

Thursday, February 27, 2020 by Andrew Weber

(<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/author/andrew-weber/>)

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/CATEGORY/PUBLIC-SAFETY/EMS/](https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/category/public-safety/ems/))

## Austin 911 operators effectively field calls, but audit finds gaps in dispatching overall

Operators field roughly a million calls for emergency services in Austin a year.

A new city report says those operators do a serviceable job of answering that glut of calls, but found a disconnect between those calls and the delivery of crucial services.

There are a lot of reasons for that, according to the Office of the City Auditor's analysis of six years of call data from October 2013 to July 2019. That audit ([https://www.austintexas.gov/edims  
/document.cfm?id=336386](https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=336386)) was discussed Wednesday at a meeting of the city's Audit and Finance Committee.

For one, the three departments using call centers – the Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department and Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services – don't uniformly measure their quality assurance, making an audit comparing response and dispatch times difficult.

Part of that divergence is intrinsic: An operator fielding a 911 call intended for AFD won't be asking a caller for a suspect description or the medical condition of a possible patient, for example. But the departments measure response time in seconds or minutes or even a rate when it comes to answering the most urgent calls for services. The audit shows AFD and EMS response times didn't accurately reflect wait times from a caller's perspective, because they didn't properly account for the transfer time it took to transfer a caller to an operator.

The audit also shows the three departments didn't always meet their dispatch goals in terms of timeliness. While the departments met the national benchmark for answering emergency calls, all told, APD, AFD and EMS met 14 of their 24 total performance targets in 2018 for dispatch timeliness.

Andrew Keegan with the city auditor's office says a lot of that lag between call and dispatch has to do with time and geography.

“If the call comes in at 5:30 p.m. on a Friday, and they have to go to South Austin ... or travel on 35 or any of the highways, that's necessarily going to take longer than if they have to respond to a call at 2 a.m. on a Tuesday, just because of traffic and people on the roads.”

Still, District 6 Council Member Jimmy Flannigan said the audit highlights the need to improve those response times and make more uniform metrics when appropriate.

“Meeting those metrics is important, but also making sure they're the right ones is important,” he said. “So my hope is that we can get ... operations streamlined a little more, so we can both measure accurately what a citizen experiences when they call 911 and making sure those response times are significant.”

Flannigan says overall, Austin benefits from having its 911 services under the same umbrella, but the report does suggest the city's 911 operators could be better prepared for an event that could cause a major disruption to the services themselves.

The city's main call center didn't properly train for a major outage caused by an internet outage or even an outbreak of the flu. On top of that, none of the three separate departments had appropriate training in the event of an emergency outage, Keegan says.

“They had plans ... but they didn't fully train staff on what to do in a disruption,” he said. “So we look at it from kind of the risk perspective: If you haven't been trained on how to respond in a certain situation, the chances of you responding correctly or following the plan correctly are reduced.”

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Audit Report

# 911 Operations

February 2020



People can call or text 911 to get help when there is an emergency. Austin's 911 service receives over a million calls and texts every year. These calls are handled by communications staff in the Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department, and Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services. We found that while these three departments met recommended goals for quickly answering 911 calls, they missed other goals related to emergency response times. Additionally, each department has practices to ensure 911 operations are effective, but improved public education efforts are needed. Lastly, we noted issues with plans and training that could limit the City's ability to continue 911 operations during a disruption.

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Cover Photo: Inside of the 911 call center, Stephanie McClintock, Acting CTECC General Manager.

