



Fall 2023 National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) Bi-Annual Meeting Executive Summary | December 5, 2023

The Westin Cape Coral | Cape Coral, Florida

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Welcome and Opening Remarks

NCSWIC Leadership, Brad Stoddard, NCSWIC Chair, Michigan Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), and Karla Jurrens, NCSWIC Vice-Chair, Texas SWIC, as well as Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Executive Assistant Director (EAD) for Emergency Communications, Billy Bob Brown, Jr., welcomed members. Mr. Stoddard and Ms. Jurrens emphasized the importance of meeting in-person and encouraged SWICs and other attendees to take time to network and form connections with their peers. Additionally, Ms. Jurrens informed members of interviews being conducted during the week to create content for a new SWIC Video Series to be released in 2024.

NCSWIC Election Updates

Mr. Stoddard and Ms. Jurrens introduced new members of the NCSWIC Executive Committee:

- Rich Fiske, Massachusetts SWIC, Region 1 Alternate
- Will Mosley, Sr., New Jersey SWIC, Region 2 Primary
- Andi Baughn, Indiana SWIC, Region 5 Co-Chair
- Jason Bryant, Kansas SWIC, Region 7 Primary
- Joey Dela Cruz, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands SWIC, Region 9 Alternate

Ms. Jurrens announced Mr. Stoddard will retain his role as NCSWIC Chair.

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Updates

EAD Brown provided CISA updates affecting the NCSWIC, emphasizing the growing breadth and depth of adversarial tactics that negatively impact emergency communications systems. Our community, he noted, must increase awareness of these techniques and work across both the public and private industry, including manufacturers and vendors, to build a proactive and collective team in opposition. NCSWIC can continue to increase its resilience by building partnerships and networking often, familiarizing the states and territories with CISA's divisions and how they interact with ECD's priority services programs, continuing to glean lessons learned and best practices from public safety at all levels of government, and reaching more broadly to an international consortium of new partners and practices.



Image: EAD Billy Bob Brown Jr. addresses NCSWIC on December 5

Interstate Interoperability Workshop

Ms. Melissa Nazzaro, Region 1 Emergency Communications Coordinator (ECC), Mr. Scott Wright, Connecticut Co-SWIC, Mr. Clayton Northgraves, Connecticut Co-SWIC, Dr. Artena Moon, Region 9 ECC, and Ms. Melissa Friend, Nevada SWIC, described their lessons learned and best practices for interstate interoperability. In particular, the panel, facilitated by Ms. Nazzaro, discussed technology challenges and governance-related best practices. The panelists covered land mobile radio (LMR) communications, emergency communications center (ECC) to LMR communications, and ECC-to-ECC communications as well as cross-border communications testing, training, and exercising.

Mr. Northgraves and Mr. Wright explained that Connecticut uses Inter-RF Subsystem Interface, or ISSI, and discussed the state's efforts to test radio effectiveness across the border with New York. The keys to interoperability success include using compatible, reliable, and flexible radios that were correctly programmed for inter-state interoperability as well as having system providers familiar with the technology. However, they cautioned, correctly programming the radio cache takes time and requires education. Panelists identified Connecticut's 911 services as working towards interstate interoperability; while all 105 of the public safety answering points (PSAPs) in Connecticut are on an Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet), the ESInet integration across state lines is still in-progress.

Dr. Moon and Ms. Friend shared their cross-border training and governance experiences in Region 9. Dr. Moon presented the Arizona Colorado River Dam Project and the Tahoe Project as examples of the need for cross-border partnerships. States benefit from a regional training plan to provide opportunities to teach communications across borders. Speakers highlighted several issues, including the approval process for certain aspects of interoperability and the difficulty finding the appropriate authority figure to sign needed documentation. However, Dr. Moon described how relationship building across jurisdictions led to solving these issues. Ms. Friend provided details on Nevada's interstate interoperability during adverse weather events. In such cases, it is necessary to ensure multiple PSAPs can communicate with jurisdictions and agencies in the field and with each other. She stressed the need to build relationships with all entities, including service providers, supporting interoperable communications in areas where cross-border and cross-jurisdictional communications are necessary for incident response.

