

**Strong Workforce Program**  
**Public Safety**  
**Dispatching Careers**  
**Regional Workforce Advisory Meeting Proceedings**  
**April 4, 2024**  
**Zoom**

## **Introduction**

The Los Rios Community College District, in partnership with Valley Vision and in collaboration with Sierra College, Yuba Community College District, and Lake Tahoe Community College, invests in Strong Workforce funding to organize and convene Regional Advisories. The objectives of the Regional Advisories are to build strong relationships between employers, educators, and the workforce that:

- Provide timely information on skills gaps and workforce needs, informing partners on major industry trend information;
- Improve the efficiency of the advisory process for educators and employers;
- Reflect a regional view of workforce needs and assets;
- Provide opportunities for systemic, ongoing engagement, including workforce partners in key industry sectors.

Regional Advisory meetings help inform decisions on needed investments and enhancements for Career Education (CE) programs to help fill the growing demand for middle-skill positions. This meeting proceedings report includes key findings, best practices, and minutes from the spring 2024 Regional Advisory meeting focused specifically on careers in Public Safety (PS), highlighting dispatching careers.

Valley Vision supports a robust talent pipeline through our multiple 21st Century Workforce initiatives. We prepare our regional workforce for the future by addressing skills gaps, advancing research, aligning efforts, and strengthening systems. Valley Vision's workforce efforts are supported by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), Golden Sierra Workforce Development Board (WDB), North Central Counties Consortium, Yolo WDB, the City of Sacramento, local community college districts, and others.

The Strong Workforce program provides Career Education opportunities to increase social mobility and fuel regional economies with skilled workers.

## Key Findings

- The Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) curriculum is being reviewed by the Office of Administrative Law. The Basic Training requirement is expected to increase from 120 to 160 hours. The changes also include [Continued Professional Training](#) (CPT) for dispatchers' ongoing professional development.
- Job demand is expected to result in approximately 94 job openings per year. Entry-level dispatcher wages in Sacramento exceed \$59,000 annually, while the median salary for dispatchers is \$72,758.
- Sacramento region's public safety dispatchers are mostly female-identifying, either white or Latina, and aged between 25 and 44. Although dispatching is traditionally female-dominated, male applicants have increased, and the gender balance may shift, according to panelists.
- Most agencies only offer the required 120-hour POST basic training after hiring. Currently, the only community college program offering POST training to non-affiliated individuals has a four-year waitlist.
- To become a dispatcher in the Greater Sacramento Area, one needs a high school diploma or equivalent. Candidates must undergo moderate on-the-job training, which can last from 1 to 12 months.
- More than 50% of dispatchers have some college education or an associate's degree. While an associate's degree is not mandatory, it can be an added advantage.
- Law enforcement agencies generally have more stringent employment qualifications than medical transport companies or other agencies. Most candidates for law enforcement dispatcher jobs are required to complete the POST course and obtain an emergency medical dispatch certification from either the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch or the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch.
- Dispatchers need to be able to multitask efficiently, handle multiple tasks simultaneously, and possess excellent customer service skills. They must also be comfortable using various types of technology to provide accurate and timely assistance. Balancing technical skills and customer service abilities is crucial. Training in simulated environments may be helpful for students.
- While younger applicants may possess better technological skills, all dispatchers must be trained to use new tools and systems. They also need to have manual skills in case of technology failures. Dispatchers must be proficient in traditional map reading and report writing methods, in addition to new systems.

## Meeting Proceedings

### Welcome and Introduction

Liz Kilkenny, Project Associate, and Hilary Tellesen, Senior Project Manager at Valley Vision, introduced the Spring 2024 Public Safety Advisory on Dispatchers. Karen E. Hubbard, Director of Employer Partnerships in the North Far North Regional Consortium, and Jill Alcorn, Associate Dean for Continuing Education at Sierra College, welcomed the employer panelists, guests, and keynote speaker. Valley Vision emphasized the importance of collaboration between colleges and employers in providing quality and relevant workforce training for individuals interested in developing a profession as a dispatcher in the Public Safety labor force.

