

Grant Approval Memo



Grantee: Municipality of Anchorage
Request Amount: \$10,749.72
Project Title: Strengthening Crisis Response at the First Point of Contact: CIT and Trauma-Informed De-Escalation Training for Emergency Dispatchers
Grant Term: 7/1/2026 to 6/30/2027
Trust Staff: Heather Phelps

Staff Analysis:

- **What does this project do?**
Trust funds will support specialized crisis-response training for the Anchorage Fire Department (AFD) emergency dispatchers, who serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing behavioral health emergencies. Funds will cover tuition costs for 10 AFD dispatchers to attend an eight-hour CIT support Training for 911 emergency communications. Trust funds will also cover the overtime or backfill staffing to ensure the maintenance of continuous public safety operations. Additionally, the 10 dispatchers will attend a two-hour training focused on trauma-informed care and verbal de-escalation.
- **Who is receiving the funds?**
The Alaska Fire Department, located in the Municipality of Anchorage, will receive the funds. The Alaska Fire Department has a mobile crisis team (MCT). This team works closely with the AFD dispatchers.
- **Why is staff recommending this project?**
Anchorage Fire Department dispatchers serve as an entry point to emergency response, receiving 911 calls and directly deploying the AFP MCT. The chart below summarizes the volume of calls for the last two years:

Year	Dispatch emergency calls received	Deployment of calls to MCT	Percentage of individuals remaining in community
2024	40,343	4,170	88.3%
2025	44,909	5,437	88%

As demand for behavioral health crisis response has increased, service times have lengthened and dispatchers are increasingly the sole point of stabilization prior to the responder's arrival. Dispatchers' ability to recognize behavioral health crises and use trauma-informed skills and de-escalation techniques significantly improves outcomes for Trust beneficiaries, keeping them in their communities and out of jails and emergency rooms.

- **Will this be a multi-year project?**
This is a one-time (12-month) funding request, although AFD noted that future training requests may be made to address new hires or refresh skills as needed.

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Trust Five Year Funding History

No Trust grants during this period.

Comp Plan Identification

Area of Focus	Objective	Comments
Area of Focus 9: Workforce	9.1 Strengthen workforce capacity with improved recruitment and retention to obtain and maintain knowledge, support innovation, and modernization	

Trust Focus Area Connection

Budget Area	Strategy	Comments
Disability Justice	DJ - Increased Capacity, Training & Competencies	

Project Description (from grant application)

Emergency dispatchers are often the first point of contact for Alaskans experiencing behavioral health crises, substance use emergencies, or acute emotional distress. A significant proportion of these calls involve Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries, including individuals with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, traumatic brain injuries, developmental or cognitive disabilities, and co-occurring conditions. How a crisis call is received, assessed, and managed at the dispatch level can strongly influence whether a situation stabilizes or escalates, directly affecting beneficiary safety, responder deployment, and downstream involvement with emergency departments or the justice system.

Anchorage Fire Department (AFD) dispatchers serve as an entry point to emergency response, receiving 911 calls and directly deploying the AFD Mobile Crisis Team (AFD MCT), which launched in July 2021 and consists of licensed mental health clinician paired with an EMT or paramedic to respond to behavioral health crises within the Municipality of Anchorage. In 2024, AFD Dispatch managed 40,343 emergency calls, increasing to 44,909 calls in 2025, reflecting a significant rise in community demand. During 2024, dispatchers deployed AFD MCT to 4,170 crisis incidents, with 88.3 percent of individuals successfully stabilized in the community without requiring hospitalization or law enforcement involvement. In 2025, AFD MCT responses increased to 5,437 crisis calls, with 88 percent of individuals again remaining in the community. Since the program's inception, law enforcement assistance has been required in only 158 AFD MCT responses, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in diverting individuals from the justice system and connecting them to clinically appropriate community-based care. As demand for behavioral health crisis response has increased, service times have lengthened and dispatchers are increasingly the sole point of stabilization prior to responder arrival, underscoring the critical role of skilled dispatch in de-escalation and successful outcomes for Trust beneficiaries.

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Dispatchers' ability to recognize behavioral health crises, apply trauma-informed communication, and initiate verbal de-escalation can significantly improve outcomes for Trust beneficiaries. Early, skilled intervention at the dispatch level helps connect individuals to the right resource at the right time, supports deployment of the Mobile Crisis Team when appropriate, and reduces unnecessary escalation to law enforcement or emergency department care. Strengthening dispatch capacity is therefore a critical prevention strategy within the crisis response continuum.