CISA Technical Assistance Offering Discussion

Mr. Michael Rits, CISA Associate Director for Nationwide Interoperability Services, led an open discussion on CISA's Technical Assistance (TA) offerings. He began by informing attendees that fiscal year (FY) 2023 was a busy year for TA; there was a 61 percent increase in TA work orders from FY 2022 to 2023, 306 work orders are open as of Quarter 1 of FY 2024, and zero capacity remains for new TA in FY 2024. The current backlog in TAs indicates demand for CISA offerings and supports CISA requests for additional TA funding. Mr. Rits next provided a brief overview of the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP), Rural Emergency Medical Communications Demonstration Project (REMCDP) Operational Rapid Assistance Package (O-RAP), and Cyber Resilient 911 funding lines as well as known high priority TAs, such as the World Cup support.

Mr. Rits opened the floor for discussion about potential TA prioritization factors and scoring criteria for implementation in FY 2025 to ensure CISA delivers the most effective and urgent TAs first. He also offered clarification on several conversation points:

- In the short-term, ECCs will continue to work with SWICs to prioritize the implementation of existing TA requests.
- CISA is committed to expanding capacity for developing new TA offerings, allowing communities to continue identifying and requesting new TAs, despite the existing backlog.
- SWIC input will determine future TA prioritization and scoring criteria and SWICs are encouraged to pass along additional feedback to their ECCs for CISA's incorporation into the prioritization and scoring criteria.

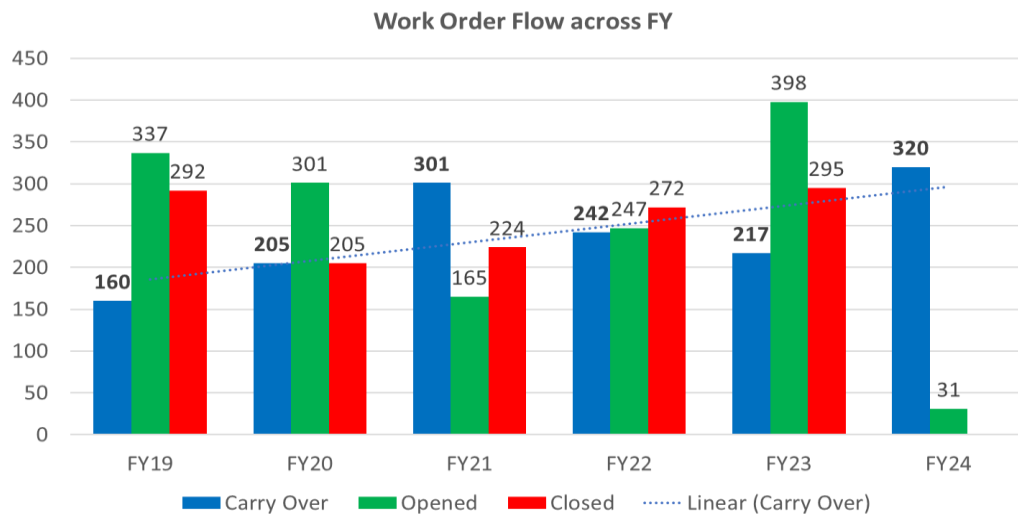


Table: Upward trend of TA Requests over time since 2019.

Regional Roundtable Discussions

NCSWIC members and ECCs held regional discussions on TA prioritization criteria, processes, timelines, and barriers as well as general regional updates. Following these conversations, select regions briefed the group on key takeaways. While each region has a unique set of challenges and needs, there were several common perspectives:

