

STAFFING UP

A systematic approach to the ECC staffing crisis includes assessment, reference to response standards and technological innovation.

By Christopher Carver

Emergency communications centers (ECCs) nationwide face a staffing crisis, which seriously impacts operations. Agencies report delays in answering 9-1-1 calls and increased response times. Job listings stay active for months, and existing staff work long hours to the point of burnout. Clearly, change is needed.

How do we tackle such a difficult problem? It won't be easy, so we need to work together. The decentralized nature of public safety in the United States means that change must come from local agencies, state 9-1-1 coordinators, vendors and 9-1-1 professionals themselves.

We also need to work systematically since the solution involves a rethinking

of procedures, technology and policies. Fortunately, there are steps ECCs can take now to begin working toward a solution.

PROCEDURES

The first step must be a thorough review or audit of workflows and processes within the ECC. Which steps add significant time and effort? What parts of the process add

complexity? Are there steps that increase response times or introduce the possibility of error?

For administrative and technical personnel, a process audit can be equally informative. How much time does it take to update hardware and software or to perform a map roll in the current system?

Training audits should also be considered. Does training require personnel to report in person to a physical location, or are new technologies available to support ECC personnel learning while on their regular shift — reducing the need for costly overtime?

While auditing and evaluating processes, it's imperative to keep in mind state and discipline performance standards and



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regulations. State 9-1-1 performance and response time standards from organizations like the National Fire Protection Association, contained in NFPA1225, may be daunting, but they can provide a justification for improved staffing, streamlined workflows and improved operational performance.

APCO has standards (apcointl.org/standards) and best practice documents covering nearly every area of the ECC operation. Using these documents as resources during process audits may help uncover the solutions to perplexing challenges.

TECHNOLOGY

An additional resource that every ECC and public safety agency should use is its

technology vendors. First off, CAD and records management vendors should act as full-fledged partners, using their industry experience and insight to help agencies solve problems. Vendors should offer features and functions that help improve workflows, reduce telecommunicator burdens and improve overall organizational effectiveness.

One example is the ASAP-to-PSAP solution used to process alarms. Using these solutions to automate the alarm receipt process and reduce associated work can improve response times. Another example is a CAD-to-CAD interface, which can dramatically decrease the time required to dispatch mutual aid units to emergencies.

Voiceless dispatch is a third technology that positively impacts 9-1-1 center staff. Whether it's automated dispatch systems that can replace the human-read dispatch messages on firehouse P.A. systems or mobile solutions that allow units to receive, acknowledge and update incidents without the need to interact with the telecommunicator these technologies preserve the telecommunicator's precious time for critical tasks.

Another example is embedded assistive AI within a CAD system. It can mine operational data to find similarities in incoming calls, alerting staff to trends and anomalies. These assistive alerts fill blind spots, allowing telecommunicators to uncover related events quicker than relying on their own abilities. The technology also alleviates the pressure to catch every little detail, which can reduce stress on both trainees and industry veterans alike.

For those in administrative roles, the transition to IP-based CAD, records and mobile solutions also offers significant time-saving opportunities. In a browser-based system, updates are made to the system and immediately available to users at the moment of log-on. A similar advance is occurring in mapping, with many new systems using mapping as a service, which means no more intensive map rolls or translations from mapping services into something capable of being used by CAD or records software.

POLICIES

Ultimately, solving the staffing problem may come down to doing things differently, and that's where a review of ECC policies come into play. There may be no better example of operations, technology and people partnering to help address critical challenges than call taking and dispatching from non-traditional locations.

Some ECCs have piloted such programs, while others found them necessary to implement due to COVID-19 or other major incidents that impacted operations. Although informed and sincere debates continue surrounding permanent dispatch-from-home arrangements, there can be little doubt that the technical capability to effectively operate from alternate locations is a significant benefit for any ECC.

From a policy perspective, measurement-based reporting can also help save time, effort and complexity. By deploying a business intelligence reporting approach, agencies can not only meet standard reporting needs, but also more easily respond to customized reporting requests, which can be time intensive. Additionally, by better understanding operational issues like peak call times and trends in types of calls for service, an improved reporting process can help ECCs better plan operations and

schedule staff to meet demand during these challenging times.

CONCLUSION

No matter what degree of challenge an agency is facing in the staffing crisis, the key to addressing it is a collaborative approach leveraging the standards, best practices, available technologies and fellow professionals in the public safety community who are navigating the same troubled waters. We're all in this together, which means we all have a role to

play in ensuring the heroes under the headset are as effective and supported as possible. ●

Christopher Blake Carver, MP, ENP, is Hexagon's Director of Market Development. He is a nearly 30-year public safety veteran of public safety, who has served in positions ranging from public safety telecommunicator with a one seat fire/EMS center to director of FDNY. After FDNY, Carver served as director of PSAP Operations for the National Emergency Number Association.

CDE EXAM #65180

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are examples of when dispatching from alternate locations may be of benefit to the ECC? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Disasters such as floods, wildfires, hurricanes, or tornadoes b. Pandemics or other health related events c. Facility or system failures which render the ECC inoperative d. All of the above 2. Which of these are an example of technology tools that can save time and workload inside the ECC/PSAP? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Pen and paper note taking b. Traditional phone calls for Mutual Aid requests c. CAD to CAD interfaces d. None of the Above 3. What NFPA standard defines fire response times? _____ <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. NFPA 1225 b. NFRA 3675 c. FNPA 1225 d. NFPA 1910 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The purpose of a process audit in an ECC is to identify how processes and workflows can be streamlined to improve efficiency and effectiveness, reduce response time and decrease impact on telecommunicators. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 5. Voiceless dispatch can help save time in telecommunicator workflows. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 6. What is one potential benefit of artificial intelligence (AI) in the ECC? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identifying trends b. Identifying similarities c. Identifying related events d. All of the above e. None of the above 7. Browser-based CAD systems can save agencies significant time required to update dispatch positions and mobile users to the latest available version. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Which of the following are advantages of new approaches to mapping for CAD and mobile applications? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Agencies do not get up to date mapping information in a more timely manner b. Mobile users have outdated maps on their devices c. No more time intensive map "rolls" d. Improved sharing of the most up-to-date map data e. C & D 9. Understanding what days/times are consistently peak-demand is critical information for ECCs to understand their staffing needs and respond appropriately. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 10. Who has a role to play in ensuring that technology helps support agencies in meeting their operational and personnel challenges? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. ECC supervisors b. ECC technology managers c. Vendors d. Government technology leaders e. All of the above |
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