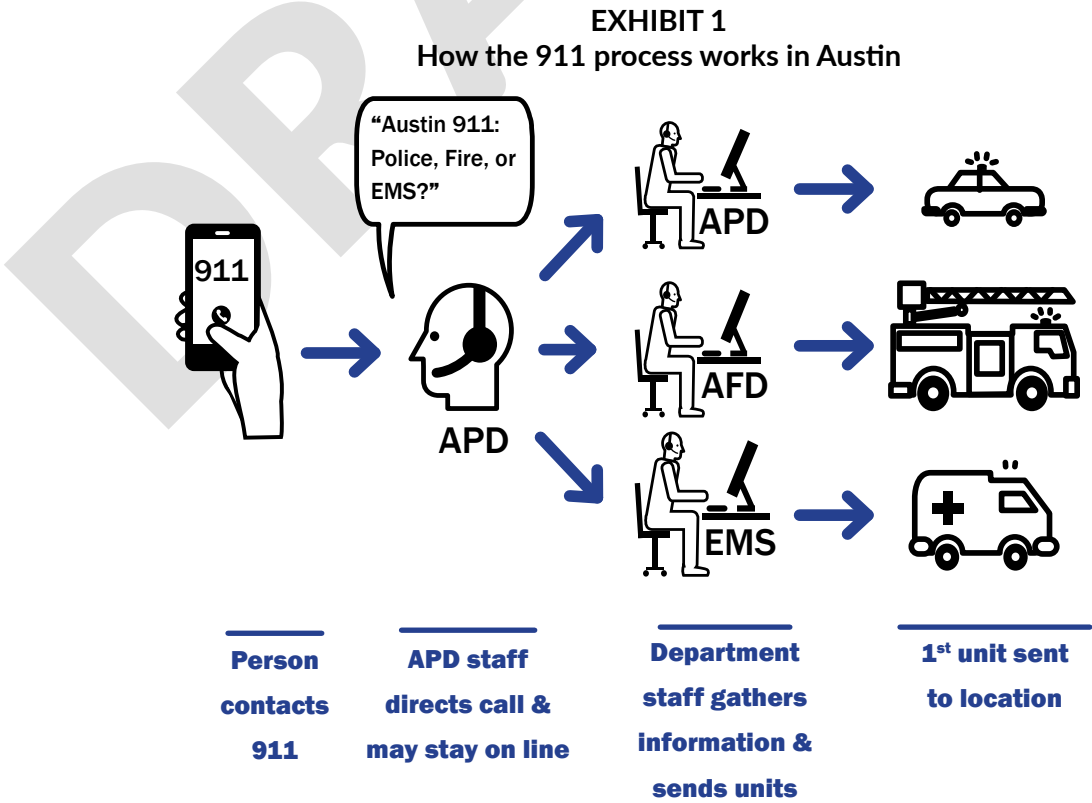
Objective

Are emergency calls being dispatched in an effective and efficient way to meet community needs?

Background

When there is an emergency people can call 911 to get help. Depending on the situation, the person may need help from one or more public safety departments. For example, a car crash may require police officers, firefighters, and paramedics.

Exhibit 1 shows the general dispatch process for someone who calls 911 in Austin. An Austin Police Department (APD) employee answers the 911 call and determines what services are needed. The APD employee may then transfer the call to staff with the Austin Fire Department (AFD), Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), or other public safety departments. These employees collect specific details about the situation, determine what resources are needed, and ensure those resources arrive on scene.



SOURCE: OCA analysis of 911 dispatch process in Austin, October 2019

In Austin, this 911 process happens at the Combined Transportation and Emergency Communications Center (CTECC). CTECC is intended to improve emergency response by allowing APD, AFD, EMS, and other public safety agencies to coordinate in a centralized location.

The three public safety departments have different missions, which result in different dispatch procedures. For example, police officers need a physical description of criminal suspects while paramedics need to know about someone's medical condition. This need for different information from callers would make it difficult for APD, AFD, and EMS to completely align 911 operations.

In Fiscal Year 2020, the three departments budgeted approximately \$29 million for emergency communications and have around 330 communications staff. These resources are used to handle the roughly one million 911 calls and texts made every year in Austin.

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# What We Found

## Summary

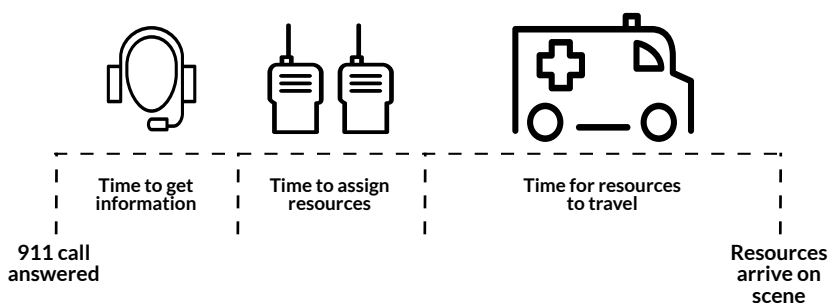
People can call or text 911 to get help when there is an emergency. Austin's 911 service receives over a million calls and texts every year. These calls are handled by communications staff in the Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department, and Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services. We found that while these three departments met recommended goals for quickly answering 911 calls, they missed other goals related to emergency response times. Additionally, each department has practices to ensure 911 operations are effective, but improved public education efforts are needed. Lastly, we noted issues with plans and training that could limit the City's ability to continue 911 operations during a disruption.

## Finding 1

Austin's public safety departments met recommended goals for answering calls but missed other goals related to emergency response times.

Each of the three public safety departments set performance goals related to the timeliness of the dispatch process. Timeliness goals can generally be separated into three segments, as shown in Exhibit 2. The first measures the time it takes to answer a call and collect information about the situation. The second measures how long it takes to assign emergency resources, and the third measures how long it takes for the assigned resources to arrive on the scene.

**EXHIBIT 2**  
**The three phases of emergency response**



Source: OCA analysis of 911 operations, October 2019

According to the National Emergency Number Association, agencies should answer 911 calls in less than 10 seconds and all three departments met this goal. However, as shown in Exhibit 3, APD and AFD reported that they missed most of their other goals related to the timeliness of 911 operations. Many of the missed goals related to the time it took for resources to arrive on the scene and involve factors outside of the direct control of communications staff. For example, arrival time at an emergency depends in large part on the location of the emergency in relation to available resources.

**EXHIBIT 3**  
**Departments did not meet many goals related to dispatch timeliness**

Performance Measure		2018 Target	2018 Performance
APD	% of 911 calls answered within 10 seconds	98	99
	Total police response time for EMERGENCY and URGENT calls	8.040	8.4
	Response time to process EMERGENCY calls	1.09	1.06
	Response time to process URGENT calls	1.22	1.2
	Response time to process EMERGENCY and URGENT calls	1.180	1.16
	Total response time for EMERGENCY calls	6.440	7.15
	Total response time for URGENT calls	8.390	9.23
	Response time to dispatch EMERGENCY calls	0.530	1.02
	Response time to dispatch URGENT calls	1.02	1.16
	Response time to dispatch EMERGENCY and URGENT calls	1	1.11
	Response time from dispatch to arrival for EMERGENCY calls	4.430	5.12
	Response time from dispatch to arrival for URGENT calls	6.140	6.47
	Response time from dispatch to arrival for EMERGENCY and URGENT calls	5.470	6.15
AFD	% of calls answered within 10 seconds	95	96
	Average dispatch time (seconds) for emergency incidents in AFD service area	5	6
	AFD call-taking time for calls in AFD service area	40	44
	% of emergency incidents where amount of time between call receipt and arrival of AFD unit is 8 minutes or less	90	82
	Average first-in unit response time to emergency incidents (minutes from dispatch to arrival)	4.7	4.9
EMS	% of calls answered in less than 10 seconds	90	93.540
	EMS Communication Center average call processing time	75	69.070
	% of EMS Communication Center calls processed within 90 seconds	90	81.310
	% of potentially life-threatening responses within 9 minutes and 59 seconds	90	90.120
	% of priority 1-5 calls responded to on time within the city of Austin and Travis County	90	94.490
	% of priority 1-5 calls responded to on time within the city of Austin	90	95.230