- **Set Number of TAs per State:** Allocating a set number of TAs per state or territory could help decrease the TA backlog and assist SWICs with effective prioritization at the state level. While there was no consensus between regions on the ideal number of TAs, attendees agreed that there were few issues with the TA system when each state and territory could request up to five TA offerings.
- **No Competition:** SWICs agreed that a new TA prioritization process should not be competitive. Attendees were averse to the idea of states competing against each other for limited resources.
- **Budget Transparency:** Greater transparency about the available TA budget and the monetary value of the TA backlog could be a useful tool for prioritization at the state level.
- **Emphasis on ‘Train-the-Trainer’ TA:** Attendees agreed that prioritizing ‘train-the-trainer’ TAs that build course capacity and sustainability at the state and regional level is essential. These TA offerings could help reduce dependence on federal TAs to deliver certain courses, increasing capacity to request a broader range of TAs.
- **Rolling Request Timeline:** In light of differing state planning timelines, constantly evolving emergency communications needs, and busy SWIC workloads, attendees favored a process that allows TA requests to be submitted on a constant or rolling basis.
- **TA Timeliness:** Attendees agreed that the TA process, from request to delivery, needs to occur within an expedited time period to ensure the offering is relevant, useful, and effective.

- **Alignment with State Plans:** TAs that align with preeminent state resources, such as Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans or Incident Communications Plans, should be prioritized. Additionally, increased transparency regarding state priorities across state lines could help ensure that TA offerings supporting common regional goals are given higher priority.
- **Need for Further Discussion:** SWICs agreed that this topic requires additional discussion at future meetings to determine the details of a new process.

Real World-Event: Hurricane Response



Image: Florida Communications Unit seal.

Ms. Pam Montanari, Region 4 ECC, facilitated a question-and-answer based discussion about local responses to Hurricanes Idalia and Ian, including successes, lessons learned, and best practices. Mr. Thomas Kelley, Public Safety Communication Technician, Nassau County, Florida; Mr. Justin Koval, Technical Manager, Collier County Sheriff's Office, Florida; Mr. Roger Lord, Florida SWIC; Sergeant Jason Matthews, Lake County Sheriff's Office, Florida; and Ms. Montanari also discussed emergency communications assets useful for disaster response and recovery activities. Speakers first described the impacts of Hurricane Ian, which hit west of Fort Myers, Florida, on September 28, 2022, as a Category 4 storm, and then Hurricane Idalia, which made landfall in the Big Bend region August 30, 2023, as a Category 3 storm. The panel discussed the communications strike team's deployment, responsibility, composition, locality-based response, and the team's pre-storm planning with emergency management for mobilization ahead of storms to hasten recovery. Personnel oversaw deployable voice and data platforms that assisted with 911 system infrastructure restoration, geographic information systems (GIS), LMR systems, and communications technologies that

assisted both local and mutual aid resources in theatre. Unified base camps provided rehab, fuel, and food for personnel, often deployed for 10 to 14 days. Additional communications technicians (e.g., electricians, drone pilots, information technology personnel, tower climbers, law enforcement, etc.) made up a multi-skilled team, which diagnoses problems and has a quick-fix turnaround.

Hurricanes Ian and Idalia highlighted the differences between rural and urban disaster response—where Ian made landfall in high-density population areas across vast island development and Idalia made landfall in low density areas of marshland and woodlands. Storms, such as Idalia, affecting rural areas often cover a broader geographic area and take considerable time to reach, which necessitates different strategies for response, such as the use of gas-powered vehicles instead of electric, to eliminate the need for charging. In rural communities, responders are sometimes not familiar with incident command or communications unit response capabilities, which may limit the ability to coherently ask for aid during recovery. Panelists described the importance of developing collaborative relationships with partners, including commercial carriers, to restore critical services, prepare debriefings, and provide updates to appropriate responsible parties until the storm is stable. Utilizing retired ECCs or SWICs, who have maintained trusted relationships, guarantees experience and support. Vendors often work side-by-side with strike teams and are aware of the challenges. The panel agreed that the capabilities of on-site technology used during response efforts are never enough and emphasized the need for increased redundancy and shared STARlink, FirstNet, Push-to-Talk, and other emerging next generation applications. They stressed the importance of determining equipment and service maturity to plan for future purchases and deploy long-term evolution push-to-talk systems. The panelists outlined several needs for future disaster response:

- Additional 'train-the-trainer' courses
- Updated Communications Leader and Technician courses
- Collaboration-focused training and exercises
- A SWIC information-sharing platform
- Outreach to inspire the next generation of emergency communications professionals
- A CISA-assisted, Florida Communications Unit-led multi-state collaboration-focused training and exercise evolution
- Regional incident management teams to coordinate with local communications teams
- Liaisons with Urban Search and Rescue component to streamline the deployment process
- Generator support team

