



INNOVATIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

for EMS Agencies

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Introduction



THE EMS WORKFORCE SHORTAGE HAS REACHED CRISIS LEVELS.

Across the nation, a lack of personnel has forced some EMS agencies to resort to longer wait times and cuts in service; some agencies have shuttered. The shortages are further stressing an EMS workforce that's already exhausted from month after month of pandemic.

Two major factors contribute to the shortages: high turnover, and not enough applicants to fill vacant positions.

In 2020, 32% of EMS employees left their jobs after less than a year with their agency, according to an American Ambulance Association survey of 258 EMS organizations. Of those, 11% left within the first three months.

At the same time, the number of open, unfilled positions is higher than ever. Job site listings for EMTs and paramedics are lengthy. EMS agency leaders report posting job openings and not getting a single applicant. Many agencies are offering signing bonuses and relocation assistance of \$5,000, \$10,000 and even \$20,000 to attract applicants. Yet some EMS agency leaders say even the promise of bonuses aren't generating much interest.

Problems with recruitment and retention in EMS have been building for years. The reasons underlying the workforce shortages are hotly debated. Anecdotally, many say that low wages relative to other health professions, challenging hours and working conditions, and too few opportunities for career advancement, are chief among them.

The 2020 median pay for EMTs and paramedics was \$36,650 annually, or \$17.62 per hour, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ([BLS](#)). Paramedics often make substantially more than EMTs, however, the BLS does not distinguish between them, and there are about four EMTs to every one paramedic. To make ends meet, EMS practitioners often work for multiple agencies or at more than one job.

EMS agencies, for their part, say they are constrained in being able to offer higher wages because the reimbursement rates set by insurance providers, Medicare and Medicaid are too low and, in many cases, below costs. As well, there are still millions of Americans without any health insurance. EMS is required to provide emergency services even when there is little hope of reimbursement. Budgets

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have been further tightened as prices for gas and supplies have risen, along with need to purchase additional personal protective equipment and other pandemic-related supplies.

RELIANCE ON VOLUNTEERS

Another stress on the EMS workforce is the reliance on volunteer labor, particularly in rural areas. About 13% of EMS practitioners in the U.S. are [volunteers](#). Almost 70% of [rural EMS agencies](#) say they have difficulty finding volunteers who have the financial means and interest in meeting EMS educational, licensing and certification requirements, and whose family and work schedules allow them to devote time to working on a rural ambulance.

The pandemic certainly exacerbated all of these existing problems. Like millions of workers across other industries, EMTs and paramedics faced disruptions to childcare and schools, and may have dropped out of the EMS workforce to care for their families. EMS practitioners with co-existing medical problems or vulnerable loved ones worried about contracting the virus, and whether continuing to work in the field was worth potentially bringing it home to their families. The job of an EMS practitioner, which is physically and mentally demanding even during the best of times, was made more so by the stress of the pandemic.

COMPETITION FROM OTHER EMPLOYERS

As the pandemic unfolded, there was also increased competition from hospitals, vaccine clinics and other healthcare providers, which were increasingly looking to hire EMTs and paramedics to cope with labor shortages of their own. These healthcare entities can often offer EMTs and paramedics higher pay, better hours and a working environment that doesn't require treating crash victims by the side of a highway in the dark and cold.

GETTING LICENSED, BUT NOT WORKING

As more experienced EMTs and paramedics hang up their medical bags, EMS agencies have also faced logistical issues with the educational and hiring process for new EMS practitioners.

Disruptions in education programs slowed progress on training and certifying new EMTs and paramedics, although this has abated somewhat as education programs adapted to virtual learning and classrooms reopened. Another issue is that many EMT and paramedic students go through EMT education programs, become certified and licensed, but do not end up entering the EMS workforce or working on an ambulance.

In Texas, as of August 2021, only 27% of licensed EMTs and

paramedics had submitted a patient care record during the first eight months of the year, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. That's down from 43% in 2020 and 46% in 2019. The 2021 figures mean about 70% of the EMS workforce had not worked on an ambulance as of yet that year.

In Louisiana, 31% of licensed EMTs and 65% of paramedics worked for an ambulance service in 2021, according to the state Department of Health. Many of the rest – 55% of EMTs and 21% of paramedics – worked for non-transporting fire departments, hospitals, law enforcement or other industries. The remainder aren't working in EMS in any capacity.

The exact reasons why licensed EMTs and paramedics choose jobs outside of ambulance services are not known. New EMTs may be accepting jobs that offer better hours and easier working conditions in healthcare or in other industries, while paramedics are believed to be using their credentials to find higher paying

jobs and better benefits elsewhere in healthcare.

All of these factors have contributed to the perfect storm, resulting in the extreme shortages that the industry is facing.

SOLUTIONS

While the challenges remain significant, many EMS agencies are trying to adapt to the new reality of fewer recruits and changed hiring conditions. They're taking action, and deploying new methods and strategies to enhance their recruiting efforts, which are featured in this guide.

There is no single solution to the EMS workforce shortage. Though the acute workforce shortages caused

by the pandemic may eventually be resolved, EMS will continue to face unique challenges in recruiting and retaining EMS personnel, due to the 24/7 nature of the position, long or odd hours, high stress and low pay/benefits considering what the career demands.

To assist EMS agencies in attracting new candidates to fill vacant positions, NAEMT presents some of the innovative recruitment strategies and practices currently in use by a variety of EMS agencies. We encourage EMS agencies to use or adapt these strategies to their own particular needs and geographic area, so that they can continue to identify and hire personnel for this vital public service their communities depend on.

