

Innovations in 911 Response

Worksheet: Preparing to Meet with Public Safety Stakeholders

Before you can start selecting calls and developing an effective triage and dispatch system, you need to collaborate with public safety stakeholders. These collaborations will be key both before launch and throughout operation and expansion. In this worksheet, we share insights through the perspective of Carmen, a fictional program director for an alternative response program who is preparing for her first group meeting with public safety stakeholders. You can use this interactive PDF by typing in your answers to **four key questions to help you prepare for your public safety work group's first meeting.**

1. Who needs to be at the meeting?
2. What expertise will each person bring to program planning?
3. What is important to these stakeholders?
4. What questions might stakeholders have for me?

1. Who needs to be at the meeting?

Example: Typically, programs include leadership from the local 911 call center, agencies currently responding to the types of calls the alternative team may assume, and other public safety agencies with relevant expertise. Funders and city officials may also be involved if they influence key decisions (see sidebar). Since Carmen's program will use 911 as its answering point and most of the city's mental health and quality of life calls currently go to police, Carmen will invite 911 and police representatives. She will also invite Fire and EMS, because her team may coordinate with them on scene and may take EMS calls in the future.

My answers:

Tips for successful collaboration with public safety stakeholders:

Invest in relationships

- Use [power mapping](#) to identify key stakeholders, assess their influence, and plan targeted engagement strategies.

Align on the vision

- Anticipate partner questions and prepare accordingly.
- Build a shared understanding of program goals.
- Set collaboration goals and establish roles and responsibilities in each program phase.

Build processes that facilitate collaboration

- Learn about partner systems and operations.
- Establish the necessary cross-agency agreements for data sharing and operations.
- Set regular touchpoints to discuss operations and report on program impact.

2. What expertise will each person bring to program planning?

Example: *Each stakeholder has field experience and call data that can help Carmen identify which 911 calls may benefit from an alternative response and are safe for her team. The 911 program leaders can also help her understand current call triage processes, adapt protocols for her program, and build buy-in among those who will refer or transfer calls to her team, either directly from 911 or via on-scene responders. (For more ideas, read how [Long Beach, California](#), relied on insights from public safety stakeholders to select call codes.)*

My answers:

3. What is important to the other stakeholders?

Example: *Carmen knows that each agency has different priorities and perspectives. She has spoken with leaders and staff individually, read studies and news articles, and attended city meetings. She knows that:*

- *Resident and responder safety are the public safety community's top priorities.*
- *The officers' union wants officers to respond to fewer calls involving mental health crises.*
- *The mayor wants to mirror successful alternative response programs in other cities.*
- *The police chief has said he feels left out of the planning process.*
- *Managers of other alternative response programs often have to address concerns that their responders might not know what to do during emergencies in the field.*

These insights help Carmen recognize the importance of talking about transparency, inclusion, and robust training as she meets with public safety stakeholders as a group for the first time.

My answers:

4. What questions might stakeholders have for me?

Example: *Carmen has heard from peers who run alternative response programs that public safety stakeholders often have questions about liability — specifically, whether their agencies or staff could be held responsible if something goes wrong on an alternative response call. She has also learned from city council meetings that some leaders do not know what alternative response actually entails, how common it is, whether it is safe, and if it truly works. In informal conversations with stakeholders, Carmen also gets a lot of questions about what the goal of her program is and what it will look like in practice. Knowing these concerns, Carmen researches answers to common questions about legal risks, responder safety, and the evidence supporting alternative response. She also prepares a quick primer on the purpose of her program and operational information to bring to the meeting.*

Questions I can answer:

Alternative Response Program Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: How many cities have an alternative response program?

A: 89 and counting. The [LEAP Nationwide Map of Community Responder Programs](#) dashboard shows which jurisdictions have alternative response programs, and the type and number of calls they take.

Q: How many calls go to alternative response programs each year?

A: To date, alternative responders across the country have resolved more than [500,000](#) calls to 911.

Q: Are programs like this safe?

A: Yes. Teams rarely call for police back up or experience injuries. In [Durham, North Carolina](#), alternative responders reported feeling safe in 99% of 30,000 calls. In [Denver, Colorado](#), responders went on 2,800 calls without needing any police back-up due to a safety issue. In [Eugene, Oregon](#), only 2% of 14,000 calls required police back-up.

Alternative Response Program Frequently Asked Questions, continued:

Q: Do alternative response teams replace police?

A: No, alternative responders supplement the existing emergency response system by providing a response for 911 calls that do not need a law enforcement response, are not life threatening, and could benefit from connections to longer-term care and services.

Q: Why have an alternative response team?

A: Cities start these programs because they recognize that some 911 calls are better addressed by responders trained in mental health support who can connect people to long-term resources. Most teams are open to including any call types that they collectively agree are a good fit for alternative response and safe for their alternative response team to handle. Typically for unarmed alternative responses, this means calls with no life threatening medical emergency and ones without weapons or violence present.

Q: Does sending alternative responders increase my city's legal liability risk?

A: The [LEAP Community Response Liability Report](#) concluded that “by sending community responders to low-risk calls in place of police, cities reduce their overall liability risk.”

Q: Could alternative response teams help lower crime rates?

A: Yes, initial data is promising. The study, “[A Community Response Approach to Mental Health and Substance Abuse Crisis Reduced Crime](#),” found that reports of non-serious crimes dropped 34 percent in the areas where Denver’s Support Team Assistance Response, or STAR, program operated (comparing the six months after the program was implemented to the six months before the program was launched). This program sends mental health specialists to non-violent, quality-of-life calls.

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: Check out the GPL’s [Strengthening Alternative 911 Emergency Response](#) page for information on innovations in the field and more information on other programs around the country.



The [Government Performance Lab](#), housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, we gain insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, we are also able to provide experiential learning.

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