and coordinating with the National Football League (NFL) on appropriate communication flow. To prepare for informational flow for such a massive footprint, a table-top drill was held in-person 3 weeks before the Super Bowl in addition to weekly planning meetings. While the drill was successful for inter-agency communication and preparedness, not all agencies participated, which made effective collaboration challenging.

Public Safety and Alert Messaging

In preparation to coordinate all public safety and alert warnings, the Super Bowl LVI guidebook classified 4 tiers of notification and authorized specific agencies to use specific notification platforms. The 4 tiers of notification for the Super Bowl were public safety notifications, jurisdictional alert and warnings, cross-jurisdictional alert and warnings, and county-wide alerts. Super Bowl LVI required activation of only tier 1 notifications, public safety alerts and warnings, but the JIC was prepared to escalate notifications further.

Public safety notifications were run by Alert SouthBay, an integrated alert and warning program that covers Inglewood. Using their Everbridge portal, Alert SouthBay was able to set up an opt-in keyword (“ING-SB”) for residents and visitors to text to sign up for critical public safety messaging during the Super Bowl. This opt-in platform was advertised locally through social media, hotel flyers, signboards of nearby freeway exits, and word of mouth. The morning of Game Day, a public safety message was sent to all subscribers giving them information about weather, parking, road closures, and resources to find critical information. Close to 600 individuals successfully signed up for this platform and post-Super Bowl survey results regarding this platform reveal that it was a well-received informational resource.

Social Media

The JIC prioritized using social media to spread public safety awareness and critical information to the public. They designated the Inglewood Police Department’s social media handles as the primary account and all agencies re-posted any messaging on their own social media feeds. To increase views and interaction with the public, the JIC had to be innovative and use the context of

the current Super Bowl in their messaging. For example, the Bengals, a competing Super Bowl team, had gone viral on social media for the use of their “Mic Cart”. The JIC collaborated with the Bengal’s social media team to make their own “Lunch Cart” to reach those competing for each team. Using the “Lunch Cart”, the JIC was able to make public safety social media posts regarding hydration, safe driving, safety exits, and more. This innovation successfully expanded their social media presence and message outreach.

Communication

At the core of the JIC’s responsibilities is communication. Not only strong communication to the public, but also within the Command Center itself. To promote streamlined information within the JIC, a daily situational briefing was held midday during every operational activation day. Every agency was given the opportunity to provide updates to the JIC regarding active jurisdictional incidents, Super Bowl events, and media inquiries. These briefings were successful in keeping all JIC representatives informed and gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions about upcoming messaging.

In addition to the internal briefings, there were situational briefings that happened jointly with the JIC and the Joint Operations Center (JOC). To prepare the JOC for the briefing, the deputy branch director submitted a daily report 1 hour before the joint meeting. While these briefings were helpful at summarizing daily updates from the JIC, it was challenging for the deputy branch director to write such lengthy reports every day. Recommendations were given by JIC members to have a scribe moving forward to help alleviate some of the administrative duties of the deputy branch director.

Last, the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department created a multi-jurisdictional media inquiry form as a streamlined platform to process and respond to media questions and requests. Within this platform, each agency PIO had pre-loaded talking points that were loaded onto the backend. Therefore, when media representatives clicked on a specific agency and submitted their request, an automated message could be sent with the PIO’s response. This allowed for quick response times as well as reducing the need to manually respond to redundant inquiries. Additionally, this platform allowed the JIC to collect data on the media’s overlapping topics of interest and tailor the JIC’s daily messaging to address these concerns. This platform also allowed the JIC to develop a current media list that could be easily accessible in case emergency messaging needed to be sent to networks.

Credentialing and Access

The JIC, along with the JOC, was stationed at the Inglewood Senior Center, approximately a mile from SoFi Stadium. Given that the JIC was operating outside of the stadium, agency representatives were left to create safety messaging and respond to the media without having seen the Game Day Stadium. While the JIC was provided with maps and the layout of the stadium, it was not a replacement for proper in-person visualization of the stadium to gain context for creation of proper safety messaging. Therefore, the JIC realized early on that gaining access to SoFi stadium would be critical for appropriate situational awareness.

Credentialing access to the Stadium proved to be challenging. When the JIC Deputy Branch Director reached out to channels at the NFL, they were redirected to the city for credentialing. The city then redirected the JIC back to the NFL for credentialing. After months of failed communication, the JIC contacted the head

Table 1. Final recommendations

	Recommendation 1	Recommendation 2
Pre-activation planning	Encourage VPSO participation	Encourage attendance to planning meetings & tabletop drills
Public safety & alert messaging	Development of public safety notification platform	Create Innovative social media content
Communication	Encourage in-person PIO attendance for all participating agencies	Create a media inquiry form
Credentialing & access	Expedited credentialing to venue	Attempt to access venue early for situational awareness

of NFL security. They were able to assist the JIC in acquiring the proper credentials to access a 1-time scheduled tour of the stadium. That tour was scheduled 2 days before game-day, which delayed safety preparedness efforts.

Discussion

The JIC for Super Bowl LVI sought to bring together all agency Public Information Officers to streamline coordination and dissemination of timely and accurate information to the public. The JIC was successful in communication among participating agencies through daily briefings and reports. Additionally, innovation within JIC operations successfully improved efficiency and safety message outreach to the community. The multi-jurisdictional media inquiry form expedited agency response, tailored JIC messaging toward topics of interest and reduced redundancy. Collaborating with Alert SouthBay to create an opt-in notification platform allowed the JIC to send hundreds of people public safety messaging. Last, the JIC used the context of the Super Bowl to influence their public safety messaging, which increased the traffic toward their social media handles. These examples should be translated into future mass gathering JIC operations for success.

The JIC encountered significant pushbacks that challenged the control objectives. With regard to pre-activation planning, it was clear that host cities for the Super Bowl operate in silos in terms of communicating with one another. While the Super Bowl LVI JIC was presented with a general overview of public safety from

the previous year's JIC, there were no specific preparedness or guideline documents passed down to assist the pre-activation planning. Moving forward, we recommend the agencies prioritize having their PIOs participate in the VPSO Program. If this precedent could be applied to all agencies, there would be improved transparency and communication among host cities for all future Super Bowl planning.

The biggest challenge in communication was the limited participation from the NFL within the JIC and concern for disjointed message dissemination, if an emergency event did occur. When discussing these concerns with a Director of NFL Security post-Super Bowl, he discussed the limitations the NFL has as a private business. While it would have been optimal for them to have PIOs participate in the day-to-day operations of the JIC, their staffing restricted them to virtual on-call availability. If an emergency did occur, the NFL prepared to work directly with the Incident Commander and follow their protocols with communications. Moving forward, the NFL would like to improve their presence in the JIC for future Super Bowls. More generally, we recommend that primary sporting agencies for mass sporting events prioritize PIO in-person representation in the associated command center.

While no emergency events occurred during Super Bowl LVI, there were still many lessons to be learned from this annual event. The successes, challenges, and recommendations can be translated to future sporting and equivalently scaled mass gatherings (see Table 1). This can improve wide-spread public safety and alert communications and overall public health.

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Rita Burke: conceived and designed analysis, performed analysis, edited

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