



## Performance & Analytics

## FACT SHEET

### Reduce 9-1-1 Call Answering Time

The City of San Diego prioritizes the provision of public safety services. To that end, Performance & Analytics (P&A) advised a working group from the Police Department's Communications Unit to shorten the time to answer incoming 9-1-1 emergency calls. This project followed the Lean Six Sigma DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) methodology to achieve a significant improvement.

**Define.** The Communications staff answers a variety of incoming calls, including calls made to 9-1-1 and to the City's non-emergency police line. In the spring of 2016, a concerted effort addressed emergency call answering wait times that were longer than industry standard. The project's goal was to free up Communications staff time to focus them on answering 9-1-1 calls as quickly as possible.

**Measure and Analyze.** The project started by surveying all Communications staff to learn what issues impeded their performance. The results were sorted into a cause-and-effect diagram, and five sub-teams developed solutions around critical topics identified by staff: call management process; dispatcher issues; software/equipment; scheduling/staffing; and, caller/public education.

**Improve.** Numerous improvements were validated and implemented, including:

- Implementing protocols that expedite call transfers to other agencies, such as Fire-Rescue;
- Enhancing working conditions that allowed dispatchers to better monitor call waiting status and improve computer screen visibility;
- Deploying technology and standardized recordings to better route non-emergency calls and provide answers to frequently asked questions, thus freeing up dispatchers to answer 9-1-1 calls;
- Piloting a new shift schedule to provide better call coverage at the busiest times; and
- Releasing a public service announcement video to remind San Diegans to only dial 9-1-1 in life-threatening emergencies, not to hang up when calling 9-1-1 and to lock cell phone screens to reduce pocket dials.

**Control.** Using several new highly visible tracking screens, Communications Unit leadership now monitors performance and adjusts staff assignments on a real-time basis. The culture has transformed completely: staff now watches its own call waiting performance and continuously strives to keep wait times down.

After improvements were implemented for the first quarter of calendar year 2016, the following results were achieved:

- After implementation of an automated phone tree answering system on the non-emergency line, Communications staff speaks to about one-third fewer callers, which shortens wait time for the public and which frees up staff to handle the true emergencies; and
- In April 2016, 67 percent of 9-1-1 calls were answered in 10 seconds or less, and in November, 93 percent of these calls were answered within 10 seconds, which beats the national benchmark of 90 percent and which represents a nearly 40 percent improvement.