SOURCE: City's ePerformance website, August 2019

Exhibit 3 also shows the differences in how departments reported 911 and emergency response performance. While departments reported similar measures, they used different formats. For example, both APD and AFD measured their response time goal in minutes and seconds. According to APD management, their target of 4.430 meant 4 minutes and 43 seconds, while AFD management said their target of 4.7 meant 4 minutes and 42 seconds. Although each department's goal was nearly identical, this was not clear based on the different formats.

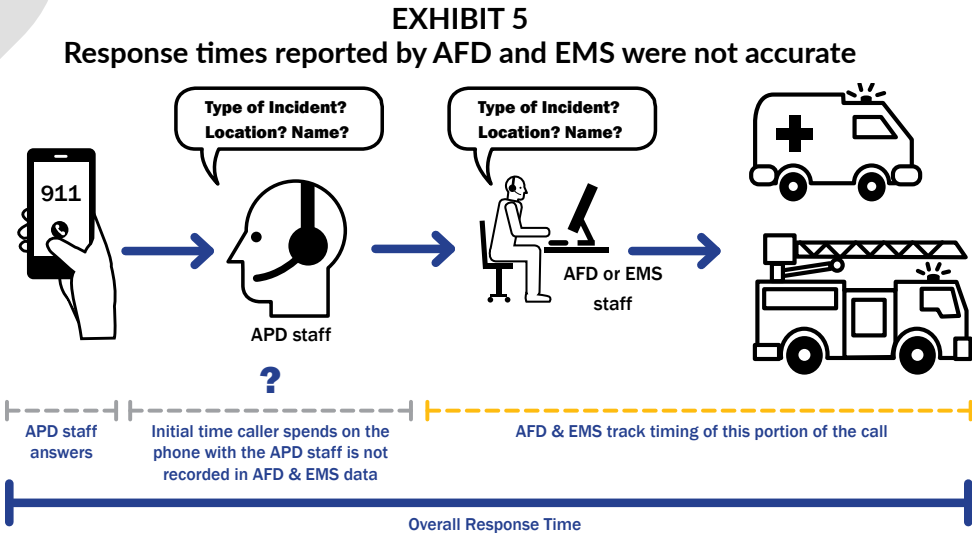
Performance measures also did not align across departments. As shown in Exhibit 4, APD had a performance target of processing EMERGENCY calls (the most serious calls) in 1.09 minutes, AFD had a performance target of sending calls to the dispatch queue in 40 seconds, and EMS had a performance target of processing 90% of calls in less than 90 seconds. The different measures make it difficult to compare performance across the three departments.

**EXHIBIT 4**  
**Department performance measures were not aligned**

	APD	AFD	EMS
Performance goal	Response time to process EMERGENCY calls	AFD call-taking time for calls in AFD service area	% of EMS Communication Center calls processed within 90 seconds
Measurement	Minutes	Seconds	Percentage

SOURCE: OCA analysis of department's reported performance, October 2019

Lastly, the response times AFD and EMS reported did not reflect the actual experience of someone who called 911. That is because those departments reported the response time from when they received the call, and did not include the time it took for APD to answer the call and transfer it to them. Exhibit 5 shows how from the caller's perspective, the response times reported by AFD and EMS were not accurate.



SOURCE: OCA analysis of department performance calculations, October 2019

## Finding 2

Departments have some practices to ensure 911 operations are effective, but could improve 911 operations with better public education efforts.

Accreditation helps ensure a high level of service by evaluating performance against a set of recognized standards.

When people call 911 they are likely in a stressful situation. Additionally, they may not speak English, may have a disability, or may be very young. As a result, it could be challenging for 911 staff to get the information they need from the caller. One way the departments have addressed this challenge is through staff training and quality assurance processes. These practices can make the 911 process more effective by ensuring staff know how to deal with communication barriers to getting the information they need.

Both APD and EMS required 911 staff to be accredited by state agencies. The departments helped staff maintain those accreditations by offering training opportunities. While not accredited by the state, AFD's 911 staff also have ongoing training. AFD only maintained some training records though, so we were unable to verify whether all staff were fully trained.

