

# TALK TI



## BENCHMARKING YOUR COMM CENTER

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Regardless of your role in EMS, the communications center affects the whole system's success: Wrong address? Poor telephone assessment? Call processing delay? Responding units sent "hot" when it's not required? There has been a lot of talk, but little action taken to benchmark performance among EMS and public safety communications centers. Questions often asked include: How are we doing? Are the right measures being tracked? How does our comm center compare with others? Are we using best practices?

At a minimum, comm centers need to be evaluated for efficiency and effectiveness, technology planning and integration, financial performance and accountability, and organizational leadership. If the center is involved in dispatching medical requests for service, then the additional category of clinical effectiveness and integration should be rated.

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# THE TALK



Communications centers can be divided into four basic categories. They are: 1) single jurisdiction, specialized function (e.g., Anytown, U.S.A.'s separate fire dispatch.); 2) single jurisdiction with multiple functions (e.g., the single community that has a consolidated 9-1-1, police, fire, EMS center); 3) multi-jurisdiction single function center (e.g., a private ambulance service communications center that serves multiple communities); and 4) multi-jurisdiction and multi-function (e.g., regional communications centers that provide more than one function, such as 9-1-1, police, fire and/or EMS).

The following tool provides a mechanism to benchmark characteristics of your communications center regardless of its functional category. The tool favors those centers that provide superior customer service, are accountable for performance and provide meaningful data to support improved management of the individual agencies served.

To use the tool, read each question carefully and then record the approximate score on the line provided after each question. Some questions ask you to award your center with a specific number of points associated with the description provided. Other questions require that you subtract points or score zero if an element is not present or is deficient. Once you've scored your comm center on all questions, tally your category totals on the scorecard provided (p. 112).

## CATEGORY 1: Center Efficiency & Effectiveness

### 50 POINTS POSSIBLE

An effective communications center performs its responsibilities in a manner that supports the achievement of mission-specific objectives of the parent organization. The scale favors centers that are operated by a single agency or multi-agency center with defined service level/performance agreements in place that specify both governance and performance accountabilities. The functions and operations of the center are aligned with strategic plans. Performance is planned, measured and published at least monthly by primary function and by component. Staffing in the center reflects the demand for service. Business improvement and quality processes are well defined. Deployment analysis occurs at least monthly.

#### 1A: Select the option that most closely describes your comm center.

- Specific performance criteria (e.g., call processing times, interrogation accuracy, unit selection, etc.) are in writing. Performance is measured monthly and posted for the center overall, and by shift. Center performance is reported monthly to the leadership of the agency(s) it serves. **SCORE 10**
- The basic performance criteria are known but inconsistently reported. **SCORE 4**
- The job gets done, but nobody really looks at performance unless something goes radically wrong on an assignment. **SCORE 0**

SCORE 1A \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1B: Select the option that most closely describes your comm center.

- The center's call processing times and dispatch times are measured at least monthly by time component (e.g., call answer, initial assignment, etc.), by the center as a whole, by shift and by individual staff member. The component performances are discussed at employee meetings, and individual performance is discussed privately. **SCORE 8**
- One of the two components—dispatch time or call processing time—is systematically evaluated and posted with the objective of monitoring and improving performance. **SCORE 4**
- Call processing and component times are either not measured or not reported. **SCORE 0**

SCORE 1B \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1C: Select the option that most closely describes your comm center.

- Staffing is variable and matched to demand. Shifts and schedules are designed according to a scientifically recognized formula (e.g., Erlang C or other scientifically accepted modeling approach). **SCORE 9**
- Staffing is variable and loosely matched to demand. Shifts and schedules are developed according to a trade association or other formula (e.g., the APCO tool, RETAINS, Responsive Efforts to Address Integral Needs in Staffing). **SCORE 4**
- Staffing is variable depending on management's estimate. **SCORE 2**
- Staffing is constant 24/7/365 and does not reflect demand. **SCORE 0**

SCORE 1C \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1D: Select the option that most closely describes your comm center.

- Business processes are improved on an ongoing basis. A variety of analytical techniques, including advanced performance management concepts (e.g., Six Sigma), is used to support process improvement. Results are benchmarked with other centers. **SCORE 8**
- Key processes have QI or process improvement initiatives underway that are well understood by the frontline staff in the center and other divisions. **SCORE 5**
- Some quality efforts are ongoing. **SCORE 2**
- Quality efforts are best described as cleaning up after an incident occurs. **SCORE 0**

SCORE 1D \_\_\_\_\_

#### 1E: Select the option that most closely describes your comm center.

- Geographic and temporal analysis is conducted at least monthly (large service) or quarterly (small