The crisis is urgent. According to the BLS, there will be an expected 20,700 job openings annually for EMTs and paramedics. Employment is expected to grow 11% over the next decade, faster than average for all occupations. EMS needs to develop a new generation of dedicated EMTs and paramedics who can answer the call for help when the community most needs it.



GETTING STARTED

To build a successful recruiting program, first you need a strategy. A recruiting strategy is a plan of action to help you identify, attract and hire the best candidates for open positions. Here are some starting points that can help you recruit the job seekers you are looking for.

01. Assess what your agency is currently doing.

Are you working with any local entities, like unemployment offices, job training programs, high schools, community or technical colleges, EMS training programs or four-year colleges? Where do you post job openings? Does it include posting jobs internally, on job sites and on social media? What's working and what isn't?

02. Define your agency's needs.

How many positions need to be filled, and in what timeframe? How many potential new hires do you expect to have in the pipeline from your current sources of recruits? Do you want to consider temporary staffing changes to get through the worst of the shortages? From there, set objectives and determine your recruiting budget.



Employee referrals can be a great source of attracting candidates.

You can save time and increase the number of applicants with an employee referral program. Check out these [tips from Indeed](#).

03. Determine who internally can help.

Look at your internal resources: Determine which personnel have the time, capacity and skills to participate in recruitment. Who is enthusiastic about their job and has the passion for their work to be a good spokesperson for your agency? Is your recruiting team reflective of the diverse communities in your service area, so that potential recruits can see themselves following in their footsteps? Decide how you will compensate them for it and how much. Will the compensation be paid time off, or other incentives or bonuses?

04. Determine what external resources can help.

Many individuals and groups work to expand employment opportunities for local residents. Identify who in the community does this work or would be interested in promoting your agency. In addition to your local unemployment office and workforce development providers, there may be [nonprofits](#) in your community that help underserved, low-income or veterans get connected with jobs. Also consider local government leaders (such as the mayor's office or city council), state legislators or state agencies that oversee workforce development.

05. Define why someone should work for your agency.

What is your agency culture? What do you have to offer as far as pay, benefits, bonuses or incentives, advancement opportunities, and team-building events? Talk to people in your agency: Why did they choose to work there? Ask your personnel what drew them to the organization, and what could be done to make the job more attractive.

06. Create an enticing job description.

Be sure to use keywords that people searching for jobs will use when searching. Describe the specific job requirements, and also tout your company culture and benefits, such as paid time off, continuing education assistance and any scholarships.

Make the careers page on your website gorgeous. Not only should you post jobs on job sites, you need a careers page on your agency's website. Here, job seekers should be able to see open roles, get a sense for who they will work with and read about your agency's mission and values. See [Royal Ambulance Careers page](#) for an example to aspire to.

07. Determine your recruitment activities.

This should include a variety of digital strategies and in-person activities, such as: posting on job boards, promoting job openings and your agency culture on social media, partnering with local groups to identify candidates, going to job fairs and campus recruiting events, and creating an employee referral program.

08. Evaluate your results.

Did you meet your objectives? Did you attract more applicants? Were you able to hire more qualified candidates? Have you increased diversity? Look back at your recruiting activities, determine which tactics are working for you and adjust as needed.





STRATEGY

Connecting With High School and College Students

Many of today's paramedics and EMS leaders got their start as EMTs in their late teens, often as volunteers. Connecting with teens and young adults in your community is one of the foundations of any EMS recruiting strategy. There are numerous ways to make sure you're reaching this prime demographic for recruiting.

EMS PROGRAMS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

High school EMS programs offer students the chance to take an EMT course for high school or even college credit. Around the nation, numerous EMS agencies partner with high schools to offer EMT training. These programs give students a head start on a career path and can provide local EMS agencies with a stream of young, motivated EMTs. The classes may be held during or after school, depending on the school curriculum, and they prepare students to take the National Registry certification exam as soon as they turn 18.

Often part of health sciences career technical education, EMT program support comes from state education departments and school districts. Today's

technical education is focused on helping students earn professional certificates in careers that are expected to grow – from plumbing to Google data analytics, cybersecurity and EMS.

To get started, contact your local school district to find out if any schools in your area offer health sciences career technical education. School districts typically have someone who oversees technical and vocational education.

Other types of programs that introduce young people to EMS include cadet programs, or Exploring programs, which are affiliated with the Boy Scouts. These programs introduce teenagers to the 911 system, basic first aid and CPR, and offer ride-along opportunities. Cadet programs can be part of a longer-term strategy to ensure young people continue to be interested in EMS as a career. However, they will not immediately result in a pool of potential new hires because students still need to take the EMT course and become licensed.

PARTNERING WITH COLLEGES

Partnerships with community and technical colleges that offer EMS programs are a tried and true EMS recruiting strategy. EMS agencies may offer ride-alongs that students need to fulfill

clinical education requirements. To forge relationships with colleges, you can offer to send members of your team to the school to speak to current students about their experiences working in the field. Another way to get to know your area's new EMTs and paramedics is by becoming an internship site for a community college's EMS program.

And don't forget four-year colleges. Many future nurses and physicians are thrilled to gain some real-life experience working on an ambulance while they're in school.

As an example, Fallon Ambulance Service in Boston partners with Northeastern University to enable their health sciences students to receive college credit and gain real-world medical experience as EMTs. The program is offered through the university's cooperative-education (co-op) program, in which students combine classroom education with work experiences.

During the six-month program, students complete an accelerated, state-accredited EMT program at Fallon and then work as full-time EMTs for the agency. During their time at Fallon, students run calls, participate in a leadership workshop series and shadow paramedics and other health professionals.