### Keynote Speakers

#### Behind the Call: Public Safety Dispatchers by Jennifer Dwyer

Jennifer Dwyer, Staff Services Manager Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), gave a detailed keynote address on the selection requirements and background information on the POST program for public safety dispatchers in the state of California. The keynote covered a [Job Task Analysis](#) that resulted in recommendations for updating the curriculum, which has not been done since 2011. These new changes will not go into effect until the Office of Administrative Law has approved them. Currently, the Basic Training requirement is 120 Hours, but after approval, it will increase to 160. Dwyer also explained the Continued Professional Training (CPT) requirement, ensuring dispatchers get ongoing professional training throughout their careers. Dwyer's presentation thoroughly overviews the hiring standards and the basic training components for public safety dispatchers.

### Labor Market Information and Job Posting Insights

Ebony Benzing, the Director of the North Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research, presented the data on public safety dispatching careers in the Greater Sacramento region. Based on her analysis of 167 online job postings, she classified them into three categories: law enforcement, medical, and other agencies (figure 1.1).

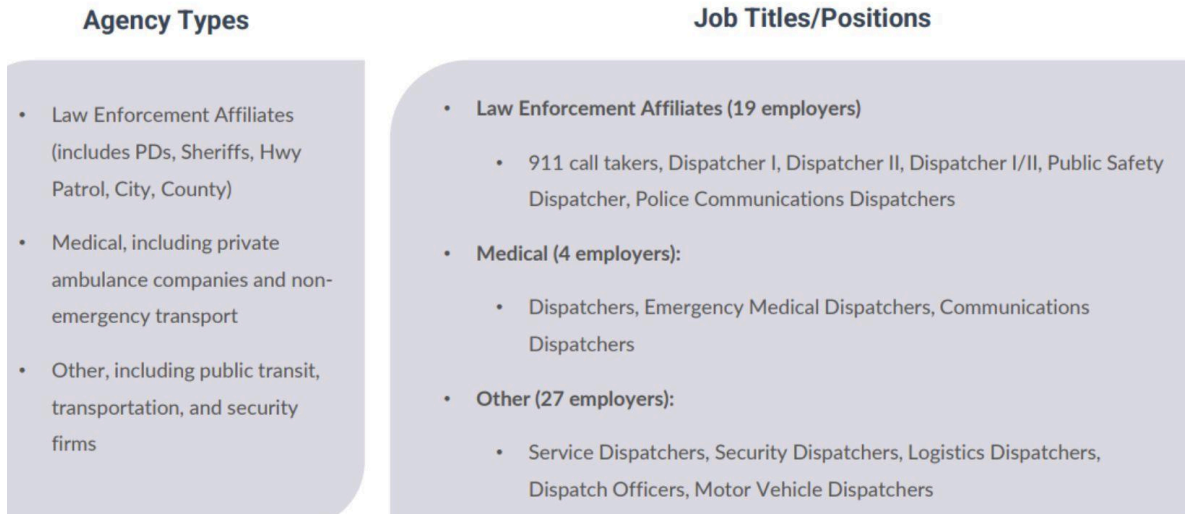


Figure 1.1 Online Job Postings

Though the job titles and requirements vary across different agency types, there is expected to be a moderate demand for public safety dispatchers in the Greater Sacramento region over the next five years. This demand is estimated to result in around 94 job openings annually (1.2). The entry-level dispatcher wages in Sacramento are over \$59,000 per year, while the median salary for dispatchers is \$72,758 (1.2). This shows that public safety dispatcher jobs in the Greater Sacramento region offer competitive wages, making it an attractive career option for job seekers.



Figure 1.2 Occupational Overview

These employment opportunities have made the public safety dispatching field a viable long-term career choice for many individuals. A demographic analysis shown in Figure 1.3 conducted by Benzing indicates that public safety dispatchers in the Sacramento region are mostly female-identifying, white or Latina, and between the ages of 25 and 44. Though dispatching is known to be a female-dominated industry, as noted by panelists, there has been an increase in male applicants, which may alter the gender ratio over time.

