



STAFF ALERT

APCO initiates nationwide education and recruitment solutions to the public safety telecommunicator shortfall.

By Joanne Greco

Unfortunately, the public safety sector is no stranger to staff shortages. We are in a period of change and must adapt accordingly. While staffing challenges have been present for many years, they are now more visible and pressing than ever. This heightened awareness calls for proactive measures to address these issues and implement sustainable solutions. Between 2019 and 2022, 1 out of 4 positions were vacant. Today, the vacancy rate is even higher.^{1,2}

Staff shortages at emergency communications centers (ECCs) can have serious implications for both workers and the communities they serve. Nationwide staffing shortages, which often reflect similar issues in police departments and law enforcement agencies,

have resulted in longer wait times and difficulties in reaching telecommunicators at centers across the country. Telecommunicators are the *first* first responders. This situation not only impacts emergency response times, it places additional stress on the existing staff.

The high vacancy rates and staffing emergencies can severely impact the ability for the ECC to operate effectively.

Addressing these shortages is crucial for improving service efficiency and ensuring public safety. These staff shortages cause increased workloads, which can lead to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. It is essential for organizations to find ways to support their staff and to manage the workload effectively, whether through hiring more personnel, offering mental health resources or implementing better scheduling practices.

There are many reasons for an ECC to experience understaffing ranging from budgetary constraints that keep workforces



at levels putting undue strain on staff; technology that makes it difficult to do the job and may result in outages; and mental health issues characterized by stress and burnout.

These critical issues are forcing agencies to rethink hiring and retention strategies that can make a significant difference in addressing the ECC staffing shortage.

Another survey by the International Academies of Dispatch (IAED) and the National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA) indicates the pervasive nature of the 9-1-1 staffing shortage that affects centers of all sizes in every state. This underscores the need for targeted strategies to attract and retain qualified personnel across the board. A survey of 774 ECCs in 47 states across the United States showed that the staffing crisis impacts centers of all sizes across every region and state surveyed.³

APCO provides resources to address the staffing shortage including webinars, articles, Institute courses, conference sessions and more, which can be found on our website at apcointl.org/staffing. At the 9-1-1 Staffing Crisis Summit held in Fort Worth, Texas, October 22-24, 2024, public safety professionals, government leaders and private sector companies came together to discuss retention, recruitment, hiring processes,

staffing strategies and building a culture of excellence. In March 2025, APCO launched the Staffing and Retention for the ECC, 2nd Edition course.⁴ This comprehensive course aims at addressing the critical challenges that ECCs face in recruiting and retaining skilled staff. By focusing on policy and cultural changes, the course seeks to enhance employee satisfaction and support staff development.

Designed for employees at all levels, the course incorporates contemporary employment factors, industry standards and insights from APCO's Project RETAINS, along with current workforce trends. Participants explore key strategies related to motivation, incentives, leadership development, scheduling and compensation. Additionally, the course provides customizable resources that agencies can use to improve their staffing and retention practices.

In July 2024, APCO launched the Career Instructor Program (CIP) initiative to help address the workforce shortage. CIP provides students and educators exposure to the public safety communications industry through APCO membership benefits and training opportunities. Through the CIP, certified teachers train secondary and post-secondary students using the Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST) 1, 7th Edition course.

CIP introduces students to public safety communications, which will not only help fill the pressing need for telecommunicators, but also provide them with valuable skills and career insights. Connecting with local agencies can enhance the experience by offering real-world exposure and potential pathways to employment. Providing prospective public safety telecommunicators with an industry-recognized credential through the CIP can significantly enhance their employability and confidence.

Emphasizing the nationwide shortage of telecommunicators can motivate students to

consider careers in this field. Here are some ideas to enhance the course:

- **Career Pathways:** Highlight different roles within public safety communications, such as 9-1-1 telecommunicator, emergency management and communication officer.
- **Hands-On Training:** Incorporate simulations and role-playing exercises to give students a taste of real-life scenarios.
- **Guest Speakers:** Invite experienced telecommunicators or agency leaders to share their experiences and insights, making the field more relatable.
- **Internships and Job Shadowing:** Partner with local agencies to provide students with opportunities to observe and learn from professionals in action.
- **Skills Development:** Focus on essential skills like critical thinking, communication and stress management to prepare students for the demands of the job.
- **Certification Opportunities:** Explore partnerships for students to earn relevant certifications that could enhance their employability.

The initiative prepares students for future jobs and develops the skills needed for success in the industry. This approach helps create a steady flow of qualified candidates to meet workforce demands, ultimately benefiting students and employers.

As found on the Career Instructor Program page⁵ on the APCO website, CIP qualifications are as follows:

- Be a current APCO Educator Member (\$29 annually). To purchase the educator membership, you must not hold a different membership through APCO.
- Be certified/licensed by their local or state teacher certification body.
- Be currently employed by a secondary or post-secondary school.
- Not be a current employee of a public safety communications center.