Public Safety Practitioner Case Study

Through new emergency communications technology, telecommunicators are exposed to graphic imagery that can cause stress. Ms. Amanda Winans, North Carolina Deputy SWIC, State Emergency Response Team Emergency Support Function Communications Manager, discussed the comprehensive approach North Carolina has taken to supporting its telecommunicators and emergency responders, and the new and ongoing efforts of NCSWIC's Planning, Training, and Exercises (PTE) Committee to develop resources to support the human factors elements of emergency response. Ms. Winans began by sharing her mental health and emotional wellness story, which has been shaped by her role as a PSAP emergency telecommunicator. She defined human factors, shared how human factors affected her, and provided resources available to support telecommunicators in PSAPs. In particular, she described how her work experiences began to affect her home life, her relationships, and her own wellbeing. As Ms. Winans explained how not addressing human factors may lead to burnout and compassion fatigue, which in turn exacerbates the high turnover rate and shortage of telecommunicators. She cited the ability to share her situation with a trained therapist who had also worked in a PSAP as a breakthrough in her ability to restore her wellness. By addressing her struggles, Ms. Winans has gone on to become the manager of North Carolina's 24-Hour Watch.



Self-Awareness
The ability to pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physiological reactions.



Self-Regulation
The ability to change one's thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and physiology in the service of a desired outcome.



Mental Agility
The ability to look at situations from multiple perspectives and to think creatively and flexibly.



Strength of Character
The ability to use one's top strengths to engage authentically, overcome challenges, and create a life aligned with one's values.



Connection
The ability to build and maintain strong, trusting relationships.



Optimism
The ability to notice and expect the positive, to focus on what you can control, and to take a purposeful action.

Image: NECP Spotlight on Incorporating Mental Health and Human Factors into Training and Exercises

Next, Ms. Winans shared North Carolina's programs and resources and urged the promotion of these or similar programs in other states. For example, the [Responder Assistance Initiative](#) provides licensed mental health coordinator support, wellness coordinators, and a trained peer support network. In addition, the North Carolina Chapter of the National Emergency Number Association also provides a peer support team, a wellness workbook, and retreat for telecommunicators. Ms. Winans noted that the importance of these human factors was pointed out in the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP). To address the issue, she is leading an effort by the NCSWIC PTE Committee to develop a resource for SWICs and their colleagues to find ways to restore and maintain positive mental and emotional health and wellness for themselves, their staff, and telecommunicators throughout the country. She described it as a starting point meant only to share known resources, not to replace available resources that may already exist. She asked those who know of additional resources to please provide them to the PTE Committee to include in the *Human Factors Resource Guide*.

Cyberattacks on Public Safety

Mr. Les DeFoor, Security Operations Center Manager, State of Oregon, and Mr. William Chapman, Oregon SWIC, spoke about recent cyberattacks on public safety in the State of Oregon, and how such incidents, such as ransomware, are mitigated and managed. Mr. DeFoor and Mr. Chapman provided lessons learned and best practices for responding to cyberattacks on public safety organizations.

The Royal ransomware cyberattack that occurred on April 26, 2023, in Curry County, Oregon, prevented access to the county's computer systems, resulting in inaccessible data and information systems for the entire county. While the attack did not compromise county radio systems, the 911 center's operations were degraded, with telecommunicators left unable to access the computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system to enter calls for service, records management systems for creating case reports, or law enforcement data systems used to provide criminal justice information including the ability to run or enter wants/warrants checks, stolen vehicles/guns/article, license plates,

and jail records. The impacts to the public were widespread: citizens were unable to buy homes, obtain crucial records or file license applications, or confirm county appointments. The Royal ransomware remained within the in the county's firewall for several months, rerouting switches and impacting the county to this day.

