



Tip Sheet: Tips for Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs)

COVID-19: Tips for Emergency Communications Centers (ECCs)

COVID-19 Implications for ECCs: Insights on How to Operate

With the COVID-19 crisis continuing to rapidly evolve, it's time for every public safety communications entity to assess crucial continuity of operations questions—when COVID-19 directly impacts the community we serve, if it hasn't already, how will we respond, and how will that response impact our technology, staffing and operations? How will we need to adapt our organizational policies? How should leadership navigate the ship during this time when emotions are high?

Depending on your location, your workforce may be significantly impacted, perhaps seeing as high as a 40 percent reduction in staff either testing positive, demonstrating symptoms or coming into contact with someone who is symptomatic. In the meantime, the public will expect that your agency will continue to support 911 calls, and call volumes are likely to rise considerably. How will you maintain 911 and dispatch operations with dramatically reduced staffing levels? What level of infection should you prepare for your call center to have?

Every public safety leader must focus on the question of how their organization is going to sustain operations. Consider these guidelines as a starting point:

1. Build a systems flowchart for all public safety answering point (ECC) systems and assess the opportunities and challenges associated with making these systems available remotely.
2. Assess your connectivity and bandwidth limitations for premises-based solutions that are remotely accessible at a backup or mobile location.
3. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), query templates should be created to question callers to determine the possibility that the person may have signs, symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19. Recommendations from the CDC for how to evaluate callers can be found [here](#).
4. Implement social-distancing measures in the ECC using tactics such as 6-foot dispatch zones, building vapor-barrier walls, single-use headsets and beyond-normal environmental cleaning of consoles after every shift. Disperse personnel to backup locations in the ECC, such as training centers, and take advantage of portable workstations if possible.
5. Most ECC continuity-of-operations and disaster-recovery plans are incomplete, outdated or more focused on technology instead of personnel continuity. Ensure that every staff member and stakeholder in the ECC is aware and trained on the plan and are fully aware of their responsibilities.

6. Eliminate visits from non-essential personnel into the ECC by reducing administration office hours to only “as needed” and encourage teleworking. This includes visits from first responders, food-delivery services and family.
7. Convene a war room that is situated with designated members of an established crisis-communications team. Establish regular meeting schedules for team updates, message development and distribution planning. Communicate daily, even if no new information is available.
8. Are your vendors and outsourcing partners ready to support dispersed operations? Do they have business-continuity plans, have they tested them through exercises, and have they trained their personnel on them? This includes cybersecurity partners.
9. Plan for malicious cyber actors to take advantage of crisis by attempting phishing attacks and disinformation campaigns. Review with ECC personnel the importance of guarding against COVID-19-related campaigns by avoiding clicking on unsolicited emails and email attachments, as well as how to recognize phishing attempts.
10. Revisit staff succession plans for all key positions—in the event that ECC leadership becomes infected and unable to drive decision-making, ensure that a plan is in place to ensure how authority policies will be delegated and enforced.

Most importantly, as public safety leaders continue to deal with this ever-evolving crisis, transparency in the ECC should be promoted. Look for opportunities to boost morale across their center, especially in light of the fact that the ECC will be an especially emotional and tense environment. Communicate daily and display behaviors that are collected and calm, while being optimistic and real.

About Mission Critical Partners

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