

# Emerging Practices to Elevate and Replicate Community Responder Programs Nationwide

## Expanding First Response National Commission Report

### Executive Summary

To support communities in expanding their first response efforts, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center launched a groundbreaking toolkit in 2022, *Expanding First Response: A Toolkit for Community Responder Programs*, as a central resource hub for communities and states looking to establish and strengthen community responder programs. Recognizing that existing and future programs need standard practices to use as a foundation for effective and high-quality programs, the organization later assembled a first-of-its-kind national commission focused on community response. The 21 members of this commission represent a diverse cross-section of community responder programs, researchers, advocates, and policymakers nationwide.

Using consensus-building methods, the Expanding First Response National Commission met monthly for six months in 2023 to collectively identify emerging practices and organize them into a report for professionals interested in uplifting and expanding community response. Commissioners and staff organized the resulting emerging practices into four pillars, intended to help set a standard for high-quality programming that meets the unique needs of communities, no matter location or size.



**“Let’s begin with the end in mind. We have shared challenges across this entire country, in every single neighborhood, in every single community. We can begin with the end in mind. Let’s look at these big picture challenges and come up with big picture solutions.”**

**FORMER CHIEF PAUL PAZEN, Denver, Colorado**

### 1. **Building and maintaining a professional identity with the community by:**

- Earning the confidence of community members and demonstrating reliability and consistency, visibility and transparency, accountability during each response, and a culture of empathy and optimism through their partnerships, communication, and staffing.
- Conducting outreach and regularly communicating with multiple partners, including credible messengers, community-based organizations, system leaders, service recipients, and marketing experts, to ensure community members understand and trust crisis response by community responders.
- Intentionally recruiting and providing ongoing training to create a complementary team of professionals who are emotionally intelligent, knowledgeable, connected to community resources, and exemplify good judgment when responding to people in need.

## 2.

### **Integrating community responder programs into existing call centers<sup>1</sup> and first response methods by:**

- Working with existing first responders to acknowledge instances of community mistrust, and then identifying ways to repair trust together rather than positioning the community responder program as the solution to other systems' systemic disparities and challenges.
- Building awareness and an understanding of community responder programs among existing call center staff through regular training and engagement opportunities.
- Creating clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for identifying appropriate calls for community responder programs and using well-defined processes to test and improve quality and consistency.
- Setting reasonable expectations for call response times to best prioritize the order and type of response for each call received.

## 3.

### **Scaling community responder programming with funding by:**

- Including multiple perspectives and partners from the likes of community leaders and advocates, community responder program managers and staff, government and system leaders and staff, labor unions, researchers and evaluators, service providers, service recipients and peers, in decision making discussions as early as possible to ensure that a diverse collective of voices and considerations are leveraged throughout the planning and implementation process.

- Factoring in resources such as radios, vehicles, uniforms, marketing activities, wellness programs, and training, in addition to traditional budget components such as staffing and fringe, direct, and indirect costs when determining the amount of funding needed and for what parts of the program.
- Accessing different sources of funding to sustain programs based on the unique needs of the program and community.

## 4.

### **Managing and monitoring a program's quality through data collection and use by:**

- Collecting information on community members, their needs, and available services and resources to understand how the program can best serve the community.
- Maintaining information on existing and missing partnerships to break down siloed information and working to improve coordination and collaboration across a crisis and care continuum.
- Monitoring program processes and outcomes through different qualitative and quantitative data types and from different data sources.
- Identifying which data to collect and how in collaboration with program staff, partners, and other community members.
- Customizing data collection methods to lessen the burden on the people providing feedback and insights.
- Publicly sharing data and creating ongoing feedback opportunities among program leadership, partners, and community members inform program decisions.

To read the full report and learn more about the CSG Justice Center's methods for building the national commission as well as more details about the emerging practices, visit <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/emerging-practices-to-elevate-and-replicate-community-responder-programs-nationwide/>.

1. Although most community responder programs receive crisis calls and calls for service through 911 call centers, others may receive calls through other call centers such as 988, 211, or 311. Additionally, 911 call receipt and dispatch processes vary by jurisdiction. To be inclusive of the nuances among programs and communities, the term "call center" is used in this report to encompass all answering services that receive crisis calls and calls for service which community responder programs can partner with.