USING STANDARDS TO ESTABLISH POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES IN THE ECC

By Stacy Banker

As we enter a new era of public safety communications with NG9-1-1, it will be important for the emergency communications industry to reexamine standards and established policies, procedures and processes within the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) to ensure that they are in alignment. From a risk management standpoint, the importance of developing effective standards, policies, procedures and processes cannot be overstated.

From core competencies to workflows, interoperability, cybersecurity and technologies, our industry is changing, and a realignment must occur as part of the migration to NG9-1-1. FirstNet will change how agencies at all levels interact with each other. The potential information exchange and interoperability between public, private, local, state, regional and federal agencies will be vastly different from our current legacy systems.

According to the 2017 Project 43 report *Broadband Implications for the PSAP*, "the receipt and processing of broadband data from NG9-1-1 and FirstNet will have a number of substantial impacts on PSAP operations." [1]

DEFINING POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES

Before we can reexamine standards, policies, processes and procedures in the ECC, it is essential to understand the unique differences between each category and how they can be integrated. [2]

A standard is an idea or thing used as a measure, norm or model in comparative evaluations. APCO is an accredited standards development organization through the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). [3] ANSI accredits the procedures of

standards development organizations to ensure there is openness, balance, consensus and due process. APCO currently has 27 published standards that were developed by peers in public safety communications and almost as many in development or under revision.

Policies are the guidelines or laws that drive the processes and procedures. Think of a policy as a "guide to thinking." A process is a high-level overview of the procedures and tasks. In other words, how do we get from point A to point B? Procedures are the

detailed steps required to perform an activity within a process. Think of a procedure as a "guide to action." A process commonly found in the ECC is the incident handling process. An agency may have an internal process for handling calls for service from start to finish (high-level overview) built into the incident handling process. An agency would have procedures and decision points that break down each step in the process.

INTEGRATING STANDARDS, POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES

To illustrate how standards, policies, procedures and processes are connected, let us look at several current APCO standards and examine recommendations out of the APCO Project 43 report.

APCO/NENA ANS 1.107.1.2015 Standard for the Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement (QA/QI) Program

for Public Safety Answering Points[4] is an operational standard that defines the recommended minimum components of a QA/QI program within an ECC. The standard recommends effective procedures for implementing the components of a QA/QI program to evaluate the performance of public safety communications personnel. Agencies can use the standard to develop a QA/QI program and establish all of the related policies, procedures and processes.

The general agency responsibilities section of the QA/QI standard includes many recommendations and requirements related to establishing policies. The standard recommends establishing policies related to program administration, minimum performance expectations, number of cases to review, records retention and other areas. Procedural recommendations can be found throughout the standard in sections such as performance review and evaluation procedures, reporting criteria, documentation criteria and face-to-face feedback. Throughout the standard document, processes related to QA/QI steps are outlined with specific instructions and sample forms.

An agency, for example, can use the standard to frame their QA/QI program. The agency may establish a QA/QI program that involves a process for ensuring that public safety telecommunicators (PSTs) are maintaining certain performance benchmarks when it comes to call processing. The agency may establish a policy that governs compliance in the program. In other words, what compliance percentage must employees maintain? The agency may also establish a procedure for completing the reviews, including scoring criteria and feedback procedures.

The Project 43 report notes that QA/QI is one area where broadband capabilities will have a significant impact. "Not only will calls continue to require review systematically and objectively, but new data types, requirements, capabilities and stresses will all have to be taken into consideration." As noted in the Project 43 report, updates to the existing standards, policies, procedures and processes will need to address new issues such as evaluating SMS/text-to-9-1-1, performance

benchmarks related to call processing times in a broadband environment, gathering and disseminating multimedia information, and establishing programs related to critical incident stress debriefing (CISD).

You can see through this illustration how standards, policies, procedures and processes are interconnected and how important it will be to realign them in an NG9-1-1 environment.

Let us take a look at another example. APCO/CSAA ANS 2.101.2-2014 Alarm Monitoring Company to Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Automated Secure Alarm Protocol (ASAP)[5] is a technical standard that provides a standard data exchange for transmitting information using automation between an alarm monitoring company and an ECC. The ASAP to PSAP standard can be used to establish policies, procedures and processes about the following data exchange specifications:

- The initial notification of an alarm event by an alarm monitoring company to a PSAP.
- Status updates by the ECC's computer aided dispatch (CAD) system to the alarm monitoring company.
- Bi-directional updating of other events between an alarm monitoring company and an ECC.

APCO's ASAP program is highlighted in the Project 43 report and used to illustrate where standards and procedures can be developed that result in a substantial reduction of errors and delays. This type of integrated program is an excellent model for NG9-1-1.