AFD dispatch personnel have formally identified a need for additional training in Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) principles, trauma-informed care, and verbal de-escalation strategies specific to emergency communications. Dispatchers routinely manage high-acuity calls involving suicide risk, psychosis, substance use, and complex medical-behavioral health overlap, often without visual cues or contextual information. Without specialized training, these calls are more likely to escalate, increasing trauma for beneficiaries and responders alike and contributing to system strain.

This project is designed to address an identified training gap through two targeted training components requested directly by AFD Dispatch personnel. First, ten dispatchers have independently expressed interest in advanced professional development will participate in an eight-hour CIT Support Training for 911. Grant funds will support course tuition as well as the overtime or backfill staffing necessary to ensure uninterrupted emergency call coverage. Second, ten AFD dispatch personnel will participate in a two hour training focused on trauma informed care and verbal de-escalation, tailored specifically to the dispatch environment. Grant funding will likewise support overtime or staffing coverage to allow full participation while maintaining continuous public safety operations.

The trauma-informed and verbal de-escalation training will be delivered by Dr. Jennifer Pierce, PhD, LPC-S, Program Manager and Clinical Supervisor for AFD Mobile Crisis and Mobile Integrated Health Program. Dr. Pierce holds a doctorate in Clinical-Community Psychology and has extensive experience providing evidence-based training to emergency responders. The training focuses on understanding escalation and trauma responses, dispatcher self-regulation, and practical communication strategies to calm emotionally dysregulated callers. The curriculum incorporates guidance from SAMHSA's guiding principles for trauma-informed care, emphasizing respect, clear information, safety, and choice to improve engagement with Trust beneficiaries during moments of crisis.

The primary beneficiaries of this project are Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries who access the 911 system during behavioral health emergencies. By strengthening dispatcher skills and clinical awareness, the project aims to reduce crisis escalation, improve resource matching, and increase the likelihood that beneficiaries are stabilized in the community whenever possible. Improved dispatch decision-making supports diversion from unnecessary law enforcement involvement, involuntary hospitalizations, and avoidable emergency department utilization.

A secondary target population is AFD emergency dispatchers themselves. Dispatchers experience repeated exposure to traumatic content and high-stakes decision-making, placing them at elevated risk for secondary traumatic stress and burnout. Trauma-informed and CIT-aligned training supports dispatcher resilience, confidence, and job satisfaction, while improving consistency and quality of crisis call handling across the system.

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The geographic area served by this project is the Municipality of Anchorage and the surrounding service area covered by AFD Dispatch, which includes a large and diverse population of Trust beneficiaries and represents a substantial portion of Alaska's emergency behavioral health call volume.

Expected outcomes include increased dispatcher confidence and preparedness in managing behavioral health crises, improved use of verbal de-escalation techniques, more appropriate and timely deployment of the Mobile Crisis Team and other crisis resources, and reduced escalation of emergency calls involving Trust beneficiaries. Over time, the project is expected to contribute to improved beneficiary experiences, reduced system strain, and stronger alignment with community-based, recovery-oriented crisis response models.

This project reflects strong organizational and community support, as it is directly driven by dispatcher identified needs and aligns with AFD's Mobile Integrated Health and Mobile Crisis Team initiatives. By investing in the earliest point of crisis response (emergency dispatch) this project advances the Trust's goals of improving outcomes for beneficiaries while strengthening the frontline workforce that serves them.

Grantee Proposed Evaluation Measures (from grant application)

Project success will be measured through participation and post training feedback to document reach, quality, and perceived impact. AFD Dispatch will track the number of dispatchers who complete each training component, including participation in the eight hour CIT Support Training for 911 and the two hour trauma informed care and verbal de escalation training. Attendance records will be used to document training completion and overall project reach.

Training effectiveness will be assessed using brief participant feedback forms administered following the two hour trauma informed care and verbal de escalation training. Feedback will capture perceived relevance, usefulness, and confidence in applying skills to dispatch operations. Project impact will be measured by the proportion of participants reporting improved understanding, confidence, or preparedness in managing crisis related calls, with the expectation that dispatchers are better supported and better equipped to respond to individuals experiencing behavioral health crises.

