

Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement that  
Supports Everything We Do

# Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Strategic Plan

Changing the lives of the people we serve



Produced by the Austin-Travis County  
Emergency Medical Services Department

**January 2012**

Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement that Supports  
Everything We Do

# Strategic Plan

In support of the community we serve

This document was produced by the Austin-Travis County  
Emergency Medical Services Department



[www.atcems.org](http://www.atcems.org)

**January 2012**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ernesto M. Rodriguez".

**Ernesto M. Rodriguez, Director and Chief**

## City of Austin Mission and Vision

The mission and vision of the City of Austin are to be the best managed and the most livable community in the country.

Without any doubt, Austin has a great deal to offer its community. Among the things that are highly valued in our community are safety and wellbeing. The emergency medical services department contributes to this in a very positive and powerful way. Our mission, vision, values, and core competencies support our great City's pursuit of being best managed and most livable.

## Austin-Travis County EMS

### Mission

To change the lives of the people we serve through a reliable, effective and affordable clinical practice that exceeds our customers' expectations.

### Vision

To be trusted by our community, employees, and partners, as the clinical provider of choice that clearly demonstrates our value to our patients, through our practice and outcomes and to be considered the organization that others want to emulate.

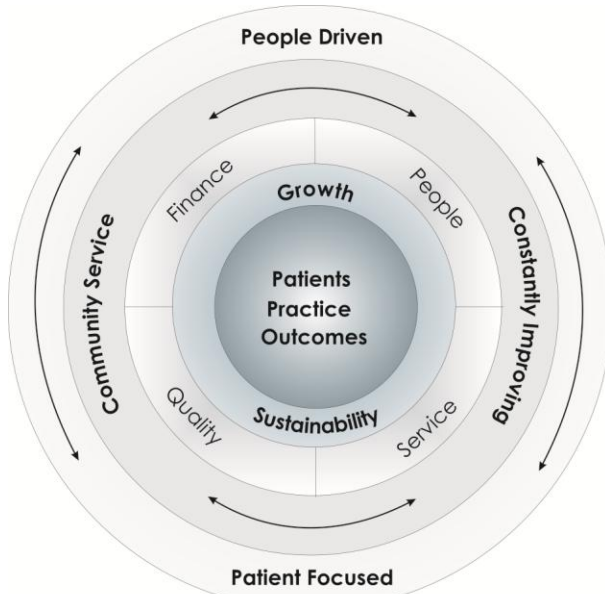
### Values

- **Public Service and Community Engagement.** We will partner with one another and with our community to provide the best service possible.
- **Responsibility and Accountability.** We take responsibility for achieving results and hold ourselves accountable for our actions.
- **Innovation and Sustainability.** We actively seek out good ideas that have a lasting, positive impact on our work, our community and our environment.
- **Diversity and Inclusion.** We recognize and respect a variety of perspectives, experiences and approaches that will help us achieve our organizational goals.
- **Ethics and Integrity.** Our actions will maintain the trust and confidence of the public and the organization.

### Core Competencies

Patients, Practice, and Outcomes - Caring for our patients, developing and enriching our clinical practice and producing positive outcomes for our community are our core competencies. Our focus on providing high quality, reliable patient care; dedication to using clinical research, quality feedback, and education to build our clinical practice; and our pursuit of positive outcomes for our patients and our community set us apart from all other pre-hospital healthcare providers.

## Executive Summary



**Austin-Travis County EMS  
Concentric Circle Strategic Design**

this way we move into the next concentric circle: Community Service and Constant Improvement.

We are dedicated to community service and we find honor in delivering care in a way that reflects our dedication to constant improvement, our agility, and our responsiveness. Paying attention to the needs of the community and the quality of our services drives us to remain flexible and responsive. In order to support our work and our pursuit of the highest quality that we can achieve, we developed a strong foundation: Our Pillars of Excellence, the next inner-most concentric circle.

