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How is your Communications Center Performing?

What the question really means: Evaluating your communications center's performance is about more than whether the center is private or public, staffed with sworn or civilian personnel, or a single-agency or multi-agency dispatch center. The cornerstone of assessing your communications center is the use of evidence-based standards rooted in industry best practices—and analyzing the impact they have on your department's operations.

The key issue is: *How do you objectively know how the communications center is performing? Can you make smart, effective decisions to increase or decrease staffing based on your current performance standards? Do you truly know the level of customer service you are providing to the public? In a cardiac arrest, how long before bystander CPR instructions are provided—and did the patient survive? Are structure fires recognized and dispatched accurately and quickly?*

Chief officers' knowledge of industry best practices in the fire service is grounded in their training, education and experience as well as guidance from industry standards such as those published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Communications center best practices are often an enigma for many fire department leaders. So where do you start? The first step is to acknowledge that you don't know what you don't know—and what you don't measure.

How to formulate your answer: The answer to any question about communications center performance should be grounded in the data derived and analyzed from your Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) System, the 911 telephone software analytics module, radio database, and a quality assurance process focused on your agency's policies and procedures. Best practices and benchmarks to compare with your agency's performance can be found in NFPA standards (1061, 1221, and 1561) and also from organizations such as:

- National Emergency Number Association (NENA)
- Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO)
- American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM)
- American National Standards Institute (ANSI)
- International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED)



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It is incumbent upon management to stay up to date with changes in the industry to provide the best service in a constantly evolving environment. For example, NENA, APCO and ANSI recently published a new [Standard for the Establishment of a Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement Program for Public Safety Answering Points](#).

Here are some examples of ways to measure the performance of your communications center:

Accessibility/Workforce

- What is your call answer time?
- What is your call completion time?
- What is your call abandonment rate?

Workload Management

- What is the breakdown of calls by call type (e.g. VOIP, wireless, or landline) and how does each impact performance?
- What is your call processing time for high-acuity calls (such as a house fire or cardiac arrest) and low-acuity calls (such as an extinguished fire or broken finger)?

Quality Management

- What percentage of calls is reviewed as part of a quality assurance process?
- What is your center's overall percentage of compliance to your agency's policies, procedures or protocols?
- Is your agency accurately triaging calls and sending the appropriate resources?

High reliability organizations use the results of these analyses to perform trend analyses, create key performance indicators and dashboards, develop strategic plans, and adjust staffing models to match peak activity times and to reduce liability exposure.

Determining the baseline health of your communications center is one of the first steps when making mission critical decisions that impact the quality of service your entire organization provides to the public.



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Meet the Fitch Team



From more than 30 years, we've helped public safety organizations improve performance in the face of rising costs, reduced reimbursement and increasing public expectations.

Fitch & Associates is the only public safety consulting organization that combines the depth of a national, full-time professional firm with an extraordinary level of personal service and responsiveness to client needs. The result? Unmatched expertise and exceptional value.

To find out more about how we can help the organization you lead, call us today at 816-431-2600 or visit fitchassoc.com