

SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT

Public Information Office

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San Francisco Part of Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab 2024-2025

Alternative 911 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort

CAMBRIDGE, MA - The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) today announced the selection of the five governments participating in its 2024-25 Alternative 911 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort, an initiative designed to support city and county leaders in expanding and evaluating alternative responses to 911 calls.

The selected governments are: City of Los Angeles, CA; City of Madison/Dane County, WI; Minneapolis, MN; New Orleans, LA; and **San Francisco, CA**.

“Over the past four years, we’ve worked with more than 30 jurisdictions to design and implement alternative emergency response programs – and divert tens of thousands of calls from traditional first responders to unarmed teams. As existing programs increasingly focus on how to expand their reach, we’re now helping governments evaluate and expand their services,” said GPL Executive Director Gloria Gong. “We are excited to support this year’s Cohort members as they work to strengthen crisis response, measure program impact, and help more community members get the right response at the right time.”

In recent years, dozens of alternative emergency response programs have been established across the country to reduce unnecessary criminal justice system involvement and create more equitable outcomes for communities of color and others disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. These programs have successfully diverted thousands of 911 calls from traditional first responders – such as those related to mental health, substance use, and trespassing – to an array of alternative services. Those alternative services often include in-person, unarmed community responder teams, behavioral health professionals embedded in 911 call centers, other crisis hotlines, and more. After designing and piloting these programs, many jurisdictions are now seeking to expand the reach of community responder teams and evaluate the impacts of their services, including understanding gaps in who is served and the resources needed to better meet service recipients’ needs.

The GPL’s Alternative 911 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort provides jurisdictions with pro bono applied research support and technical assistance focused on alternative emergency response expansion and evaluation. This includes one-on-one coaching for government staff; access to adaptable implementation template materials such as data strategy plans and responder team training curricula; and GPL-facilitated Cohort calls with peer government agencies.

The GPL selected the 2024-25 Cohort from a highly competitive applicant pool representing 78 jurisdictions around the country. Selection criteria included the jurisdiction’s vision and commitment to equitably improving community safety and wellbeing; support from local leaders; collaboration across government departments; and commitment to increasing the reach of alternative emergency responses. Two governments – City of Los Angeles, CA and City of Madison/Dane County – are returning to the Cohort for a second year of support.

Since launching in September 2021, the GPL's Alternative 911 Emergency Response Implementation Cohort has directly supported 21 Cohort members representing 32 jurisdictions in piloting or improving their alternative 911 emergency response programs. After joining the GPL's Implementation Cohort, nine Cohort members launched their alternative 911 response programs, ten Cohort members expanded their programs, and two additional members are set to expand their programs. Additionally, nine Cohort members have collectively responded to more than 65,000 calls. The GPL also runs a [community of practice](#) composed of more than 340 representatives from 100 governments.

San Francisco's Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT) has responded to more than 46,000 911 calls since launching in 2020, including those related to mental health crises and low acuity medical needs. This support from the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab will help strengthen our efforts to scale insights from our efforts related to data tracking and sustainable expansion to other alternative emergency response programs across the country.

– Sandra Tong, San Francisco Fire Chief

Learn more about the SFFD Community Paramedicine Program at [our website](#).

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