At the local level, there were challenges understanding the incident's gravity and knowing who to coordinate with for response and recovery. The presenters highlighted their response efforts, which included making appropriate notifications to partners to help investigate the 911 call delivery network and referring the PSAP to the [Information Technology Disaster Resource Center](#) to help stabilize the ongoing degradation. The response of a CISA ECC was requested to supplement the local team and help coordinate the initial response, and the presenters worked to implement measures to reduce the risk to other counties and state agencies while ensuring interoperable communications channels remained open for incident response.

The speakers highlighted a variety of key takeaways and lessons learned:

- Ask for all support needed, including SWICs and ECCs, to support and guide cyberattack recovery
- Ask questions to scope requests and find common vocabulary with jurisdictions who may not know what resources to ask for
- Ensure mission critical needs are addressed first and foremost
- Ensure Incident Command System training exists for personnel, including telecommunicators and information technology (IT) personnel
- Prepare a continuity of operations plan, cyber incident response plan, and IT response plan in advance
- Focus on cyberattack consequence management in emergency management planning
- Train IT personnel in cybersecurity and ICS and involve them in response
- There is a gap between the perceived impact or scope of a cyber event and the actual effect it can have on a community
- Unlike traditional disasters, there does not appear to be a defined federal support mechanism for "cyber disasters" (e.g., the Stafford Act)

NCSWIC ACADEMY

December 4, 2023

Prior to NCSWIC's plenary session, new members met with seasoned SWICs to learn more about the program's history, goals, objectives, and mission. Additionally, new members learned how to leverage access to regional ECCs—crucial partners supporting emergency communications and critical infrastructure across the nation, and who maintain close relationships with SWICs and other public safety partners in their regions. Finally, attendees heard a brief overview of CISA's Emergency Communications Division, including its organizational structure, evolution, and role in supporting NCSWIC.

Advancing 911 Across the Nation: Updates from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration National 911 Program



Image: QR Code to DOT's Safe System Approach

Mr. Brian Tegtmeyer, National 911 Program Coordinator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), US Department of Transportation (DOT), provided updates from the NHTSA National 911 Program and explained how they collaborate with stakeholders, connect systems nationwide, create and share resources, and improve post-crash care. Attendees learned about National 911 Program initiatives and resources related to CAD interoperability, GIS assessments, Next Generation 911 (NG911), and cybersecurity for 911.

Mr. Tegtmeyer detailed the National Roadway Safety Strategy, which incorporates the Safe System Approach, and explained how 911 plays a role in all five elements:

- Safer people report risky behavior to 911.
- Safer roads exist when unsafe conditions such as debris, light malfunction and hazards are reported to 911.
- Safer speeds are created when traffic law violations are reported to 911 and law enforcement is dispatched.
- Safer vehicles are designed with automatic collision notifications that connect to PSAPs and transmit data through telemetry.
- Post-Crash Care often begins with a 911 call identifying accident location, nature, severity, and providing dispatch help.

Mr. Tegtmeier then highlighted recent publications providing strategies for enhancing CAD interoperability and resources to help stakeholders integrate GIS into NG911 systems. He also reviewed resources that assist with implementing universal data sharing across 911 systems, especially those that improve interoperability across a nationwide system of systems. Mr. Tegtmeier discussed initiatives to revisit the telecommunicator minimum training guidelines and encouraged attendees to review the National 911 Program's [Public Safety Telecommunicator Reclassification Toolkit](#) to help agencies assess telecommunicator duties and tasks to align job descriptions with current emergency communications center operations, technology, and educational requirements. He emphasized the need to strengthen partnerships with CISA on cyber resilient program development and the resources available on CISA.gov.

NCSWIC SUB-GROUP MEETINGS

December 4-7, 2023

In addition to the NCSWIC and Joint SAFECOM-NCSWIC Bi-Annual plenary sessions, members of the NG911 Working Group, Project 25 User Needs Working Group, Communications Section Task Force, Joint SAFECOM-NCSWIC Funding and Sustainment Committee, NCSWIC Governance Committee, NCSWIC PTE Committee, and NCSWIC Executive Committee met to further collaborate on identified work products and to plan endeavors for 2024. The strategic direction of the program, including upcoming initiatives identified during these meetings, support the implementation of current and future NECPs and drive a coordinated approach across regions, states, and territories.