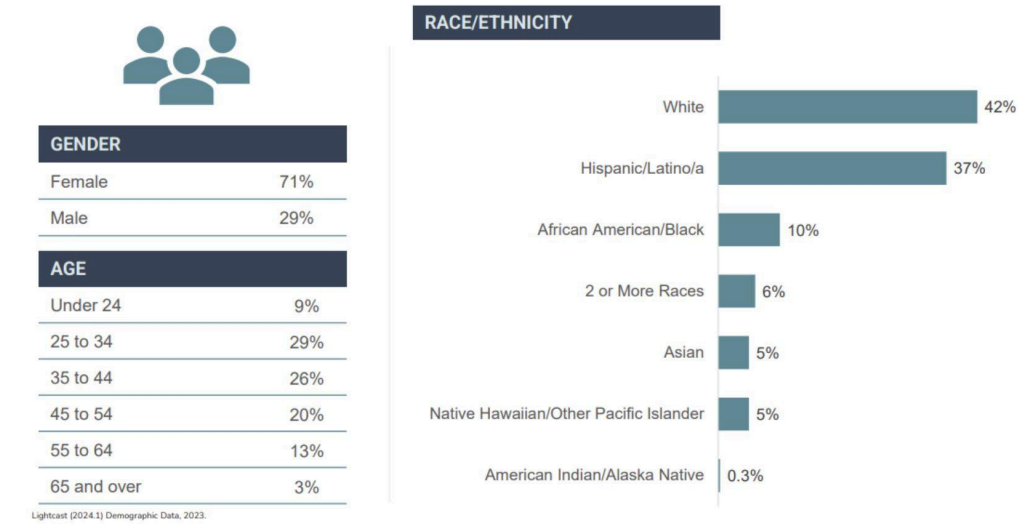


Figure 1.3 Worker Profile

To become a dispatcher in the Greater Sacramento Area, one typically needs a high school diploma or equivalent. According to Benzing, candidates must also undergo moderate on-the-job training, which can last from 1 to 12 months. During this period, they learn to use the necessary communication equipment, software, and protocols. Community colleges in the region offer 6-7 unit dispatching courses, but these are only offered through agreements with law enforcement agencies rather than being open enrollment.

Benzing stated more than 50% of dispatchers have some college education or an associate's degree. While an associate's degree is not mandatory, it can be an added advantage. Agencies participating in the POST program require an entry-level 120-hour basic training course. Benzing also highlighted the differences in the employment requirements for dispatchers between law enforcement agencies and other types of agencies (figure 1.5).

### Overall Employment Requirements

- High School Diploma and Drivers License
- Employment requirements vary depending on agency type. Law enforcement dispatchers have higher eligibility and training requirements than medical and other dispatchers, and it is most likely that only law enforcement affiliates require POST.
- Some law enforcement agencies require an additional certification: International Academy of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) certified emergency medical dispatch
- Some medical transportation companies require dispatchers to hold a certified medical dispatcher's license
- Agencies that dispatch medical services follow guidelines set by the [California Emergency Medical Services Authority](#)

### Law Enforcement Specific

- Entry-level Dispatcher positions:
  - High School Diploma
  - At least 1-2 years of customer service experience
  - Typing 40 WPM
- Lateral or Level II Dispatcher Positions:
  - 2 years of experiences working as Dispatcher I; preference to experience in same organization
  - POST 120 Basic Dispatcher course
  - IAED emergency medical dispatch certification

Figure 1.5 Educational Requirements

Law enforcement agencies generally have more stringent employment qualifications than medical transport companies or other agencies. For example, most candidates for law enforcement dispatcher jobs are required to complete the POST course and obtain an emergency medical dispatch certification from either the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch or the National Academy of Emergency Dispatch. This certification is necessary for dispatchers to handle medical emergencies effectively. Although this certification can be earned while on the job, it is listed as an additional requirement beyond the basic POST course.

Location	CCCCO Region	Training Provider	START DATE
San Jose	Bay	South Bay Regional Training Consortium	04/01/24, 10/07/24, 02/24/25, 04/28/25
Sacramento	Greater Sacramento	Sacramento Police Department	04/08/24
Fresno	Bay	Fresno City College	04/24/24
Riverside	Inland Empire/Desert	Riverside County Sheriff's Dept.	05/06/24, 05/16/24
Whittier	Los Angeles	Rio Hondo Regional Training Center	06/24/24

FYI...

- San Jose is one of the only programs that accepts non-affiliated candidates; most other programs require affiliation with an organization.
- In 2020, the waitlist for non-affiliates was four years.

\*All POST Training Courses listed are 120 hrs. or more

Figure 1.6 Upcoming Post Courses

When discussing the potential for new dispatcher training programs, Benzing noted a disconnect between what many individuals want and what most agencies offer. Many individuals want to take the POST course before being hired, however, most agencies send employees to training only after they are hired. She also highlighted the long four-year waitlist

for the only community college program (South Bay Regional Training Consortium) that offers POST training to non-affiliated individuals seeking to enter the profession (figure 1.6).