Types of High School EMS Programs

	Exploring	Cadets	Health Sciences Career Technical Education
Sponsoring Organization	EMS agency/fire department + local Scouting Council + chartered organization	EMS agency/fire department based	Local education agency, such as the school district or charter school
Funding	- EMS agency/fire department, dues or other payments by participants - Community/individual fundraising	- EMS agency/fire departments - Municipal allocations - Community/individual fundraising	Federal grants to states to fund career and technical education, under provisions of Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 and reauthorized in 2018 (Perkins V)
Staffing	- Volunteer leaders - May draw from local or regional EMS agency/fire departments	EMS agency/fire department personnel assigned or who volunteer	- Teachers who teach health sciences career education - May or may not be EMS clinicians
Oversight	Post committee and chartered organization representative	EMS agency/fire department leadership	School administrator and district administrators over all career programs
Program Leadership	Volunteers identified by chartered organization, approved by post committee	Appointed or assigned by EMS agency/fire department leadership	Typically, campus academic EMS agency/fire department, curriculum chair, or a particular faculty member
Challenges	- Local scouting infrastructure may be limited - Heavily dependent on participant/family funding - Philosophical/political opposition to partnership with Scouts	- Staffing limitations may limit primary assignments or collateral duties - Single-role fire departments may lack EMS personnel	- Administrators may resist the creation of “new” CTE pathways - High initial cost for equipment to meet accreditation standards - Must include at least 3 courses over time, cannot be EMS only



For more info on cadet programs, follow the [High School Fire and EMS Cadet Conference Facebook page](#). The group hosts an annual symposium and swaps ideas about curriculum, starting a cadet program, dealing with administrative requirements and success stories.

01. High School EMS Programs

CREATING A CANDIDATE PIPELINE



AS A 9TH GRADER, EMILY GOUGH JUMPED at the chance to enroll at Veterans Tribute Career & Technical Academy, a Las Vegas high school that enables seniors to take an EMT course along with the usual math, science and history classes.



Emily Gough pictured right

A couple of days after she turned 18 in July 2020, Gough passed the National Registry exam, and soon had a full-time job as an EMT for Community Ambulance.

"If you tell a 17-year-old they get to drive around in an ambulance and do all of this cool medical stuff, I was like, 'Sign me up,'" Gough said. "I can do this instead of working at Dillard's? That sounds awesome."

Her classmate, Francisco Corona, a high school soccer player, was inspired to take the EMT course after seeing an injured pro player helped by medics. "I wanted to be the guy who ran out onto the field and helped the athletes when they were down," said Corona, who now works for the same ambulance service.

"When you graduate with that license, it saves a lot of time. I could get a job at a fast food place or Amazon. But being that person who shows up on a 911 call, I'd much rather do that."

Las Vegas is home to four high school EMS programs, housed in both public and private schools: Rancho High School, Pinecrest Academy, Bonanza High School and Veterans Tribute Career & Technical

Academy, which started its program in 2009. A public safety magnet, the school also offers courses in 911 dispatch, law enforcement, forensic science, cybersecurity and criminal justice.

"Every student has signed up for this school because something in their head and hearts say, 'I want to learn how to help people. I want to investigate these careers,'" said Principal Jason Ginoza.

THE GOALS

Like other EMS agencies, private ambulance services in the Las Vegas area have faced ongoing recruiting challenges for EMTs and paramedics. Enrollment in EMT education programs in their area has been down since the pandemic, meaning fewer potential paramedic candidates later on, said Sam Scheller, a paramedic and CEO for Guardian Elite Medical Services in Las Vegas.

By supporting the high school programs, Guardian Elite and Community Ambulance hoped to ensure a stream of new EMTs who would be interested in starting their careers there, and who had the potential to become paramedics.



Maria Vega and the team in the EMS classroom at Veterans Tribute Career & Technical Academy.

THE STRATEGY

Community Ambulance and Guardian Elite provide ride-alongs and internship opportunities for high school EMS students. Scheller also sits on Veterans Tribute's advisory board for technical education.

The EMS curriculum begins in 9th grade with a foundation of public safety course, followed by health sciences, anatomy and physiology courses for sophomores and juniors. Seniors can then take the 180-day EMT course, including clinical rotations with local EMS agencies. The school also brings in EMS, law enforcement and medical professionals from the community as speakers.

The EMS class uses a mock ambulance, stretchers, CPR mannequins and other medical equipment for hands-on skills. There's also a mock 911 call center for emergency dispatch students, a forensics lab and a cybersecurity lab.

While some assume high school technical education is for students not going to college, Ginoza said such coursework benefits the college bound too, helping them figure out what they want to study or providing a better way to pay the bills and gain valuable work experience while in school. "You hear people talk about preparing students for career or college. Our program is preparing them for career *and* college," Ginoza said.

Bringing real world experience

Maria Vega, an Army medic for over 20 years, is the EMS instructor at Veterans Tribute Academy, a Title 1 school where about 70% of the student body is female and about 65% qualify for free or reduced price lunch. "I just love working with the kids, being a positive influence and helping them to be successful in life," Vega said.

Vega came to the U.S. from Mexico as a teen-ager, speaking limited English. She worked at a drapery factory, watched TV to learn English, and eventually earned her high school diploma, bachelor's degree and a master's degree in school counseling.

Although Vega says she's a strong believer in higher education, "I also understand the importance of going other routes," she said. Taking the EMT course



Sam Scheller pictured left

in high school, at no charge, saves young people the time and expense of needing to pay for an EMT course on their own, enabling them to start working right away.

THE RESULTS

Of the 30 students who graduated in Emily Gough's class, about six went directly into jobs in EMS, while others went to college, many with plans to enter other medical fields such as nursing. Gough is working full-time as an EMT for Community Ambulance while studying forensic science at a local college. Corona has already become an advanced EMT at Community Ambulance, and has plans to become either an Air Force pararescueman or a firefighter-paramedic.