We are building our organization on four pillars of excellence: People, Service, Quality, and Finance. These pillars establish the framework for our organizational culture and our operational effectiveness. They assure that key elements of our organizational focus remain at the forefront. Our success depends on people who are committed to providing the highest quality of service. The services that we provide are directed toward providing the right care for the right patient at the right time. We do this always in pursuit of the highest level of quality that we can reach. Improvement is a never-ending process for us and we are committed to it. Our financial decisions need to be guided by what we are working to achieve and with full understanding of the impact of our choices. When all of the efforts within each of the pillars (people, service, quality, and finance) are executed well, we achieve growth and sustainability.

We are building an EMS System that will last far into the future. It will be reliable and trustworthy. It will provide a powerful value to all in our community. It will provide the services that are most needed in an economically responsible fashion. It will be filled with great people who care immensely about the community we serve and everyone in it. The impact of our organization on our community will be positive and strong. The attributes within growth and sustainability take us to our Core Competencies. These are shown in the very center of our concentric circle design.

We chose a concentric circle design as a way to describe who we are and what is important to us. The concentric circles show what matters to us most from a broad context to the things that are at our core.

Shown here in a concentric circle design, Austin-Travis County EMS (ATCEMS) is people driven and patient focused. In fact, our people are the organization. Their expertise, professionalism, and compassion define us.

Our most important attribute is our focus on patient care. Everything that we do needs to focus on the care that we deliver to our patients. They are first in everything we do and we place our needs second to theirs. In

Patients, Practice, and Outcomes are our Core Competencies. Our focal-point is our patient care, our clinical practice, and ultimately, the positive outcomes that we achieve in our community. All of our efforts are driven by the needs of our patients. We care for them by developing and growing our clinical practice. Positive outcomes are produced by keeping a sharp focus on our patients and our clinical practice.

We exist to change the lives of the people who we serve in positive ways and to help improve their situations. This is achieved through powerful, insightful, mature, innovative, responsible leadership. We believe that all the people in our organization are responsible leaders and our approach to leadership is one of inclusiveness and collaboration. We believe that inspirational leaders with high integrity yield the greatest results. We call this combination “I<sup>2</sup> Leadership” (I-Squared Leadership). The combination of these character traits is so powerful that we consider them exponential and unstoppable. Our leadership motto about inspiration is this challenge, “If you don’t think inspiration is important, try breathing without it... what is true in life, is true in leadership.”

## Strategic Planning Methodology

Austin-Travis County EMS has developed a Strategic Planning Team composed of members of the executive team. This team has met for several years developing a focus for the organizational culture and strategy for the department. During this time the team has focused on creating strategies, systems, and methods for achieving performance excellence in pre-hospital healthcare. This work has included building knowledge and capabilities throughout the organization by providing training opportunities at multiple levels, ensuring organizational sustainability by optimizing the structure of the department, and stimulating innovation by implementing employee focused workgroups. Members of the team have also met with stakeholders and partners, evaluated survey results and participated in a variety of planning exercises including SWOT analysis at all levels of the organization, Demand Analysis, and Appreciative Inquiry exercises intended to validate the Mission, Vision and Values for the organization.

This strategic plan is a living document that will continue to change and grow just as we do. It has already become a part of our everyday language as it guides our efforts and defines our results.

The plan will be reviewed each year as we prepare to develop our annual business plan and budget. It will be reviewed with individuals as part of our annual evaluations and in the Success Strategy Performance Review (SSPR) planning meetings.

Ongoing strategic planning for Austin-Travis County EMS includes gathering feedback from our stakeholders and partners such as emergency department nurse managers, advisory board members, county representatives, civic groups, members of first responder agencies, the office of the medical director, members of the city executive team, industry leaders and consultants, and our own workforce. Each time we review

and revise the strategic plan our circle of influence will increase to include more and more input.

## Current Situation

The City of Austin and Travis County are changing, but in different ways. Travis County is growing faster than the City of Austin in population. As more people move into Austin's multi-story dwellings, families with children are moving out of Austin's most central areas into surrounding communities, small cities, and into unincorporated areas of Travis County. Hispanic and Asian communities are among the fastest growing within the borders of the City of Austin.