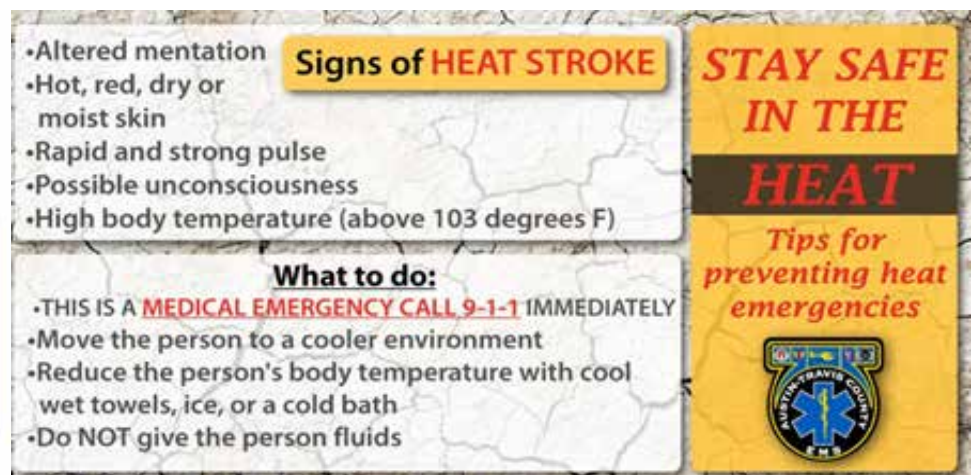
All three departments also had practices to monitor and review calls to ensure staff handled the call appropriately. The specific practices used by each department, such as the number of calls reviewed each month, were different though. For EMS, monitoring was required to maintain the department's status as an Accredited Center of Excellence by the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch.

Another method to address the challenges of getting accurate information is educating the public about 911 operations. Both APD and EMS had materials to educate children about how to use 911. Each public safety department also posted about 911 on social media, and APD recently created a Facebook page specifically focused on emergency communications. However, these efforts were limited and inconsistent.

As shown in Exhibit 6, some posts simply stated that people should call 911 "in an emergency," but did not define what qualifies as an emergency. Other posts clearly defined what qualified as an emergency. This distinction is important because people in Austin can call 311 to report non-emergency situations and people who do not understand the difference between an emergency and a non-emergency may call the wrong number.

### EXHIBIT 6

Social media posts provided varied information about what qualifies as an emergency



SOURCE: APD Twitter and EMS Facebook, October 2019

While some situations are clearly emergencies, others may be less clear. For example, a downed power line may seem like an emergency to some people but this is likely not an emergency and should be reported to Austin Energy. Alternatively, some people may think they should call 311 to report a gas smell, but AFD staff said they consider this an emergency and people should call 911 in that situation.

Between May 2018 and April 2019, 311 transferred almost 3,500 calls to 911.

When someone calls 311 to report an emergency it will take longer for the appropriate personnel to respond. Not only does the caller spend time talking with 311 staff, but it can take longer to confirm a caller's location because the 311 system does not automatically collect this information. As a result, 911 staff have less data about a caller's location when calls are transferred from 311.

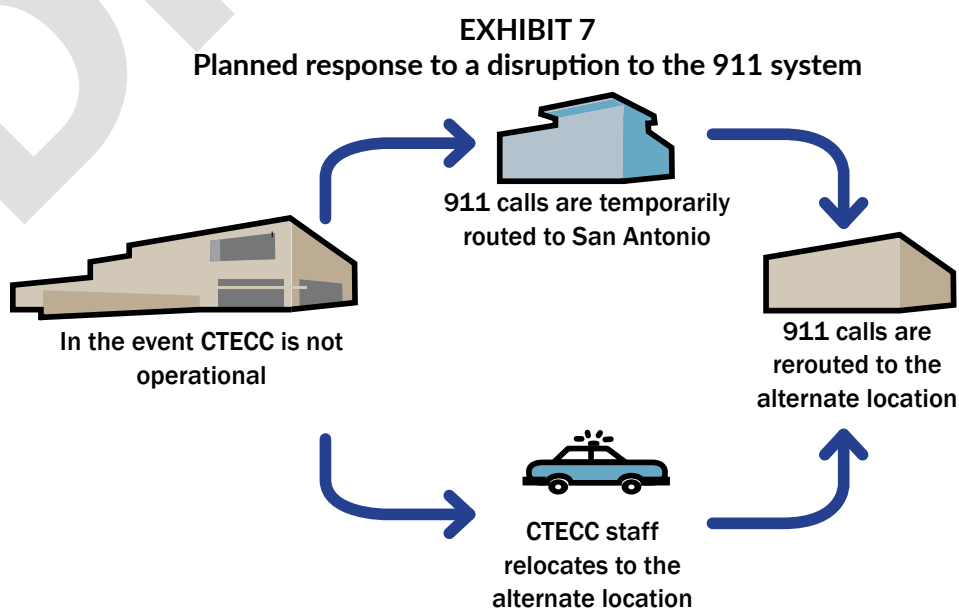
Lastly, the departments provided little education about what to expect when someone called 911. EMS published a video with this information on their YouTube channel, but we saw few other examples of this type of education from any of the public safety departments.

## Finding 3

Although there are some actions to prevent disruptions of 911 operations, several issues with plans and practices could result in serious health and safety consequences if public safety dispatch operations were disrupted.

The 911 system is critical for the City and maintaining that service is important. National standards require that public safety agencies create a plan to continue 911 operations during any disruptions. City policies also require that every department maintain an emergency management plan.

Austin's 911 system has several safety measures and protections in place to prevent disruptions of 911 operations. This includes data backups, an alternate location for 911 operations, and an agreement with San Antonio to handle Austin's 911 calls if needed. Exhibit 7 shows the plan for continuing 911 operations if there was an issue with CTECC.