"Going to that high school definitely showed me what I can do. Our teachers were actual paramedics, cops, and dispatchers," Corona said. "I owe everything to that school and that program."

Sam Scheller of Guardian Elite has also hired more than a dozen EMTs who came out of Veterans Tribute and the other high school EMS programs. "We get very qualified applicants," he said.



Francisco Corona is now an AEMT.

STRATEGY

Reaching Out to Diverse Communities

EMS has long struggled with recruiting a diverse workforce, including women and racial and ethnic minorities. Although some strides have been made in recent years, certain groups remain underrepresented in EMS.

About 5% of newly certified EMTs and 3% of newly certified paramedics in 2017 identified as Black, whereas 13.4% of the U.S. population is Black, according to a 2019 study in [Prehospital Emergency Care](#).

About 13% of newly certified EMTs and 10% of paramedics were Hispanic, whereas the U.S. population is about 18.5% Hispanic. About 8% of EMTs and 5% of paramedics who received initial certification in 2017 identified as being American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Women represented 35% of those earning initial EMT certification in 2017, which is up from 28% in 2008.



These potential talent pools represent opportunities for EMS in recruiting new candidates, while also developing a workforce that more closely mirrors the changing demographics of the community served.

EMS agencies that put an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion in recruiting often have programs that remove barriers to training by paying for training, compensating recruits while they're in training, and offering guidance in the form of mentorship programs. Internally, agency leadership must also be committed to these goals. Leadership fosters a workplace culture of inclusion, listening and engaging with current employees about their perceptions of their workplace environment.

In addition, agencies should ensure that websites and marketing materials reflect their commitment to diversity and inclusion. Images should be authentic and feature real employees who represent a broad demographic.

Examples

- [EMS Pathways Academy](#) in St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Acadian Ambulance in New Orleans and Louisiana [NAACP scholarships](#) for EMTs in training.
- [Rookie School](#) at Metropolitan EMS in Little Rock, Arkansas and [in-house training for Emergency Vehicle Operators \(EVOs\)](#) to introduce people to EMS. EVOs, who are permitted to drive ambulances, were created in 2021 to alleviate staffing shortages. EVOs have the option of continuing on in their training to become EMTs.

02. Johnson County MED-ACT

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO RECRUIT A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

JOHNSON COUNTY MED-ACT, A COUNTY-BASED EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) AGENCY, has a service area of 476 square miles, serving 610,000 residents. Answering 55,000 calls a year in a mix of rural, suburban, and urban areas, EMS personnel receive the county government benefits plan and are part of the state's retirement plan for public service employees. Ambulances are staffed by two paramedics.

In the past, MED-ACT received a strong supply of applicants for paramedic jobs from three local community college-based EMS programs. The agency is also an internship site for several out-of-state community college EMS programs.

Mirroring nationwide trends, recently the agency has found it harder to fill vacancies, said Maria Beermann-Foat, battalion chief of operations. "We're feeling the crunch like everywhere else," she said.

MED-ACT competes for personnel with multiple other Advanced Life Support (ALS) services, as well as hospitals, stand-alone emergency departments and medical research companies hiring paramedics to assist with clinical trials.

Turnover has also increased. Former employees give a range of reasons for leaving, including fatigue due to the heavy workloads and 24-hour shifts; work-related stress; mental health concerns; general wellness concerns due to the physical demands of the job; and perceived inadequate benefits and salary ranges compared to other employment options.

THE GOALS

Johnson County MED-ACT sought to boost the number of new recruits and reduce turnover. As their local population had grown more diverse, the agency also wanted their workforce to better reflect the communities served.

THE STRATEGY

MED-ACT established recruiting and hiring committees made up of field practitioners and managers. Field practitioners receive compensation for time spent representing the department



Maria Beermann-Foat

at job fairs and conducting information sessions with EMS students.

"We choose people to be on these committees who have a passion for it, because they are the ones who can best represent the department," Beermann-Foat said. "They are able to speak to the culture. They are very approachable. They are closest to the job, so they can speak openly and honestly about what it's like to be a paramedic in our service."

Boosting the number of applicants:

To increase applicant numbers, MED-ACT expanded their recruiting locations and geographic area. They posted job advertisements on national job boards such as Indeed, CareerBuilder and Glassdoor, as well as in EMS trade journals and websites. They also send MED-ACT staff on recruitment visits to EMS programs outside of their local area and in neighboring states.

The MED-ACT team also stepped up recruitment efforts locally, including participating in high school health careers programs to increase student exposure to EMS, and offering health career program students the opportunity to ride-along with crews.

To encourage more applicants to apply, the department also established a

continual open application process rather than having applicants wait for a once- or twice-a-year hiring window.

They recently started accepting applications for EMTs, with a plan to staff some ambulances with a paramedic-EMT team instead of two paramedics on all.

To address concerns about market competitiveness and staff retention, MED-ACT is implementing a more competitive pay structure and plans to use other recruitment incentives such as referral, sign-on, retention, and other staffing bonuses.

Reaching diverse members of the community:

In 2018, Johnson County established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which was tasked with ensuring that county services are accessible and inclusive. As one of two EMS representatives to that committee, Beermann-Foat was asked to bring the ideas back to her department.

MED-ACT has long offered community education programs, such as CPR, first aid and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. To ensure these were made available to diverse groups, they held sessions at locations recommended by Hispanic, Black, Asian, and LGBTQ community groups, and

handed out recruitment materials during the events. They also redesigned existing recruitment materials to depict a more representative sample of their personnel. "We are almost 50% women, yet the recruiting materials were overwhelmingly male," she said.