Austin-Travis County EMS has been monitoring the relationship between population growth and increases in emergency call volume. Over the past five years, emergency call volume and population growth appear to be directly proportional. Based on this, we can confidently assume that EMS will face increased call volume inside the City of Austin and throughout Travis County.

ATCEMS is part of a system of providers that includes area first responder organizations, area hospitals, various educational organizations, volunteer groups, and corporate first responder organizations. An effort to improve collaboration between all providers is vital to Austin-Travis County EMS. Pre-hospital healthcare efforts should focus on training, service provision, and quality care where combined efforts can improve community service and create positive patient care outcomes.

The City of Austin and Travis County have faced severe budgetary challenges for several years. All governmental functions have experienced budget reductions with simultaneous increases in demand for services. Austin-Travis County EMS has been able to sustain and improve our service provisions while implementing budget reductions but our ability to continue to do so has become critical to our organizational capabilities.

Future challenges include continued growth in population, increases in demand for service, increased need for different services, further reductions in available dollars, reductions in healthcare reimbursement, changes in healthcare reimbursement methods and regulations, increases in fuel and other operating costs, and increases in personnel costs.

Austin-Travis County EMS's agility, creativity, and adaptability will be tested in the next three to five years. We will face the challenges that we are anticipating, by continuing to build and reinforce our culture and values; strengthening our knowledge of our industry; seeking out and testing innovative solutions; and challenging our established processes.

## Pillars of Excellence

People, Service, Quality, and Finance

Excellence is earned through planning, innovating, testing, learning, and perseverance. The department has four Pillars of Excellence. These pillars are the result areas that are essential to our success. Everything we do is build upon these pillars.

It is upon these pillars that the department builds strategic objectives and goals that will drive its success in the future.

People make up our organization. We cannot succeed without a committed workforce.

Service to our community is our calling. We must focus on the services our community needs.

Quality describes the value of our work. Attention to detail, reliability, and consistent quality is our mainstay. We study what we do to improve our processes and outcomes every day.

Financial credibility and trustworthiness enable our work. We want our community to see how we manage the dollars that are entrusted to us. Good financial management secures our sustainability.

Each pillar is described on the following pages in greater detail. Characteristics for each pillar are provided to help us communicate expectations and to recognize success.



## **People**

When it comes right down to it, ATCEMS can be no better than the people who make it up. They are the ones who directly serve our community, or make it possible for others to do so. This pillar is our first focus because without a committed workforce that takes ownership of the department and its mission, we will fail to meet our commitments to the community and to each other.

### **Description**

The people who are ATCEMS are owners of the department, committed to and passionate about its success. We demonstrate this each time we have contact with our patients, the public, co-responders, and other organizations.

We are proficient in all aspects of the care we provide the community, with the wisdom and judgment to know what to do, when to do it, and for whom. We are committed to and passionate about helping people, including our co-workers. We approach our work with compassion, sympathy, and empathy for others.

We realize that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We value each opportunity to contribute to the department, to the community, and to others with whom we work.

Each of us is a leader. We seek to inspire others to follow us, allowing us to increase our abilities exponentially. Yet we are servants, and seek to humbly meet the needs of those we have the privilege to serve. We are people of high integrity, seeking to have the courage to do what is right, even when it is hard to do so. We hold ourselves accountable for our actions and behaviors.

### **Characteristics**

- Experienced
- Passion for helping people
- Compassionate
- High integrity
- Courageous (do the right thing when its hard)
- Accountable
- Proficient
- Judgment/discernment > wisdom
- Ownership
- Committed
- Loyalty
- Relationship-oriented
- Community-oriented
- Part of something bigger
- Empathetic
- Sympathetic
- Humility
- Leaders



## **Service**

If ATCEMS is to be an effective, valuable organization, we must work to meet the needs of the community. The Service Pillar looks at how we identify those needs, and what we do to meet them. Here we seek to answer the question, “How well do we create public value?”