APCO ANS 3.103.2.2015 Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST)[6] is a training standard that identifies minimum training requirements for public safety call takers, fire service telecommunicators, law enforcement telecommunicators and emergency medical services (EMS) telecommunicators. This standard is based on research compiled from multiple occupational analysis workshops conducted throughout the nation. Over 100 high-performing PSTs representing various

agencies participated in these workshops. The standard contains a number of references to policies and procedures that should be established by an agency and integrated into the agency's training program. The standard delineates between agency responsibilities and PST responsibilities.

This PST training standard is an excellent standard that agencies can use to develop job descriptions, performance appraisals, training criteria and policies related to the workforce. This standard is the very standard that APCO's Agency Training Program Certification (ATPC) is built on. ATPC is a formal mechanism for public safety agencies to ensure that their agency training program is compliant with the PST standard.

From an NG9-1-1 standpoint, agencies will likely see the most significant impact on the workforce. Core competencies, knowledge, skills and abilities will evolve and eventually require a change to meet the increased job complexities and stress inherent to operations in a broadband environment. Throughout the Project 43 document, there are recommendations related to the ECC workforce and to the policies and procedures that will require reexamination.
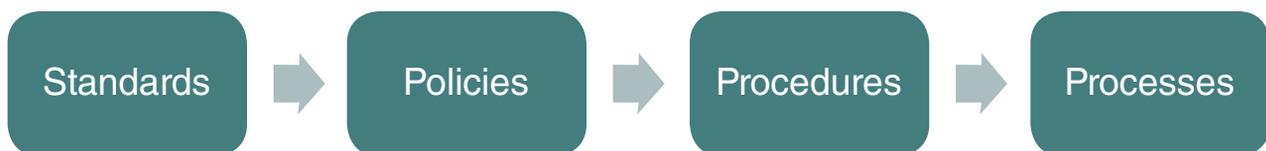
STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT WORK

The Project 43 report is an excellent example of how APCO is a trusted resource for public safety communications initiatives that result in standards development projects. APCO standards establish the framework and roadmaps for internal policies, procedures and processes. The interconnection between standards, policies, procedures and processes can be a powerful tool for public safety communications agencies entering the NG9-1-1 environment. As we look forward to a new way of doing business, the task of reexamining and developing standards, policies, procedures and processes can be a daunting one.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of the many subject matter expert volunteers that create the standards.

There are a few ways to get involved with standards development work:
- Join a working group

Standards → Policies → Procedures → Processes

- Join a standards development committee or subcommittee
- Participate in the public review and comment process
- Stay connected to APCO International

For more information on standards development opportunities, visit the *APCO standards web page* today at apcointl.org/standards. ●

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References
[1]Project 43: Broadband Implications for the PSAP www.apcointl.org/resources/broadband-implications-for-the-psap/

[2]SweetProcess. "The Key Difference Between a Policy, Process, & Procedure (and Why it Matters For Your Business!)" ww.sweetprocess.com/what-are-the-differences-between-a-policy-a-process-and-a-procedure-why-knowing-this-is-the-key-to-scaling-and-automating-your-business/

[3]American National Standards Institute. www.ansi.org

[4]APCO/NENA ANS 1.107.1.2015 Standard for the Establishment of a Quality Improvement Program for Public Safety Answering Points. ww.apcointl.org/download/11071-2015-quality-assurance/?wpdmdl=5901

[5]APCO/CSAA ANS 2.101.2-2014 Alarm Monitoring Company to Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Automated Secure Alarm Protocol (ASAP) www.apcointl.org/download/alarm-monitoring-company-to-psap-cad-automated-secure-alarm-protocol-asap/?wpdmdl=5938

[6]APCO ANS 3.103.2.2015 Minimum Training Standards for Public Safety Telecommunicators© www.apcointl.org/download/minimum-training-standards-for-public-safety-telecommunicators-3/?wpdmdl=6288

CDE EXAM #51395

1. _____ are the guidelines or laws that drive the processes and procedures is the definition of:
   a. Standards
   b. Procedures
   c. Processes
   d. Policies

2. _____ are the detailed steps required to perform an activity within a process.
   a. Procedures
   b. Standards
   c. Policies
   d. Tasks

3. A _____ is an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations.
   a. Standard
   b. Process
   c. Procedure
   d. Policy

4. ANSI accredits the procedures of standards development organizations to ensure there is openness, balance, consensus and _____.
   a. Standardization
   b. Equivalency
   c. Due Process
   d. Justification

5. In which of the following ways can someone be involved with standards development at APCO International?
   a. Join a working group
   b. Connect with APCO International through social media
   c. Join a standards development committee
   d. All of the above

6. The ATPC program is based on the Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement Program for Public Safety Answering Points standard
   a. True
   b. False

7. The Alarm Monitoring Company to Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) Automated Secure Alarm Protocol (ASAP) is considered a technical standard.
   a. True
   b. False

8. A procedure is a guide to thinking.
   a. True
   b. False

9. A policy is a guide to action.
   a. True
   b. False

10. APCO's Project 43 report is a comprehensive report on the broadband implications for the emergency communications center (ECC).
    a. True
    b. False

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