MED-ACT also invited members of diverse communities to hold education sessions with EMS staff about their community's unique healthcare and emergency concerns. Representatives from the LGBTQ community spoke to EMS personnel about approaching gender identity to ensure patients feel safe and respected. "By increasing exposure between these communities and the EMS staff, the hope is that individuals from these diverse populations will come to see a career in EMS as a viable and welcoming option," Beermann-Foat said.

Countywide diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts have continued to expand. For example, in collaboration with the county's Human Resources Department, various training and learning opportunities are being offered to frontline employees and supervisors.

Some of these educational resources address recognizing and avoiding "unconscious bias," which occurs when people unintentionally make assumptions or judgements about others based on various factors such as race, gender, marital status, education, disability or veteran status.

Taking care of existing employees:

The department also took steps to mitigate fatigue, decrease stress and address management concerns.

To reduce fatigue, the department implemented real-time unit hour utilization (UHU) tracking, which notifies field supervisors when a crew reaches a fatigue trigger threshold. Supervisors then contact crews and offer a break period. They also identified the five busiest and the five slowest stations, and modified schedules so that crews never continually worked in the busiest station. Now, after working two, 24-hour shifts in the busy station, the next two 24-hour shifts are in the slow station, with a 96-hour break in between.

The agency also staffs extra field units with overtime personnel during

periods with an expected higher call volume and established an internal peer support group to support mental health. Field supervisors are also expected to communicate with each other across shifts and agree on standards and procedures to ensure management consistency and that expectations for employees are clear.

THE RESULTS

With many of the initiatives either newly launched or about to launch, it's still a work in progress, Beermann-Foat said. But by approaching the recruiting and retention challenges from several angles, they're confident they will start to see a trend in the right direction soon.

They're already getting positive feedback from employees on the fatigue mitigation and other changes, which she hopes will translate into more people wanting to work for their EMS department. "Our current employees are our best recruiters. If they are happy at work, talking about their service is a point of pride for them, and others will want to join them," she said.



03. South Carolina EMS Association

USING DATA TO BUILD A CASE FOR GREATER EMS SUPPORT



SCEMSA's Henry Lewis (left) and South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster

IN 2018, HENRY LEWIS, THEN PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA EMS ASSOCIATION (SCEMSA), was hearing from members that recruiting had become more difficult. Lewis wanted to ask the state legislature for financial help to tackle the issues. But he realized they needed more than anecdotes. "Everyone said, 'It's hard to hire people.' But we didn't have data to support our position," Lewis said. "The goal was to quantify what we knew existed."

SCEMSA and the South Carolina Office for Healthcare Workforce conducted a [survey](#) of EMS agencies in the state about EMS staffing levels, projected growth, barriers to success in recruitment, and

workforce culture concerns.

The workforce survey found that only 31% of agencies had an active recruitment and retention program, while 69% didn't. About one in three agencies didn't conduct exit interviews to determine the reasons people were leaving jobs.

The survey also confirmed the reports of hiring difficulties: 66% of agencies said it took four months or longer to hire an EMT and 52% said hiring a paramedic took four months or longer. Public EMS services had as difficult a time with hiring as private services, Lewis noted. "It was a statewide, across-the-board issue," he said.

At the same time, 67% of agencies said they expected to increase their level

of staffing over the next two years. The survey also found that the average age of paramedics was 41, and that more than 40% of EMS practitioners worked for two or more EMS agencies. That meant that when one EMT or paramedic left the field, their departure left two or more agencies scrambling.

In 2019, they followed up with a second survey of 15 technical colleges and Regional EMS Councils, which are authorized by the state to provide initial EMS training. That survey found that training programs had capacity to train more students, but not enough were signing up. In addition, respondents predicted about three in four of their EMT, AEMT and paramedic would go directly into patient care. These findings helped provide a rationale for why support in getting more students into EMS education programs could reduce EMS workforce shortages.

"We knew we had an issue with our workforce and it was going to get worse. We had aging workforce and a lack of awareness of EMS career opportunities, which resulted in a decrease in the number of people entering the EMS education system. And that was before the pandemic," Lewis said.

"This is a physically demanding field, and not enough people coming into replace those leaving. It really started to send off the warning signal that we are headed off a cliff."

THE GOALS

From the surveys, SCEMSA decided to try to boost the number of people coming into the field. They identified three areas to focus on: raising awareness of EMS career opportunities, providing access to EMS careers, and addressing the cost of EMS education.

THE STRATEGY

Raising awareness about EMS needs among stakeholders: As a first step, SCEMSA shared the survey findings with stakeholders at EMS agencies, EMS education institutions, and elected officials and others within state and local government.

The findings prompted the state technical college system in 2019 to designate EMS as “critical need infrastructure,” which made EMS education programs eligible for state funding earmarked to address the state’s immediate workforce needs in critical industries.