To apply for CIP, visit apcointl.org/cip. Once approved, the applicant will register and complete the APCO PST 1, 7th Edition online student course free of charge. The course includes a downloadable manual. A hardcover manual is available for \$99 during the registration process. The prospective career instructor will participate in the 4-week, instructor-led course with others from different areas of the nation, with different levels of expertise in the field, from beginners to those retaking the course

CIP provides students and educators exposure to the public safety communications industry through APCO membership benefits and training opportunities.

for certification, learning from one of our esteemed adjunct instructors.

Once the PST course is complete, the applicants are directed to the CIP orientation course, which must be completed within 30 days of the PST 1, 7th Edition course end date. It can take up to three hours to complete the orientation course.

Once all required steps are completed, the career instructor is approved to teach the PST 1, 7th Edition course. They will have access to the career instructor community within PSConnect, APCO's professional networking site for public safety communications professionals. The online community allows members a venue to share ideas, resources and questions with their peers. The career instructor community contains a library where the instructors can find all the teaching and learning resources for the PST course provided by APCO. There are also discussion boards where they can post questions or share comments and experiences.

The career instructor can purchase PST 1, 7th Edition manuals for \$99 per student and submit courses through our online process.

Information regarding the process for submitting completed courses and the issuance

CIP: What's on Offer

Key benefits and components of the Career Instructor Program (CIP) program include:

- **Standardized Training:** Providing a consistent curriculum ensures that all students receive high-quality education, which can enhance their readiness for real-world challenges.
- **Credentialing:** By offering a recognized credential, students gain a competitive edge in the job market, making them more appealing to potential employers.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Instructors involved in the program can connect with industry professionals, fostering relationships that can lead to job placements for their students.
- **Hands-On Learning:** The program can emphasize practical training, allowing students to engage in simulations and real-life scenarios that they will encounter as public safety telecommunicators.
- **Community Awareness:** By partnering with local agencies, instructors can help raise awareness of career opportunities in public safety, encouraging more students to consider this path.
- **Support for Instructors:** Providing resources and ongoing professional development for instructors ensures they stay updated on best practices and emerging trends in the field.

of student certificates is provided throughout the comprehensive training.

APCO career instructors must revalidate every two years. There is no cost for revalidation, but a short quiz is required.

The student certificate is good for four years, during which time we hope they seek employment at an agency. The student certificate is not revalidated and expires after four years.

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Once the student gains employment, they need to complete the PST Transition course at no cost, which requires the standard 24 CDE hours each year for a total of 48 hours for the two-year recertification period. ●

Joanne Greco is the APCO Institute's Program Compliance and Implementation Manager. Greco oversees the Career Instructor Program and is the primary point of contact for the APCO Emergency Medical Dispatch Program ensuring agencies are in compliance with program guidelines and standards. She also provides logistical and administrative

support for APCO Institute's new programs and strategic initiatives.

By equipping state and local instructors with the resources to teach the APCO PST 1, 7th Edition course, CIP prepares students for careers in public safety and creates a more skilled workforce. CIP is a proactive approach to building a pipeline of qualified public safety telecommunicators, addressing current staffing shortages and future workforce needs.

REFERENCES

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- 4 APCO International. "Staffing and Retention for the ECC." Online Course Catalog. www.apcointl.org/training/courses/catalog/#tab-939831
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CDE EXAM #73783

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which is <i>not</i> a critical challenge faced by ECCs: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. High attrition rate b. Lack of trainers c. Hiring difficulty d. Budget constraints 2. Staff shortages cause: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased workloads b. Stress and burnout c. Longer wait times d. All of the above e. None of the above 3. APCO launched the Career Instructor Program (CIP) in July 2024, as an initiative to help address the workforce shortage. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False 4. Prospective career instructors can attend the PST student course and PST instructor course at full cost to teach at their institution. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What membership is required to apply for the Career Instructor Program? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Full b. Associate c. Educator d. All of the above e. None of the above 6. The online community that allows members a venue to share ideas, resources and questions with their peers is called: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. My APCO b. Training central c. Continuing education d. PSConnect 7. Some key benefits and components of the Career Instructor program are (check all that apply): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Standardized testing b. Ride alongs c. Hands-on training d. CPR training e. Credentialing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What is not a Staffing Shortage Resource provided by APCO: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Webinars b. Recertification c. Staffing crisis summit d. CIP 9. The Career Instructor Orientation course needs to be completed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Within 30 days of PST course ending b. During PST course c. Within 48 hours of PST course ending d. Within 6 months of PST course ending 10. APCO recently released the Staffing and Retention for the ECC, 2nd Edition course, which focuses on policy and cultural changes seeking to enhance employee satisfaction and support staff development for current and future roles within the agency. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. True b. False |
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