## **Panel Discussion**

During the panel discussion, regional employers shared information about the current and changing landscape of the dispatching industry and occupations. The employers represented a variety of local agencies covering fire, police, and county-wide dispatching offices. The panelists included:

- Krystle Horak, Sacramento Police Department, Dispatch Supervisor
- Claudia Harlan, City of Roseville, Police Administrator
- Kimberly Picolet, Placer County Sheriff, Dispatch Services Manager
- Yvonne K. Vazquez, Sacramento Regional Fire and EMS

The panelists shared valuable insights on recruitment, technical and soft skills in demand, and explored ideas to better prepare students for careers in public safety as dispatchers.

## **Challenges for Entry-Level Positions**

The industry panelists reported that one of the major challenges faced by agencies is retaining entry-level dispatchers. The initial training period is difficult, and as a result, turnover rates have been reported to be as high as 80%, according to Horak. Dispatchers have to multitask efficiently and handle a variety of tasks simultaneously, such as answering phone calls, managing radio transmissions, operating computer systems, and more, all while remaining calm and focused. This multitasking ability was cited as a common skills gap among all panelists.

Effective communication skills are essential for dispatchers to handle stressful conversations with callers and quickly gather important information. In addition, dispatchers must be able to make logical and quick decisions in high-pressure situations. Vazques acknowledged that the job demands long hours, shift work, and frequent exposure to traumatic incidents, which can contribute to the challenges of retaining entry-level staff. Therefore, Sacramento Regional Fire and EMS are working on improving the culture and support for new hires.

Finding candidates with these key competencies during interviews and assessments can be a daunting task for employers. As a result, the panelists explained how their respective agencies are working to better prepare potential candidates by exposing them to the job duties. They are doing this through internships, job shadowing, and other programs that hope to provide a more in-depth understanding of the role and its demands. They are hoping that by proactively addressing these challenges, their agencies can improve the retention rates of entry-level dispatchers and ensure that they have a highly qualified and competent workforce.

## **Technological Changes**

During the panel discussion, the focus was on how the dispatch field is continuously evolving and how the introduction of new systems and tools is influencing it. The panel members emphasized that these changes are impacting the skills required of dispatchers. They highlighted that dispatchers must now be adaptable to new technologies, such as next-gen 911, videos from callers, license plate readers, and security cameras, among other forms of technology.

Horak pointed out that younger applicants tend to be more tech-savvy, but all dispatchers must learn how to use new systems and tools while still possessing manual skills in case of technological failures. Harlan also cautioned against over-reliance on technology, which could hinder problem-solving abilities. She stated that dispatchers need to be trained on both traditional methods of map reading and report writing and new systems.

Vazques suggested that dispatchers could benefit from exposure to new technologies through simulated environments or early adoption programs. These programs could help dispatchers seamlessly integrate tools into their work, keeping them up to date with the latest advancements in the field and improving the overall quality of their service.

The panel also noted that technological changes may initially make the job more challenging, however, if implemented properly, they could ultimately make responders safer and the service more effective. By utilizing the latest tools and systems, dispatchers could enhance their ability to respond to emergencies and provide a better experience for responders and those in need.

## **Preparing Students**

The panel discussion also focused on how education systems can better prepare students for careers as dispatchers, and several insightful recommendations were made for improving education pathways. Multiple panelists emphasized the importance of incorporating aspects of the dispatching culture and providing students with exposure to the terminology, stresses, and demands of the job to help them understand what to expect.

To achieve this, the panel suggested offering hands-on training opportunities that simulate dispatch environments. One such example from Vazques is the use of real 911 calls to enable students to practice multitasking and decision-making skills in a controlled setting. Vazques stated that this would help them become more comfortable with the high-stress emergency situations they are likely to encounter on the job.

Additionally, Horak recommended preparing students to pass critical tests which are frequently required for many dispatching jobs. She also emphasized the importance of teaching radio terminology, codes, and effective communication strategies in emergency situations. Students



should be given instruction on relevant laws, protocols, and technical skills, such as map reading, that are necessary for the job.

Finally, the panel suggested that community colleges partner with local dispatch agencies to allow students to observe dispatch centers and ask current dispatchers questions. This would provide students with an opportunity to gain practical insights into the day-to-day operations and challenges of the job and to ask questions that can help them prepare for their careers as dispatchers.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the advisory, faculty, and employers were encouraged to continue to engage with one another to build a stronger pipeline into dispatcher careers in the region. For more information about the report and labor market data provided, please contact:

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