## **Description**

Our service goal is to identify and meet our customers’ needs, exceeding their expectations whenever it is in our power to do so. We seek to accomplish this in everything we do, not just our clinical services. And this goal extends beyond our patients, to all our stakeholders inside and outside the department.

Our mission is to change the lives of the people we serve. This means doing more than the minimum that is required of us. We seek to always leave the person or situation better than we found it. We will treat our customers the way that we would want ourselves or our family to be treated.

We seek to constantly provide services that our customers need, doing things because they benefit the customer and not us. We will do this consistently, reliably, and without bias.

## **Characteristics**

- Leave it better than we found it
- Doing more than minimum
- Putting other people first
- Provide level of service you would want to receive
- Humility
- WOW (with substance)
- Reliable
- Consistent
- Unbiased
- Treat everyone like family
- Focused on needs of customer
- Provide a service that customer needs
- Meet the person where they are, not where we want them to be
- Align service with customer needs
- Customer-focused

## **Quality**

It is not enough to offer services to the community. If we are to fulfill our mission and vision, we must do so to the best of our abilities. The Quality Pillar requires us to measure our performance and improve it.

### **Description**

Quality is the partner of service. We seek to provide the best possible service to every customer the first time, every time. When we make a mistake, we will own up to it, correct it, and learn from it so it will not happen again.

Quality is defined by our customers and stakeholders. We will provide services that are meaningful to our patients and the community we serve.

We are never satisfied with our performance. Starting with the basics of our services, we constantly seek to improve the quality of our care for the community.

As we work with our community and stakeholders to define what is important, we will develop ways to measure it. This allows us to objectively evaluate ourselves, measure improvements as they happen, and hold ourselves and each other accountable for our performance.

### **Characteristics**

- Do it right the first time
- Measure what's important
- Reliability
- Master the basics
- Continuous improvement
- Know what's important
- Never being satisfied
- Meaningful to people we serve

## **Finance**

ATCEMS is a publicly funded organization. Thus, it is important to the community that we act prudently with its money. The Financial Pillar requires us to include economic considerations in our planning, evaluations and reporting.

## **Description**

We will conduct the public's business in a fiscally responsible manner. We are accountable and transparent, meeting the highest ethical and legal standards. While using public money in deliberate, business-minded ways, we continue to seek innovative approaches that maximize the return on the dollars that are spent. We plan forward, coordinating projects to maximize return wherever possible.

We will be sensitive to the needs of taxpayers, customers, and our fiscal environment. We will take a thoughtful approach, prioritizing spending to best meet the needs of the community.

## **Characteristics**

- Fiscally responsible
- Accountable
- Transparent
- Creative/innovative
- Thoughtful / prioritized
- Coordinated
- Forward-looking
- Business-minded
- Deliberate
- Sensitive to taxpayers / customers / operating environment
- Ethical
- Legally compliant

## Strategic Objectives

The Austin-Travis County EMS Strategic objectives set our high-level, long-term direction and guide resource allocations. They are aligned with the four Pillars of Excellence: People, Service, Quality and Finance. Our Strategic Objectives are the articulated aims of the department that address the changes or improvements we believe are necessary to support our Mission, Vision & Values. They establish the direction through which we achieve our Core Competencies.

These Strategic Objectives are focused both internally and externally and will guide the department in becoming a valuable, performance driven, sustainable organization.

**People:** Be an employer that quality EMS professionals want to join; where they can grow into recognized industry leaders, and where they can enjoy long and satisfying careers.

**Service:** Be driven by the delivery of high quality care, attention to detail, and variety of services that are designed to meet a broad range of community needs.