SOURCE: OCA analysis of the plan to respond to a disruption in 911 operations, September 2019

However, we noted several issues with these efforts which may limit the City's ability to maintain 911 operations during a disruption. The alternate location site is smaller than CTECC and cannot support current 911 staffing levels. It is currently being renovated to increase capacity, but will still not be able to support the same number of 911 staff as CTECC.

Another issue relates to current plans to respond to a disruption to the 911 system. APD has primary responsibility for 911 operations and has a plan to maintain them during a disruption. However, both AFD and EMS also have plans, and none of the three plans appear to be aligned. As a result, departments may not effectively coordinate during a disruption, which could extend or worsen the situation. Additionally, the departments' plans may not be accurate. For example, none of the plans appeared to have the correct address of the alternate location, and one plan has a different address than the other two. Lastly, public safety management said their staff had limited access to the plans.

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A disruption could be caused by a break in internet connectivity, an interruption in the mobile phone system, an environmental incident at CTECC, or even a pandemic flu that affects staff.

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A third issue is that there is limited training for staff to prepare for disruptions. For example, it appears that only AFD regularly has 911 staff operate out of the local alternate location and only one APD shift has practiced switching 911 operations to San Antonio. Without regular practice and access to department plans, staff may be unfamiliar with what to do during a disruption and not respond appropriately or timely.

Even when training does occur, it is not clear whether the experience is used to improve department response to a disruption. We were unable to find evidence that staff had completed after-action reports from previous training drills. During one training drill we observed in April 2019, there were several issues with technology and communications. However, many of these issues were not included in the after-action report APD prepared. One purpose of training should be to identify problems so they can be avoided during an actual disruption. If problems and solutions are not identified through training, there is a chance that the same problems will prevent effective response during a real disruption.

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# Recommendations and Management Response

- 1 | The Assistant City Manager responsible for public safety should ensure the three public safety departments work together to standardize current performance measures.

Management Response: AGREE

Proposed Implementation Plan: Each of the three public safety departments has different performance measures because they have different mission focuses. However, the three public safety departments will develop a work group to determine the most appropriate standardized measurement for reporting specific performance measures.

Proposed Implementation Date: October 2020

- 2 | The Assistant City Manager responsible for public safety should ensure the three public safety departments work together to develop a new performance measure that reflects the entire experience of a 911 user. This measure should demonstrate timeliness from when a 911 call is made to when the appropriate resources arrive on scene.

Management Response: DISAGREE

Proposed Implementation Plan: Significant challenges exist to implementing the suggested performance measure due to the current 911 software, Solacom system design and ownership of the system. This software is designed to begin measuring the answer rate and overall response time from the time of “phone pickup.” Each public safety agency is able to measure their respective department’s response time from the time of “phone pickup” to “first unit arrival”; however, because AFD and ATCEMS are secondary Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) their response time begins from their phone pickup. As the primary PSAP, APD 911 Operators answer 911 calls by stating, “Austin 911, do you need Police, Fire, or EMS?” If the caller states Fire or EMS, the 911 Operator immediately transfers the 911 call to AFD or EMS, at which point the time of transfer is usually five (5) seconds or less. Due to this software’s system design, AFD and ATCEMS are technologically unable to measure their overall response from the time of APD’s “phone pickup”.

Further, the Capital Area Emergency Communications District (CAECD) contracts and manages the 911 software, Solacom, for all PSAPs for the Capital Area Council of Governments. The PSAPs include all emergency service agencies answering 911 calls in the CAECD District. In 2013, State Legislation and subsequent resolutions established the CAECD for the City of Austin and the following counties, Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis and Williamson counties.

The CAECD oversees 911 services to local governments in the State Planning Region 12; therefore, changing the software and its configuration will impact all CAECD agencies and incur significant costs associated with implementing the suggested performance measure. Should CAECD plan for an upgrade for the Solacom system in the future, staff will explore how the performance metric might be included in the upgrade.

Proposed Implementation Date: N/A

The Assistant City Manager responsible for public safety should ensure the three public safety departments work together to create a public education plan to teach the public about using 911. The plan should:

- involve 311, schools, utilities, and other stakeholders,
- focus on what is considered an emergency and non-emergency,
- address how to interact with 911 staff, and
- engage non-English speaking communities as well as people with disabilities.

**Management Response: AGREE**

**Proposed Implementation Plan:**

April - August 2020: The three public safety departments will continue to develop their existing public education plans teaching the public about using 911 and will work together to ensure consistent messaging.

Initiatives currently underway, includes APD's launch of its Emergency Communication Division's Facebook webpage and the Community Outreach Program. Both resources aim to actively engage and educate the public about how to best use the 911 call system. APD also uses these platforms to promote Texting 911, directed at persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. In 2019, APD also collaborating with Austin 3-1-1 to create an educational video about the difference between a 9-1-1 and 3-1-1 call.

There are on-going discussions between the three public safety departments to create educational videos in English and Spanish promoting the use of 911.

APD, AFD and ATCEMS will integrate lessons learned from the audit findings into their current public education efforts to include schools, utilities and community events.

**Proposed Implementation Date: June 2020**

4

The Assistant City Manager responsible for public safety should ensure the three public safety departments work together to improve disruption preparedness for 911 operations. These departments should:

- enhance training for communications staff on disruption procedures,
- prepare reports that document all issues that arise during training and use these reports to improve disruption preparedness, and
- update comprehensive plans for handling disruptions that addresses the needs of each department and ensure all staff can access it.