Proposed Project Performance Measures (developed by the Trust)

How much did you do?

- a. Number (#) of dispatchers who completed the eight-hour CIT support training for 911 emergency communications.
- b. Number (#) of dispatchers who completed the two-hour training focused on trauma-informed care and verbal de-escalation.

How well did we do it?

Number (#) and percentage (%) of dispatchers who felt the training was relevant and useful to dispatch operations.

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Is anyone better off?

Number (#) and percentage (%) of dispatchers who reported improved understanding in managing crisis-related calls.

Sustainability (from grant application)

This request is intended as a one-time investment to provide foundational Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) and trauma-informed verbal de-escalation training for Anchorage Fire Department dispatch personnel.

While this is a one-time funding request, the skills and practices gained through the training are durable and sustainable, continuing to benefit Trust beneficiaries and the dispatch workforce beyond the grant period. Training materials and protocols will be retained by AFD and incorporated into informal onboarding, coaching, and refresher discussions as staffing allows.

Due to the nature of emergency communications work, staff attrition is expected over time, and future training requests may be made to address new hires or refresh skills as needed.

Who We Serve (from grant application)

The primary beneficiaries of this project are Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries who access the 911 system during behavioral health emergencies. This includes individuals with serious mental illness, substance use disorders, traumatic brain injuries, developmental or cognitive disabilities, and co-occurring conditions who rely on emergency dispatch as their first point of contact during moments of acute distress. For many beneficiaries, the initial interaction with a dispatcher sets the tone for the entire crisis response and can influence whether a situation stabilizes safely or escalates to law enforcement involvement, emergency department care, or involuntary hospitalization.

By strengthening dispatcher capacity in Crisis Intervention Team principles, trauma informed communication, and verbal de escalation, this project improves how Trust beneficiaries are engaged and supported at the earliest stage of crisis response. Beneficiaries are expected to experience calmer and more effective crisis interactions, improved connection to appropriate crisis resources such as the Mobile Crisis Team, and a greater likelihood of stabilization in the community when clinically appropriate. As a result, Trust beneficiaries will be better off through reduced escalation, fewer unnecessary justice system or hospital encounters, and improved access to community based crisis care.

Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)

Number of people to be trained	10
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Project Budget (from grant application)

Personnel Services Costs	\$7,749.72
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00

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<p>Personnel Services Narrative</p>	<p>Personnel Overtime – \$7,749.72 Trust funds will support overtime or backfill staffing to maintain uninterrupted emergency call coverage while dispatch personnel attend training. Overtime costs are calculated using projected 2026 overtime rates and reflect the actual operational cost of releasing staff for training while preserving public safety operations.</p> <p>Hourly Overtime Rates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Dispatcher: \$81.65 per hour • Dispatcher: \$74.73 per hour <p>Overtime Cost Breakdown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Dispatchers (4) • Eight hour CIT training: $4 \times 8 \text{ hours} \times \\$81.65 = \\$2,612.72$ • Two hour trauma informed care and verbal de escalation training: $4 \times 2 \text{ hours} \times \\$81.65 = \\$653.20$ <p>Dispatchers (6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight hour CIT training: $6 \times 8 \text{ hours} \times \\$74.73 = \\$3,587.04$ • Two hour trauma informed care and verbal de escalation training: $6 \times 2 \text{ hours} \times \\$74.73 = \\$896.76$ <p>Total Personnel Overtime: \$7,749.72</p>
<p>Other Costs</p>	<p>\$3,000.00</p>
<p>Other Costs (Other Sources)</p>	<p>\$0.00</p>
<p>Other Costs Narrative</p>	<p>Training Tuition – \$3,000.00 Grant funds are requested to cover tuition for an eight-hour CIT Support Training for 911 for emergency communications personnel. The training will be delivered virtually in two four-hour sessions conducted on consecutive days to minimize operational impact.</p> <p>Ten dispatch personnel, including four Lead Dispatchers and six Dispatchers, will attend the training. Tuition is \$300 per participant, for a total cost of \$3,000, which will be fully funded by the Mental Health Trust Grant if granted.</p> <p>This training investment supports improved emergency communications response to behavioral health-related calls</p>

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	and strengthens system capacity to route callers to appropriate crisis and community-based resources. Training Tuition Calculation: 10 participants × \$300 = \$3,000
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Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

N/A	\$0.00
Total Leveraged Funds	\$0.00