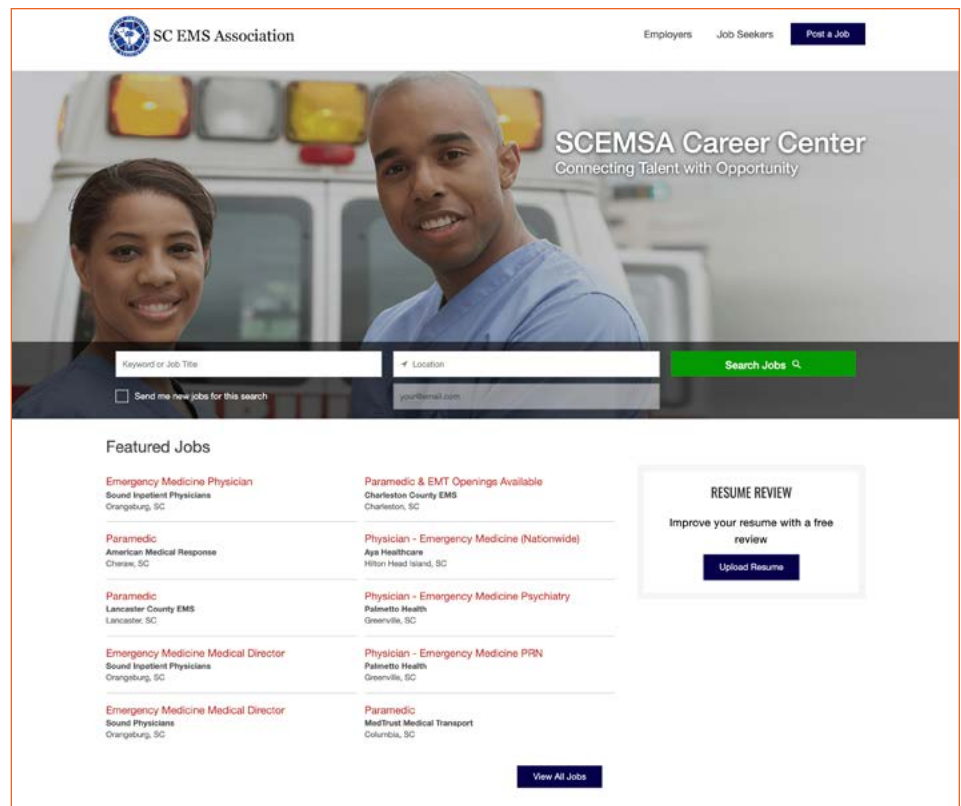
Launching a statewide recruiting campaign: In early 2021, after lobbying by Lewis and SC EMSA members, the state legislature (called the general assembly) awarded SC EMSA a \$350,000 grant to launch a statewide EMS public awareness and recruiting campaign. SC EMSA hired a Columbia, S.C.-based marketing firm to develop the campaign.

“In small-town South Carolina, you can go up to a citizen and ask where the nearest police or fire department is, and they can tell you. If you ask that same person where the nearest EMS station is, they assume it’s the hospital or they assume it’s combined with the fire department. That’s where our association is working hard to raise public awareness,” he said.

The marketing campaign will feature video, social media content, brochures, billboards and TV spots featuring a diverse array of real-life EMS practitioners. Regionalized versions will reflect local communities. “If you don’t see people who look like you in the marketing or the workforce you may immediately dismiss it as not being right for you,” Lewis said. “Our marketing campaign will be driven by the diversity and the demographics of the respective place.”

EMS agencies across the state will be provided with the marketing materials to share on their websites, social media channels and at local events. Videos and other marketing materials can be modified to include individual agency contact and hiring info.

While the campaign will heavily focus on social media to reach the younger generation, it will include some TV spots to better reach parents and grandparents who might encourage their kids to give EMS a try.



Connecting job seekers with employers: To get the word out about job openings, SC EMSA also contracted with YM Careers, which provides job board software for associations. The service lets agencies post [job openings](#) and email job posts to practitioners, for a fee. Job seekers can also upload their resume and receive free help from resume experts.

SC EMSA is also working with a consultant to determine how many high school EMS programs there are in South Carolina, and whether these could be expanded with more support to further strengthen the numbers of young people choosing EMS.

THE RESULTS

The recruiting campaign kicked off in January 2022, so it’s too soon to see results. However, SC EMSA has won the support of many members of the state legislature and South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster. McMaster recently announced [a plan](#) to allocate the last \$17 million in the state’s COVID-19 education relief

money to cover the costs of technical college training for high-demand jobs, including EMS.

“I am proud to tell you our governor here in South Carolina does not say anything about ‘ambulance drivers,’ and he doesn’t say ‘police, fire and other first responders,’” said Lewis, who has since been hired as his association’s executive director. “He and our general assembly members reach out to us if they have questions about EMS.”

Because that money goes only to technical colleges, SC EMSA also formed a foundation that will soon launch a scholarship program for students educated by the Regional EMS Councils.

“We also lobbied our general assembly for additional funds to create the South Carolina EMS Foundation which is launching scholarship/grant opportunities to address unmet needs for EMS education for those who are in underserved areas and cannot otherwise capitalize on the technical college systems,” Lewis said.



[View the report](#) on the South Carolina EMS workforce and education surveys. This survey could be replicated in other states to build a case for supporting EMS education and training.

STRATEGY

Marketing Your EMS Agency on Social Media



EMS practitioners know how to take care of patients, while agency leaders know how to run an ambulance service. But typically, neither are trained in marketing.

Marketing an EMS agency ensures that the community understands what EMS is, what it does and why it deserves respect and support. From a recruiting standpoint, marketing an EMS agency can make people aware of EMS job opportunities and make them want to work there.

Promoting your EMS agency includes all of the in-person events your personnel attend, from community education to speaking at local schools.

For the younger generation – sometimes called “digital natives” because they were born in a digital world – digital marketing is also very important.

Your agency's website is a major marketing and recruiting tool for your agency. [See page 5](#) for tips on how to make your hiring page engaging and attractive to potential candidates.

Social media can also help you get the word out about your agency, drive interest in career opportunities and assist prospective recruits in beginning the application process.

A place to start digitally marketing your agency is by creating a recruiting video for your website, to share on social media and even to play at job fairs or other events where you may encounter recruiting prospects.

