



Protest on Steroids: Republican National Convention 2016 – Cleveland, Ohio

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Situational Overview

The 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC) took place July 18–21, 2016, at the Quicken Loans Arena in downtown Cleveland, with more than 50,000 visitors, including delegates, alternate delegates, and media representatives. This was the first time the city of Cleveland had hosted the event since 1936. Cleveland State University (CSU) is in the heart of downtown, with more than 85 acres, 40-plus buildings, nearly 18,000 students, and 1,518 employees. Nearly 4,000 law enforcement officers from around the country answered the call to keep the peace, and CSU fed and housed 700 of them during the RNC, 24/7.

Pre-Planning

The Cleveland State University Police Department (CSUPD) worked hard to prepare for the RNC by using internal and external partnerships with an emphasis on gathering and sharing information for stakeholders. For example, CSUPD officers designed tabletop exercises specifically to test and challenge CSU senior leadership on anticipated scenarios, such as mass protests, arrests, etc. Additionally, our Emergency Management Office implemented continued oversight of potential post-recovery efforts with Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP). The creation and implementation of Incident Action Plans (IAP) also proved to be beneficial to keep senior leadership informed.

Similar to other colleges and universities, the Expressive Activity Policy was created to promote free exchange of ideas in a safe way on our campus. The purpose of the policy is to promote the free exchange of ideas as well as the safe and efficient operation of CSU.

The policy underwent the review

and approval process of the CSU Board of Trustees and was rolled out via email communications. There were no limitations as to the assembly of students gathering, nor any negative reaction to the policy.

We partnered with both the city and county emergency management agencies, in conjunction with staffing the Cleveland Emergency Operations Center (EOC) while monitoring the Knowledge Center / WebEOC during the RNC. (The Knowledge Center or WebEOC is a tool to share information in real time and a national model for providing updates to stakeholders during a critical incident.)

As part of our planning, we received 50 800-MHz mobile and portable radios, which were a direct link to the Greater Cleveland Radio Network and Ohio's



Protesters during RNC, Cleveland, Ohio

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Multi-Agency Radio Communication System (M.A.R.C.S.). The radio communications network provided CSU personnel with the ability to monitor and communicate with outside agencies that operate on the 800-MHz system. Previously, CSU had been on a 400-MHz radio frequency, which prohibited direct communication with nearby departments.

Supervisors participated in the Field Force Operations training, a three-day training course provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency on topics including mass-arrest procedures, team tactics, demonstrator tactics, crowd dynamics and mob behavior, use of riot control agents and less-lethal munitions, and the employment of personal protective equipment.

Another planning dynamic consisted of the CSU K-9 and handler participating in the Multi-Jurisdiction Improvised Explosive Device Security Planning—a program designed to assist with collectively identifying roles, responsibilities, capability gaps, and how to optimize limited resources within a multi-jurisdictional planning area.

CSUPD received a significant number of inquiries that focused around the university's operations in conjunction with the city of Cleveland's pre-planning efforts. Many streets in the downtown area were closed or blocked in some areas close to the host site. This would prove evident the weeks leading up to the RNC event. Cleveland State University is mainly a commuter school, situated in downtown Cleveland.

The timing of announcements about the planning exercises created challenges for the university's senior leadership in deciding if classes should be held on campus; city officials

routinely shared information that traffic patterns downtown would be greatly impacted along with a citywide parking ban. The CSUPD met routinely with student groups/advisors, faculty, and deans to share our own plans and the city's operational plans during the RNC. We worked with the CSU Marketing Office to craft messaging that was shared on the university Website each

which protest groups planned small and/or large-scale events on campus. It is important to note that one, in particular, generated national attention from our partners at the FBI, and we worked closely with federal officers to minimize the group's effort.

Another item was the Knowledge Center, which was located in the city of Cleveland's Emergency Operation Center. The goal of the EOC was to provide real-time information to all agencies monitoring the web-based site. However, the information was not being updated and shared by each individual agency on a regular basis. With a large-scale event such as the RNC, the need to share information in a timely manner is critical for outside agencies so senior leaders have what they need for daily briefings, deployments, and planning efforts.



Officers patrol amidst protesters

week that included the final decision about moving classes off campus.

Post Lessons Learned

Communication with external agencies proved to be a critical component in the success of our operations during the

Conclusion

The Republican National Convention proved to be an exciting time for the city of Cleveland; it directly impacted Cleveland State University's emergency-management efforts in a positive manner. Law enforcement agencies that are scheduled to host multi-day events require a significant amount of pre-planning, funding, resources, partnerships, and routine communication among all stakeholders.

Finally, although our officers were not directly responsible for response within the "red zone" specific to the venue, CSU hosted a significant number of events on campus sponsored by RNC delegates. This was a once-in-a-career opportunity for the men and women of

our department—a pleasure and an honor to serve and protect all those who participated. 🍷



CSU Officers

RNC. This included but was not limited to monitoring social media. We quickly realized by monitoring social media