



Police Communications Dispatchers Update

This report provides an update to the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee regarding the Police Communications Dispatchers best practices and comparison of salaries around the State.

THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION.

Summary

At the December Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee meeting, the subcommittee requested information on how the City's salary for Communications dispatchers compare to other jurisdictions in the region. This information is provided below in addition to some additional contextual information developed through a workgroup in 2019-20.

Salary Comparison

Staff contacted agencies across Arizona to gather comparable salary information on the Communications Dispatcher classification. Results were gathered from the cities of Avondale, Chandler, Gilbert, Glendale, Mesa, Peoria, Scottsdale, Surprise, and Tempe. Results showed an average annual market salary of \$54,766, whereas, Phoenix Communications Dispatcher's average annual salary is \$55,356, a +1.07% difference from the overall average salary.

911/Civilian Response Workgroup

Police Communications Operators work in a round-the-clock, psychologically stressful environment while managing highly emotional and demanding calls that often end with unfavorable results. In 2019, a "911/Civilian Response Workgroup" was formed to brainstorm ideas and find sustainable solutions that will improve employee well-being, foster overall job satisfaction, increase retention, and enhance the City's ability to recruit more candidates. The Workgroup was chaired by Human Resources Director Lori Bays and comprised of numerous employees from Police, Fire, Aviation and Human Resources, members representing AFSCME Local 2960 and ASPTEA, staff from District 4, the Hunkapi Farm, plus a registered Health Psychologist who specializes in trauma with public safety employees.

The Workgroup met several times over the course of eight months to develop recommendations for workspace, staffing, recruiting, wellness, and training improvements with the goal to better aid Communications Operators, Emergency Dispatchers, and other civilian employees supporting first responders. The following are a few recommendations the Workgroup provided to aid in improving staffing and recruiting/hiring:

Staffing

With the limited number of employees due to high vacancy and turnover rates, management regularly struggles to maintain minimum staffing levels. Scheduling time off is a challenge as staff need to bid a year out for vacation. There are cases when employees work their regular day off simply to take another, scheduled workday off. Often, employees call out last minute with protected leave just to have a day off from work. This places additional burdens on the remaining employees as call-outs result in mandatory holdover, which compels employees to stay beyond their shift. It is estimated that in this career field, the average burnout rate is seven to eight years. Improved staffing levels and retention strategies will relieve additional burdens placed on all employees within the workgroup.

Workgroup Recommendations:

- Overstaff these workgroups to relieve the burden of mandatory holdover and provide greater flexibility to schedule time off. Overstaffing may also offer additional scheduling opportunities, such as flexible schedule options, which could further assist with attracting and retaining employees.
- A mentorship program was established in 2019 in Police Communications. The program provides new staff with assistance getting acclimated, as well as provides seasoned staff with additional avenues for psychological decompression. Expand this mentorship program into other work areas.
- Develop career paths that may offer progression within these classifications or a transition into other City positions.

Recruiting/Hiring

The City regularly struggles finding qualified candidates to fill 911 positions. Furthermore, the current recruitment process is long and cumbersome, frustrating many candidates that do apply. A workgroup chaired by the Deputy HR Director of Talent Acquisition was formed to focus on marketing and recruiting improvements and several recommendations were developed. Some of these recommendations were recently implemented. As of February 2020, applicants are no longer asked to submit resumes. Rather, they now complete a series of screening questions to better assist hiring supervisors with collecting relevant information to reduce review time.

Additionally, the need for two separate typing tests are no longer required for the onboarding process. Candidates are now only required to successfully complete one test that captures more realistic typing abilities for better gauge of performance. Recruitment documents have also been refreshed and are now more dynamic and exciting. They promote “Making a difference!,” “Helping people!,” and “Being a hero!,” while using QR Codes, all in an effort to better target today's audience. The following are additional recommendations developed by the Workgroup.

Recommendations:

- Consider implementation of a personality/psychological profile during the interview process to better assess a candidate’s abilities to handle high-stress calls before hire.
- Further reduce the application-to-hire timeframe.
- Marketing strategies for larger candidate pools.
- Outreach to non-traditional groups.

Applying any number of the above recommendations will assist the organization in offering sustainable solutions on improving the work environment for Communications Operator, Emergency Dispatcher, and other civilian employees supporting first responders. The 911/Civilian Response Workgroup was grateful to analyze these issues and provide the opportunity to develop these recommendations for improvements.

Responsible Department

This item is submitted by Deputy City Manager Toni Maccarone and the Human Resources Department.