**Quality:** Have a culture of excellence through continuous improvement of quality and safety in everything we do.

**Finance:** Have an effective and transparent financial model that insures good stewardship of public funds.

# Goals

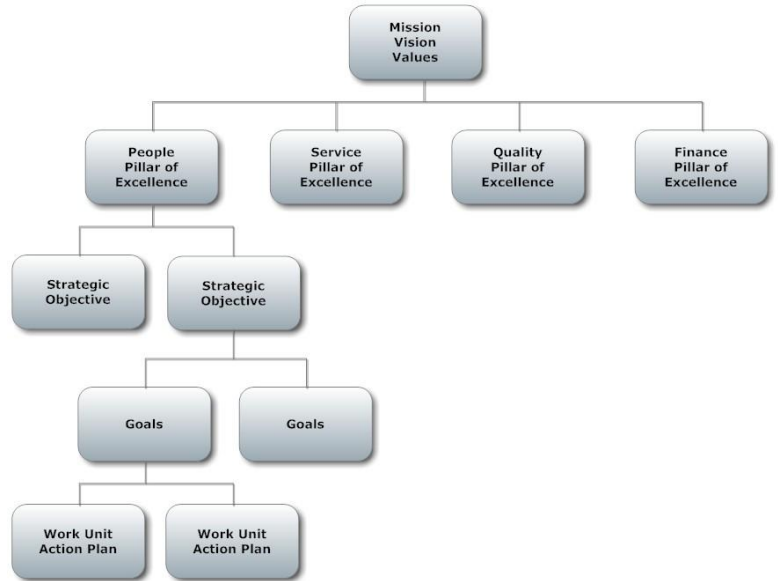
The goals of ATCEMS refer to the future condition that we aspire to achieve. Austin-Travis County EMS has fifteen goals that serve as milestones on our journey to obtaining performance excellence. Each goal is aligned to a specific strategic objective and describes our desired state.

<b>People</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Finance</b>
<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>Strategic Objective</b>	<b>Strategic Objective</b>
<p>Be an employer that quality EMS professionals want to join; where they can grow into recognized industry leaders, and where they can enjoy long and satisfying careers.</p>	<p>Be driven by the delivery of high quality care, attention to detail, and variety of services that are designed to meet a broad range of community needs.</p>	<p>Have a culture of excellence through continuous improvement of quality and safety in everything we do.</p>	<p>Have an effective and transparent financial model that insures good stewardship of public funds.</p>
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Goals</b>
<p>P1. To attract, recruit, hire and retain quality people to grow our organization.</p> <p>P2. To have a workforce that knows what is expected of them and how they are going to be measured against those expectations.</p> <p>P3. To foster an environment for individual growth opportunities that will enhance the organization and the community.</p> <p>P4. To have an informed workforce that is engaged in organizational decisions and direction.</p>	<p>S1. To be an organization that strives to improve the lives of people in our community.</p> <p>S2. To have a service delivery model that best serves the needs of our community.</p> <p>S3. To be an organization that puts service before self.</p> <p>S4. To be an organization that supports our employee's efforts to help others in the community.</p> <p>S5. To have an informed community that actively participates in feedback for improvement.</p>	<p>Q1. To have a clinical practice that enhances quality through error-proofing based on standardized practices and procedures.</p> <p>Q2. To be an industry leader in innovation, collaboration, clinical performance and evidence based practices.</p> <p>Q3. To be an organization where employees have ownership in safe practices.</p>	<p>F1. To utilize effective financial management tools and methods that allow for fiscal transparency and accountability.</p> <p>F2. To be an organization that provides value to the community.</p> <p>F3. To provide quality cost efficient service to the community.</p>

# Action Plans

The Action Plans for ATCEMS refer to the specific actions taken by individual work units that support the short and longer term goals and strategic objectives set forth by the department. Action plans are used to make the strategic objectives and goals specific and achievable so that effective organization-wide understanding and deployment is possible.

The planning and accountability tool that will be utilized to track action plans is the Success Strategy Performance Review (SSPR) process. Through the SSPR planning process, all work unit leaders will develop action plans for their respective teams that will be directly linked to performance assessment and development planning.



Action plans will be reviewed for continuity with the strategic plan and progress by the Strategic Planning Team and the Director. Measures derived from action plans will be incorporated into the Quality Steering Committee’s monthly reviews.