**Management Response: AGREE**

**Proposed Implementation Plan:**

May - August 2020: The Emergency Communications Divisions (ECD) of the three public safety departments will ensure Division staff receives training related to practices and procedures on disruption preparedness. In addition, ECD will conduct bi-annual drills with the San Antonio Emergency Communications Center (SAECC). The ECDs of the three public safety departments and the SAECC have agreed to hold 2020's first 911 disruption drill on June 1, 2020.

June 2020 and ongoing: The ECDs will ensure after-action reports (AAR) for disruption drills are comprehensive and will use the AARs to improve disruption preparedness.

The ECDs of the three public safety departments will update their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) to ensure the plans contain accurate information and outlines current procedures. Further, each ECD will ensure their staff has read access to the procedures and training opportunities on the COOP.

**Proposed Implementation Date: May 2020**

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## Scope

The audit scope included 911 dispatch operations and procedures from October 1, 2013 to July 31, 2019.

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## Methodology

To complete this audit, we performed the following steps:

- interviewed management and staff in APD, AFD, EMS, Communications and Technology Management, Austin 311, Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management, and Office of the Medical Director;
- interviewed vendor management from the Capital Area Council of Governments, San Antonio Police Department, and Travis County Sheriff's Office;
- reviewed applicable laws, policies, procedures, guidelines, and best practices;
- reviewed department performance measures and training materials related to dispatch operations and emergency response;
- selected a judgmental sample of training certifications and reviewed supporting documentation to determine if department communications staff are qualified to perform job duties;
- observed the dispatch process for each public safety department at CTECC and the backup center;
- selected a 15-day sample of data (January 1, 2018 - January 15, 2018) and analyzed 911 calls dispatched;
- reviewed dispatch system security, maintenance, and recovery plans;
- reviewed department continuity of operations plans and after-action reports;
- observed a scheduled drill between Austin and San Antonio Communications Divisions to practice transferring 911 calls to / from both cities in case of an emergency;
- analyzed call transfer data of Austin 311 to 911;
- reviewed criminal background check policies and procedures;
- reviewed criminal justice information services policy and procedures at CTECC;
- reviewed community survey results to determine public satisfaction with 911 services;
- reviewed public safety department social media and public education materials;
- selected a judgmental sample of collisions and reviewed supporting documentation to determine if public safety departments are traveling safely to incidents;
- evaluated the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse associated with the dispatch process; and
- evaluated internal controls related to administering and monitoring of the dispatch process.

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## Audit Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. We conduct performance audits to review aspects of a City service or program and provide recommendations for improvement.

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*Alternate formats available upon request*

Memo


To: Public Safety Commission

From: Public Safety Commission ATCEMS/AFD Dispatch Equity Study Scope of Work Working Group ["PSC Working Group"]

Date: February 27, 2020

**Update to full Public Safety Commission from  
ATCEMS/AFD Dispatch Equity Study Scope of Work Working Group  
Kathleen Hausenfluck, Rebecca Webber, Preston Tyree**

**FY 2019-2020 budget<sup>1</sup>** includes funding for a Dispatch Equity and Optimization Study.

**DISPATCH EQUITY AND OPTIMIZATION EFFICIENCY STUDY:** To conduct a comprehensive review of the equity and efficiency of Austin Fire and EMS services, \$250,000 in one-time funding is incorporated into the FY 2019-20 budget. A multidisciplinary team will determine a scope of work and select a consultant to review dispatch times, ISO ratings, station locations, and the timeline for bringing on new stations. 

**July-December 2019 Official Working Group:** Meetings and collaboration—between representatives of ATCEMS, AFD, Austin EMS Association, Austin Fire Association, Travis County Office of Emergency Management, and the City Manager's Office ["Official Working Group"]—occurred through the summer, fall, and winter regarding the Scope of Work.

From: Arellano, Rey <[Rey.Arellano@austintexas.gov](mailto:Rey.Arellano@austintexas.gov)>  
Date: Mon, Jul 22, 2019 at 5:15 PM  
Subject: Dispatch equity and optimization  
To: Baker, Joel <[Joel.Baker@ausps.org](mailto:Joel.Baker@ausps.org)>, Rodriguez, Ernesto [EMS] <[Ernesto.Rodriguez@ausps.org](mailto:Ernesto.Rodriguez@ausps.org)>, Escott, Mark <[Mark.Escott@ausps.org](mailto:Mark.Escott@ausps.org)>, [bob\\_nicks@yahoo.com](mailto:bob_nicks@yahoo.com) <[bob\\_nicks@yahoo.com](mailto:bob_nicks@yahoo.com)>, Selena Xie ([President@austinemsa.org](mailto:President@austinemsa.org)) <[President@austinemsa.org](mailto:President@austinemsa.org)>, Scruggs, Ed - BC <[bc.Ed.Scruggs@austintexas.gov](mailto:bc.Ed.Scruggs@austintexas.gov)>, Charles Brotherton ([Charles.Brotherton@traviscountytx.gov](mailto:Charles.Brotherton@traviscountytx.gov)) <[Charles.Brotherton@traviscountytx.gov](mailto:Charles.Brotherton@traviscountytx.gov)>  
Cc: Ochiltree, Alta <[Alta.Ochiltree@austintexas.gov](mailto:Alta.Ochiltree@austintexas.gov)>

Dear Colleagues,

The purpose of this note is to invite you to an initial meeting to explore an effort that will look at how we might improve dispatch equity and optimization related to Fire and EMS. For this meeting, I will cover the background for the initiative and describe what we mean by "dispatch equity and optimization." It is my hope that we will be able to work together in partnership on this effort.