When EMS practitioners are asked why they chose this field, they often say to serve the community, to be part of an organization that makes a difference, and opportunities for career growth. These are good messages to share in your video.

Looking for inspiration?

6 EMS recruiting videos to get you going, compiled by EMS1.

01. [Georgia MedPort EMS](#)
02. [Mineola Volunteer Ambulance Corps](#)
03. [McGregor Memorial EMS](#)
04. [Waldorf Volunteer Fire Department](#)
05. [Kootenai County Fire and Rescue](#)
06. [Manatee County EMS](#)

04. South Metro Fire Rescue

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND RECRUITS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

CREDIT CUPCAKE THE HORSE WITH KICKING OFF one of EMS's most successful social media strategies.

In 2015, Eric Hurst was operations manager at an emergency dispatch center for South Metro Fire Rescue in Centennial, Colorado, when he volunteered to be an on-call public information officer.

The following year, Cupcake got stuck in a mud bog, and South Metro Fire Rescue firefighters worked doggedly to save her from drowning. Hurst shared the four-hour rescue on Facebook and Twitter. #SavingCupcake went viral. CNN and Inside Edition covered the story, and people all over the world cheered.

That early success helped Hurst demonstrate the power of social media. "It was a proof of concept," he said. He was soon hired as the full-time public information officer for the department, which has 30 fire stations serving about 300 square miles in south Denver.

Hurst quickly developed a passion for the job, which included using his photography and video editing skills to create social media content that helps the public better understand the work of fire and EMS. The department now also includes a second full-time PIO and three part-time PIOs.

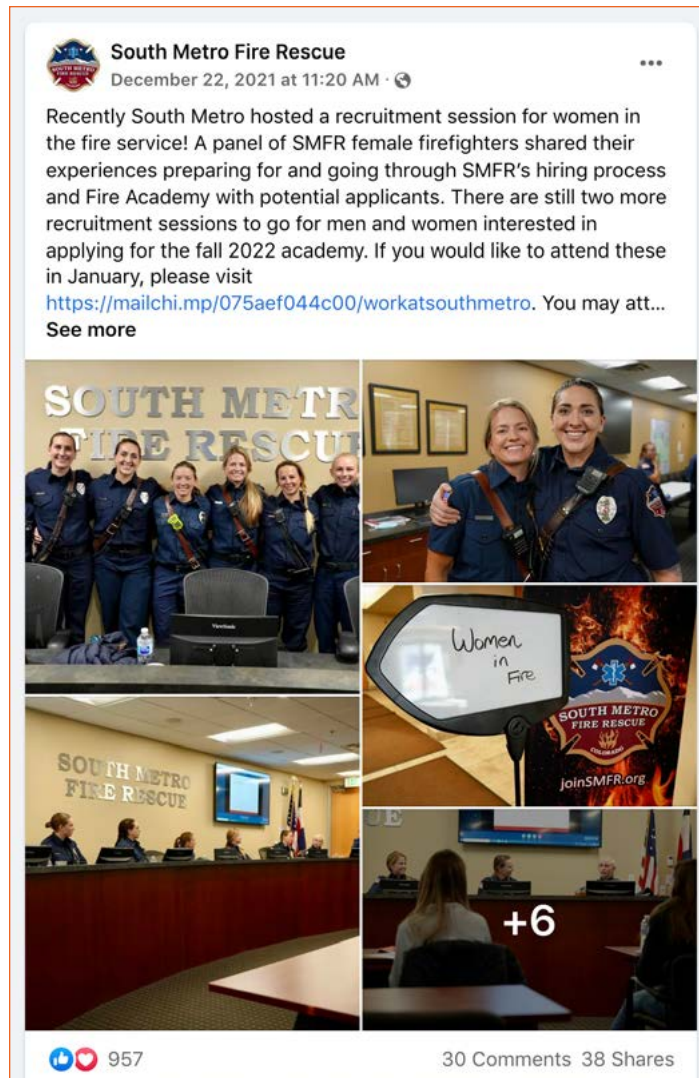
THE GOALS

Hurst's social media strategy has several goals:

- Providing important information to the public about incidents or situations that could affect their health and safety.
- Raising awareness in the community about the fire department and the services it provides.
- Recruiting. "In an era where we are not seeing the same numbers of interested candidates, we have to do something to stand out and get some attention. Social media is a great way to achieve that," Hurst said.

THE STRATEGY

Great content is the foundation of any social media strategy. To keep the public informed about their day-to-day work, Hurst posts



real-time information and after-incident reports on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. "We're trying to reach our community members and stakeholders so they have a better understanding of what we do for them as an organization," he explained. "One day we will have to go to our voters and ask for more money. We need to tell them why."

Social media also enables the fire department to remind the public about topics in health and safety, such as the dangers of frozen ponds, car seat recalls, weather advisories, and safe Christmas tree disposal. "Social media also provides an easy access point for them to obtain information, ask questions, and for us to share things we want them to know about personal safety or the advancements we're making in the organization," he said.

Third, Hurst and his team use social media as a recruiting tool. Posts include specific job openings and recruiting events. A recent post about a panel discussion with female firefighters on the

hiring process and their experiences on the job got over 2,500 Instagram likes and nearly 1,000 Facebook likes plus 38 shares.

For recruiting, Hurst also uses South Metro's wildly popular [YouTube channel](#), where the most-watched videos have over 2 million views.

PREPARE FOR 'FEEDBACK'

While social media provides a great way to connect with the community, it brings challenges too.

On the plus side, "there are a whole lot of people who are looking to be inspired about a job. There are community members who want to learn about what we're doing in the community. Then there are other fire and EMS professionals from around the globe who we interact with and who are getting ideas from us as well as sharing their ideas with us. We've had some really good dialog in our comments section."

