



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** 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 Greene, Virginia _____

Program Title: Greene County Emergency Medical Services _____

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Melissa Meador _____

Title: Director of Emergency Services _____

Department: Emergency Services _____

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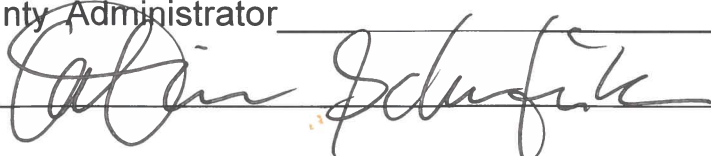
Website: <https://greenecountyva.gov/government/depts/emergency-services> _____

Email: mmeador@gcva.us _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Cathy Schafrik _____

Title: County Administrator _____

Signature:  _____



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2023 Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Award Submission
Locality/Department: County of Greene/Department of Emergency Services

Executive Summary:

Greene County is a community in transition from a rural community to a suburban one. The population has grown by 41% since 2000 to nearly 21,000 residents, straining the county's infrastructure, including rescue services. Emergency Medical Services responders provide lifesaving pre-hospital care for patients from all walks of life. This is even more evident in a relatively rural area such as Greene County where it can take 30-60 minutes to transport a patient to the nearest hospital.

Greene County faced a trio of challenges in 2020, in addition to the Coronavirus Pandemic. First, a decrease in volunteer recruitment over the years caused the county's volunteer rescue squad—which had served the community for more than 50 years—to dissolve, requiring more resources to go toward the county's contracted ambulance provider. Four months later, that provider told the county it would sever its contract within six months. Finally, the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of the Greene County Emergency Medical Services (GCEMS). It usually takes months and sometimes years of planning to launch a career EMS agency, but Greene County had 155 days. And on October 14, 2020, the new squad hit the street at 0600 hours.

Background:

Before COVID-19, before the dissolution of the volunteer rescue squad, before the contract ambulance provider severed its contract with the county, Greene County Emergency Services participated in two fire and rescue studies. These studies included input from the county's three volunteer fire companies, the then-volunteer rescue squad, the public at large, members of the Board of Supervisors, and members from County Administration. As part of that assessment, experts in the field noted that Greene County would be hard pressed to answer a mass trauma call or two major event calls at the same time, putting the community in jeopardy when the coronavirus pandemic, the dissolution of the volunteer rescue squad, and the severing of the contract with the ambulance provider all converged in the spring of 2020.

Greene County is a small, rural bedroom community without a huge tax base. Greene County Emergency Medical Services is the only rescue squad for the county that remains largely rural, especially along the Blue Ridge Mountains. U.S. Routes 29 and 33—both thoroughfares of state significance—run through Greene. U.S. Route 29 carries roughly 28,000 vehicles per day through Greene and U.S. Route 33 handles approximately 25,000 through the county. Additionally, Greene County is the site of one of four entrances onto Skyline Drive into Shenandoah National Park, which has an annual visitation of nearly 1.5 million.

Program Overview:

Greene County faced a trio of challenges in 2020, in addition to the Coronavirus Pandemic. First, a decrease in volunteer recruitment over the years caused the county's volunteer rescue squad—which had served the community for more than 50 years—to dissolve, requiring more resources to go toward the county's contracted ambulance provider. Four months later, that

provider told the county it would sever its contract within six months. Finally, the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of the Greene County Emergency Medical Services. It usually takes months and sometimes years of planning to launch a career EMS agency, but Greene County had 155 days. And on October 14, 2020, the new squad hit the street at 0600 hours. However, it had to do that without a building of its own and with inherited equipment from the then-volunteer rescue squad, which had done its best to perform proper maintenance but had fallen short. One ambulance was taken out of service immediately due to safety concerns. The building official condemned the volunteer rescue squad building. The county has increased funding year after year for staffing and built a new squad building to the tune of \$2.5 million, but the budget lacks funding for additional capital needs.

GCEMS truly comes from humble beginnings starting with 10 EMTs and 12 Paramedics (some full time and some part-time) to 17 EMTs and 20 Paramedics today and a waiting list to join the department when an opening arrives. Since its beginnings, GCEMS has answered more than 6,500 calls for service with the number of calls increasing by 10% from 2020-2022. If the current pace continues for 2023, GCEMS will exceed 3,500 calls for service this calendar year alone. It is expected that by the end of this calendar year, three fully staffed medic units per 24-hour shift will be necessary to meet the needs of the community.

Results of the Program:

As part of the prior assessments, Greene County heard that it would likely be hard-pressed to handle several serious incidents at once. Since GCEMS was created the number of EMS providers available to answer calls has more than tripled. Most recently, the Virginia Office of Emergency Management acknowledged GCEMS as a model agency for others to look to.

Socioeconomic issues in Greene County, as well as the advanced age of some residents, increases the possibility that providers will experience patients who have put off preventative care and need advanced life support care during the long transport to the hospital. In the 2022 calendar year, GCEMS answered 169 chest pain and cardiac calls, which was roughly 6% of the total number of calls in the entire EMS region, which includes communities much larger than Greene County. Since going into service in 2020, GCEMS has had 20 patients needing resuscitation and had 12 successful attempts—a 41.4% success rate where the national average in 2020 was only 23%, according to a JAMA Cardiology investigational study. Greene County is located at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and transport from the rural areas of the county to the nearest hospital can take 30-60 minutes of transport time. The providers utilize all innovations to provide service to the patients, including electronic chest compression devices where the ability to provide long-term compressions are not feasible.

In August 2022, GCEMS launched the “Earn While You Learn” program with one provider beginning the EMT to Paramedic Program at Piedmont Virginia Community College. The program pays 100% of the upfront tuition, books, class, rotation, and field time for the entire program and adapts the schedule to ensure employees reach educational goals without sacrificing the work-home balance.

Other 2022 highlights for GCEMS include:

- A more defined structure that includes an EMS Chief, EMS Captain, four Lieutenants, a Training Officer, and a Logistics Officer.
- The implementation of new administrative software to assist with scheduling, training, charting, and other administrative needs.
- Participated in the UVA SCOPES project (telemedicine capabilities that will allow GCEMS to have doctors/specialists in the back of the ambulance virtually).
- Partnered with Piedmont Virginia Community College and Virginia Commonwealth University of advanced educational opportunities for staff.

- Ordered a new ambulance and quick-response vehicle.
- Increased staffing by adding a 12-hour shift unit.
- Received a 99.4% state reporting compliance rate.
- In the top 5% for Virginia EMS agencies regarding “time of dispatch” to “time responding.”
- Earned recognition from area hospitals regarding stroke assessment capabilities.
- GCEMS delivered a healthy baby boy in June and a healthy baby girl in September; both in the back of an ambulance.
- Received a 94% employee satisfaction rate.

Conclusion:

The global pandemic highlighted the workforce challenges volunteer and paid staff EMS departments are facing across the nation. The American Ambulance Association sent a letter to both chambers of Congress in October 2021 asking for Congressional hearings on EMS workforce shortages, calling it “critical, particularly felt in many of our rural and underserved communities.” Additionally, the letter noted that in studies the overall turnover rate among Paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians ranges from 20-30% annually, which means that EMS departments across the nation face 100% turnover rate every four years. Yet, in Greene County, there is a waiting list to apply. Greene County could have been one of the rural areas that lacked any emergency medical services providers in 2020, succeeding despite the challenges and in ways never imagined previously.