



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico  
Program Title: Communication Fire Officer Program  
Program Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton  
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration  
Signature: 

## **Program Overview**

The Henrico County Division of Fire adopted the Communications Fire Officer program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing Paramedic Fire Officers, the division was able to ask more in-depth questions to citizens and thus make more informed decisions. This was paramount because it allowed the division to scale resources when appropriate, and directly aided in maintaining a healthy work force and minimizing PPE usage. This “virtual first responder” places a Paramedic Fire Officer with a citizen in that critical time between 911 activation and dispatch and the moment first response units arrive. This time is capitalized on to ask more informed decisions, give specific advice, and provide a direct liaison between the citizen and responding units while never delaying service.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

This model was born in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide overall real-time system status management, citizen outreach, and place a full-time liaison between field command team members and the citizens in the Emergency Communications Center. In anticipation of increased calls for service, a potential sick work-force, and uncertainty surrounding personal protective equipment streams, having a coordinated effort within the communications center led to an increase in efficiency. This position was necessary to responsibly minimize response unit assignments while never reducing the standard of care or level of service provided to the community. These Paramedic Fire Officers report to a Captain within the ECC under direct oversight from the Operational Medical Director and the Deputy Chief of Operations.

## **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

This program is worthy of award consideration because it elevates the Henrico County Division of Fire’s already effective response model to new levels. By immediately connecting citizens in

need with a Paramedic Fire Officer, from the moment a citizen reports an emergency until the moment a first responder arrives, they are receiving the best care possible. A true partnership between the Henrico County Emergency Communications Center and Division of Fire has blossomed with the recipients being the community at large. The citizens are better protected, the first responders are provided the most valuable real-time information from which to make decisions, and we can provide unique, tailored support to the community to their specific emergency. A true partnership between the Henrico County Emergency Communications Center and Division of Fire has blossomed with the beneficiaries being the community at large. The citizens are better protected, the first responders are provided the most valuable real-time information from which to make decisions, and we can provide unique, tailored support to the community to their specific emergency.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

The CFO program, began in February of 2020, placed a Paramedic Fire Officer within the Emergency Communications Center to provide insight to responding units and provides immediate support to those calling 911 with COVID-19 complaints. Trained to work the Communications Equipment and Computer Aided Dispatch systems, these providers are a direct liaison between field first responders and the command team to the citizens of the community and the emergency communications center. This vital “virtual first responder” can immediately over-the-phone advice that elevates the level of care provided between the vital time between activation of field units and their subsequent arrival on scene. These individuals receive several weeks of training in both the classroom and at their assigned workstation to become a competent, effective professional.

## **Financing and Staffing**

The cost of this program was providing overtime for one CFO working 12 hour shifts per day at an average hourly rate of \$35 per hour for a total of \$420/ day. The size of the Division of Fire allowed for three Paramedic Fire Officers to be re-deployed to the Emergency Communications Center to fulfill this model. The program was built in house by the Emergency Communications Captain, a position that already existed. The cost is only the personnel operating costs as no additional equipment is necessary to replicate this model. It should be noted that this program also helped decrease exposure rates for our members, and any decrease in high-risk exposure lowered quarantining of our personnel, thereby decreasing overall OT costs.

## **Program Results**

This program has had overwhelming success. The program is unique in that it better serves the community by more effectively matching risk presented with specificity and preciseness of the resources assigned. It also better serves the department at large by minimizing the impact on members for calls that do not warrant large apparatus assignments. In turn, vehicle usage, fuel, and maintenance costs can thus be realized. The most overwhelming success is the level of specificity a provider can have. By directly placing our CFO with a patient we can ascertain specific needs and conditions before the arrival of a first responder. This level of direct interaction with callers to the ECC was incredibly helpful at the beginning of COVID-19 as so many people misunderstood the disease and what they could do to help themselves. This is vital and allows us to adjust responses based on what is gleaned over the phone. A specific example of a life truly impacted was a call where a CFO was speaking to a family member of a patient and through astute observation was able to hear ineffective respiratory effort. The CFO gave advanced, specific direction and the family member then found that the patient had no pulse. The CFO provided CPR instructions over the phone while simultaneously relaying this information to

responding units and deploying additional units to assist with this now critical patient emergency. Had the CFO not been present, it would have been minutes before field first responders arrived and located the patient, and even longer for them to call for additional help.

### **Brief Summary**

In anticipation of increased calls for service, a potential sick work-force, and uncertainty surrounding personal protective equipment streams, having a coordinated effort within the communications center led to an increase in efficiency of existing emergency resources during the Pandemic. By placing a CFO within the Emergency Communications Center (ECC), we can also train the staff more effectively within the ECC. We can serve as a direct liaison to the ECC and answer in depth medical questions and fire operations questions. The yield of this is that call takers within the ECC can navigate the commercial Emergency Medical Dispatch software better because they have a deeper understanding of the information being asked and answered. This position also serves as a liaison to the field command team allowing system status management to fall to an individual with direct, real-time knowledge of the current call volume, as well as pending calls for service, unit mark outs, and mutual aid requests. Allowing the CFO to assume administrative responsibilities allows the Field Command Team and better serve their direct reports by being more engaged operationally and tactically without being bogged down by administrative tasks.

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