Alta will be scheduling the meeting toward the end of next week. I hope your schedules will allow you to make it.

Best regards,



Rey Arellano

Assistant City Manager

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [https://assets.austintexas.gov/budget/19-20/downloads/2020\\_Approved\\_Budget.pdf](https://assets.austintexas.gov/budget/19-20/downloads/2020_Approved_Budget.pdf)

**December 10-17, 2019:** A Request for Information from potential contractors was posted by the City of Austin Procurement Office.<sup>2</sup>

**City of Austin  
Request for Information  
Dispatch Equity & Optimization Efficiency Study  
RFI 4400 EAD6005**

**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this RFI is to ask for input to create a scope of work for a Dispatch Equity & Optimization Efficiency Study for the City of Austin.

In relation to this RFI, the City is looking for potential topics to consider for the scope of work, as well as anything to consider that may hinder the successful execution of a contract.

**December 16, 2019:** A potential contractor, the Matrix Consulting Group, responds to the Request for Information. In 2016, the Matrix Consulting Group prepared the 233-page community policing study of APD commonly referred to as “the Matrix Report”.<sup>3</sup> The Matrix Consulting Group is the only potential contractor that responded to the Request for Information regarding the equity dispatch study. This lack of interest among potential contractors is concerning and was even highlighted by Matrix in their recommendations.

There are issues which may arise in the course of this study which prevent the successful execution of a contract. These include a lack of vendor availability or capacity, difficulty in collecting the necessary data, insufficient understanding of

The Matrix Consulting Group’s full response to the City Request for Information is attached to this memo.

**January 28, 2020:** Public Safety Commission invited by the City Manager’s Office to collaborate on the Scope of Work. The invitation did not inform the Commission that the Official Working Group had been working for six months on the Scope of Work, much less include the current draft. The invitation also did not inform the Commission that a Request for Information had been posted and that one potential contractor had responded with recommendations.

In addition, the City Manager’s Office is working to develop a scope of work for the dispatch equity and optimization efficiency study. During the FY 2019-2020 budget adoption, the City Council approved \$250,000 in one-time funding to hire a contractor to conduct a comprehensive review of the equity and efficiency of Fire and EMS services and review dispatch times, ISO ratings, station locations, and the timeline for bringing on new stations. We are also requesting two nominations from your board for this project to review the draft scope of work.

(Excerpt from Jan. 28, 2020 email from the Assistant to Assistant City Manager Rey Arellano)

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<sup>2</sup> RFI attached to this memo and also available at

[https://assets.austintexas.gov/financeonline/downloads/vc\\_files/RFI\\_4400\\_EAD6005/RFI\\_4400\\_EAD6005\\_PAC1\\_v1.pdf](https://assets.austintexas.gov/financeonline/downloads/vc_files/RFI_4400_EAD6005/RFI_4400_EAD6005_PAC1_v1.pdf);

Solicitation Details regarding this particular available at

[https://www.austintexas.gov/financeonline/account\\_services/solicitation/solicitation\\_details.cfm?sid=134085](https://www.austintexas.gov/financeonline/account_services/solicitation/solicitation_details.cfm?sid=134085).

<sup>3</sup> 2016 Matrix Report available at

[https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Police/Austin\\_Community\\_Policing\\_Report\\_7-21\\_-\\_Final.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Police/Austin_Community_Policing_Report_7-21_-_Final.pdf).

**February 2, 2020:** Public Safety Commission nominates Kathleen Hausenfluck, Rebecca Webber, and Preston Tyree to serve as the “Public Safety Commission ATCEMS/AFD Dispatch Equity Study Scope of Work Working Group” [PSC Working Group].

**February 14, 2020:** PSC Working Group requests the current and prior drafts of the Scope of Work and correspondence, meeting minutes, etcetera from the Official Working Group so that we could get up to speed on how the Scope of Work had evolved over the second half of 2019.

When can we expect to receive the current draft of the Scope of Work?

In order to prepare for the meeting, please send us:

- responses to the RFI
- correspondence among the working group made up of EMS, AFD, Associations, Dr. Escott, Chuck Brotherton, etc. regarding the study itself and the Scope of Work
- agendas, notes, minutes of meetings by the official working group
- previous drafts of the Scope of Work

(Excerpt from Feb. 14, 2020 email to the Assistant to Assistant City Manager Rey Arellano)

**February 24, 2020:** statutory deadline by when the City Manager’s Office should have responded to the PSC Working Group’s request for public information.<sup>4</sup>

**February 26, 2020:**

More than three weeks after the PSC Working Group was convened *at the City Manager’s Office’s request*, the City Manager’s Office responds to the group’s request to better understand the process by which the Scope of Work was developed and the thought processes of the Official Working Group. As discussed above, the PSC Working Group wanted to get up to speed by reviewing the changes implemented throughout the prior drafts. The PSC Working Group is informed that they will not be allowed to view correspondence, agendas, notes, or meeting minutes from the Official Working Group or even prior drafts by the Official Working Group. Rather, the group will be allowed to review the final draft at an in-person meeting that could potentially take place on March 13 or March 31.

Please let me know which date works best and Alta will send the meeting invite notice.

- March 13; 1p to 2p
- March 31; 10:00 to 11:00
- March 31; 11:00 to 12:00

This process will follow the same process as the Sexual Assault scope of work process; therefore, we will share with you a final-draft scope of work with once it is more complete and fully reviewed by staff.