"But then there is also this subset of public safety trolls out there that are dying to find something you did wrong in a video

so they can tell you about it. We try and vet our content to the point where those things are avoided, but we do want to show reality,” which occasionally means showing a mishap or an error.

“We don’t want to pretend we’re infallible and we want to be transparent about what the world of South Metro is like. This is just us, and we welcome you to watch what our culture and technology is like here.”

“Agencies who want to do this have to be prepared to accept criticism. Maybe somebody says something and you say, ‘Hey, they’re right.’ There is a lot of mutual education that occurs as a result of sharing.”

In addition to the time needed to create and post content, you also need to [monitor the comments](#) on your sites, so

you can answer questions, engage with the public, and manage comments as needed.

THE RESULTS

Social media analytics allows you to see how many people are viewing or engaging with your content and their demographics. On their YouTube channel, about one-third of South Metro’s audience is in the 18- to 25-year-old age range – their target age for recruitment.

When job candidates are asked how they heard about South Metro, “overwhelmingly, candidates cite South Metro social media as a way they discovered us or why they decided to apply.” This is especially true for firefighter-paramedics, he added.

However, South Metro also has viewers

across the age span. These include a group of enthusiastic middle school “super fans” who created a South Metro Fire Rescue video game on Roblox, a gaming platform that allows users to create their own games. The tech-savvy youths created a virtual world based on South Metro’s stations, vehicle and gear. “They asked me for detailed photos of the inside of the stations, and they used it to create replica fire stations in their game,” Hurst said.

“Literally groups of kids log on and play simulated emergency calls. They talk to each other through a headset, play dispatcher and run scenarios and treat injuries.”

Could there be some future EMS professionals in the making? “Recruiting starts young,” Hurst said.

How to Use Video on Social Media to Engage Your Audience

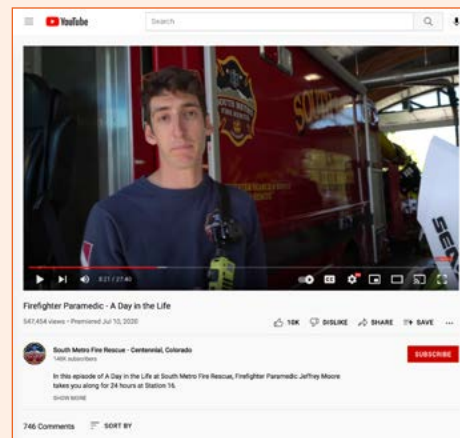
Most people are familiar with taking pictures and posting them to a site like Facebook. But fewer know how to make videos for use in marketing their agency. The growth of video on social media has been explosive, and statistics from marketers and social media platforms show that [consumers pay more attention to videos](#) than any other form of content. In a given week, [YouTube reaches more 18-to-49 year olds](#) than all cable TV networks combined.

Eric Hurst provides these tips for getting started with creating video content for recruiting.

CONTENT

Hurst uses four themes for the department’s [YouTube videos](#).

01. Day in the Life, which follows a firefighter-EMT, firefighter-paramedic or other staff member as they go about their job. The videos show responders on scene at real emergencies, but also back at the station, washing dishes or maintaining their equipment. “Not everyone has a mentor in their life or has someone at their local fire station who they can go ask about the job. What we have found is the younger generation looks at YouTube the same way many of us looked at TV. They see our people in the video,



and view them as mentors. They’re hearing their personal perspectives and experiences, what it took to get in their roles, and what it takes to do their role really well.”

02. PIO Vlog, featuring edited footage of a major incident that occurred in the past few weeks, narrated by the PIO.

03. Fleet Friday, featuring a virtual tour of a vehicle and its equipment by a crew member.

04. Station Saturday. A station number is picked at random, and then the crew gives a tour of the facility. “It’s a great way for our community and audience to get a good idea of our culture and see the crew in a more laid-back environment. Station Saturday gives people a good picture of who we are and who our people are, that we are real people responding to emergencies.”

OTHER IDEAS:

- Footage from incidents, which you can then edit before posting to protect privacy.
- Training exercises.
- Community events, which you can share live and invite people to come see you.
- Animals rescues also get lots of social media love. South Metro has rescued baby geese from storm drain and dogs from frozen ponds and house fires.
- Public service announcements, such as a video showing how to turn off the main water valve to a house.

EDITING

You can do a lot with just your cell phone and [video-editing apps](#), which let you select photos, video clips and music. Hurst uses Apple’s Final Cut Pro, which costs about \$300.

EQUIPMENT

To really step up your video game, consider investing in a little equipment. The visuals in a video matter of course, but audio quality matters too. Terrible sound quality can ruin and otherwise great video.

Lavalier, or lapel mics, clip onto a shirt or can be tucked under a collar. They are inexpensive (under \$40) and help make sure you get great sound quality if you’re shooting inside a station or conducting a vehicle tour. For about \$200, you can also buy a shotgun mic and boom pole, which can be positioned so that you record only the speaker’s voice and cut down on distracting background noises, such as wind or people talking.

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Vitals Aware & ERInfo Pro:

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Health and Wellness apps:

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ABOUT NAEMT

Formed in 1975 and more than 72,000 members strong, the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) is the only national association representing the professional interests of all emergency and mobile healthcare practitioners, including emergency medical technicians, advanced emergency medical technicians, emergency medical responders, paramedics, advanced practice paramedics, critical care paramedics, flight paramedics, community paramedics, and mobile integrated healthcare practitioners. NAEMT members work in all sectors of EMS, including government agencies, fire departments, hospital-based ambulance services, private companies, industrial and special operations settings, and in the military.