We will not be sharing previous iterations of the draft scope of work.

(Excerpt from Feb. 26, 2020 email from the Assistant to Assistant City Manager Rey Arellano)

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<sup>4</sup> Tex. Government Code § 552.221(d): “If an officer for public information cannot produce public information for inspection or duplication within 10 business days after the date the information is requested under Subsection (a), the officer shall certify that fact in writing to the requestor and set a date and hour within a reasonable time when the information will be available for inspection or duplication.”

**February 27, 2020:**

PSC Working Group requests clarification regarding the City Manager's Office's denial of their request for information. What provision of the Texas Public Information Act allows the City Manager's office to withhold this information from us, *ie*, the public?



**CITY OF AUSTIN, TEXAS**  
Purchasing Office  
**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)**  
**COVER SHEET**

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**SOLICITATION NO:** RFI 4400  
EAD6005

**COMMODITY/SERVICE DESCRIPTION:** Dispatch Equity  
& Optimization Efficiency Study

**DATE ISSUED:** December 10, 2019

**COMMODITY CODE:** 91832

**CONTACT THE FOLLOWING  
PERSON WITH ANY QUESTIONS:**

Erin D'Vincent  
Procurement Supervisor  
Phone: (512) 974-3070  
Email: [erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov](mailto:erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov)

**RESPONSE DUE PRIOR TO:**

December 17, 2019, 2:00 PM, Central Time  
[erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov](mailto:erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov)

**The Respondent, by submitting a response, acknowledges that this request is not a solicitation, will not result in a contract award, and the information provided may be utilized in possible future solicitations.**

**SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSE VIA EMAIL TO:**  
[erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov](mailto:erin.dvincent@austintexas.gov)

**City of Austin  
Request for Information  
Dispatch Equity & Optimization Efficiency Study  
RFI 4400 EAD6005**

**DISCLAIMER**

This (Request for Information) RFI is issued solely for information and planning purposes only and does not constitute a solicitation or contract. All material submitted to the City of Austin (City) becomes public property and is subject to the Texas Open Records Act upon receipt. Any information submitted in response to the RFI should not contain proprietary and/or confidential information.

Responses to the RFI will not be returned. Accordingly, responses to this notice are not offers and cannot be accepted by the City as such or to form or suggest a contract or commitment of any nature. Respondents are solely responsible for all expenses associated with responding to this RFI.

**1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this RFI is to ask for input to create a scope of work for a Dispatch Equity & Optimization Efficiency Study for the City of Austin.

In relation to this RFI, the City is looking for potential topics to consider for the scope of work, as well as anything to consider that may hinder the successful execution of a contract.

**2. BACKGROUND**

During the fiscal year 2019-2020 budgeting process, the Austin City Council approved funding for a dispatch equity and optimization efficiency study.

The City of Austin (City) will seek a Contractor to conduct a comprehensive review of the equity and efficiency of the Austin Fire Department (AFD) and Austin Travis County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) dispatch times, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) ratings, station of locations, and timeline for bringing new stations.

**3. SUBMISSIONS**

Contractors who wish to provide information please include:

- Links or copies of documents that other organizations (government or non-government) have completed for a similar study
- The estimated time frame for completion of the study
- Relevant items you think the City should review in addition to dispatch times, ISO ratings, station of locations, and timeline for bringing new stations
- Any additional questions you may have based on the limited information the City has at this time

If you wish to be provided notification if the City issues a competitive solicitation, please include:

Company Name:

Point of Contact:

Email Address:

Telephone Number:

**Response to Request for Information –  
Dispatch Equity and Optimization Efficiency  
RFI 4400**

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AUSTIN, TEXAS



**December 16, 2019**

# Response to Request for Information Re: Dispatch Equity and Optimization Efficiency Study

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The Austin City Council has approved funding for a dispatch equity and optimization efficiency study. The City of Austin is seeking a contractor to conduct a comprehensive review of the equity and efficiency of the Austin Fire Department and Austin Travis County EMS dispatch times, ISO ratings, station locations, and timeline for bringing new stations online. As part of preparation for this study, the City has requested feedback and input from contractors regarding the scope of work which should be included. In response to this, the Matrix Consulting Group has the following suggestions:

- In addition to the areas already outlined in the RFI, the City should consider including analysis of the equity of fire station staffing and resources relative to their typical or anticipated incident volume.
- The time allotted for a study such as this one should be 3-4 months from the date of initiation. This timeframe is typically sufficient for a well-resourced team to collect the required data and perform the analysis necessary to produce accurate, insightful findings and recommendations.
- There are issues which may arise in the course of this study which prevent the successful execution of a contract. These include a lack of vendor availability or capacity, difficulty in collecting the necessary data, insufficient understanding of the Fire Department, or insufficient communication regarding expectations and the scope of services. To avoid these, the City should seek a vendor with demonstrated experience and expertise in providing consulting services to fire and dispatch agencies, as well as a vendor with prior experience in the City of Austin.

As one of the nation's leading providers of consulting services for both dispatch and fire agencies, we would like to be provided notification if the City issues a competitive solicitation. Our information is shown below:

<b>Company Name</b>	Matrix Consulting Group
<b>Point of Contact</b>	Richard Brady, President
<b>Email Address</b>	info@matrixcg.net
<b>Telephone Number</b>	650.858.0507