Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD)

Hiring and Screening Preparation Guide

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City of Cambridge, Emergency Communications Department – ETD Hiring and Screening Preparation Guide

I.   Introduction

This preparation guide has been distributed to help prepare candidates for the hiring, screening and testing for the position of Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD) with the City of Cambridge.   The work of an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD) is essential as ETDs provide public safety communications for fire, police, EMS, and utility services responding to emergency situations to assist citizens in need. The complexity of the role of the public safety dispatcher requires that candidates successfully complete a series of screening examinations to assess the abilities and aptitude for the job to be performed. The Emergency Communications Center (ECC) is staffed 24hrs a day, 365 days per year, and require minimum staffing levels.

II.   About Us

The Emergency Communications Center receives approximately 155,000 incoming telephone calls annually, of which approximately 100,000 are dispatched for service. We receive an average of 342 routine calls, and 88 emergency 9-1-1 calls per day. A routine call is a non-emergency call from a resident or visitor in need of assistance. For example, a person may call asking if their car was towed or to report a larceny that occurred a week ago.

Our staffing compliment is a total of thirty-one (31) dispatchers and seven (7) ECC Supervisors. During each shift, there is always an ECC Supervisor and a minimum of two (2) Fire Dispatchers and (2) Police Dispatchers as well as Call Takers and other employees. As an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD), there are many important duties and responsibilities you will perform to assist the public and first responders. Responsibilities include coordinating the operations and activities in the Emergency Communications Center (ECC). Test, monitor, and operate police and fire signaling systems. Receive and process police, fire, and EMS-related emergency calls using various national, state, and local protocols. Dispatch police, fire, EMS, and other emergency units and personnel as needed. Monitor and operate radios, computers, telephones, and other specialized equipment in support of public safety communications and dispatch functions. Perform other dispatch, signal monitoring, and communications support duties as assigned. The ETD hiring process consists of many phases including test components such as: Typing Test, CritiCall Test, Personality Test and Geography Knowledge Exam.

Most ETD's work a rotating schedule of days, nights and overnights which includes weekends and holidays. In addition, because of the nature of the position within public safety, there are instances where forced shift overtime is mandatory to meet a minimum staffing level, fill a sick call or due to high peak work periods.

III.   Desirable Candidates

Due to the demands of the role of the Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD), there are several required and desired qualifications of candidates. Below are some of the required qualifications to be considered for the position:

- Type 30 words or more per minute.
- Actively listen to callers on the telephone and first responders on the radio.
- Gather information quickly and accurately.
- Dispense information to police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and paramedics in a clear tone of voice.
- Ability to study a map and give directions accordingly.
- Remain calm during emergency situations.
- Work with others as a team, as well as independently when needed.
- Learn how to use various 9-1-1 equipment such as telephones, computers, radios, and various software applications.
- Prioritize incidents when emergencies are occurring.
- Give medical instructions over the phone to callers while responders are on the way.
- Work a rotation including days, nights, weekends, and holidays as part of a regular shift.
- Take proper care of themselves so that they may take care of others.
- Detailed knowledge of the City of Cambridge with demonstrated knowledge of Cambridge streets and locations.
- Demonstrated experience in one of several areas of public safety and/or public safety dispatching including one year of experience as a public safety, police, fire or EMS dispatcher, a police officer, firefighter, EMT, or paramedic is desirable.
- Applicants with one year of experience as a police/fire alarm or telecommunications system installer, call center operator, or dispatcher in non-public safety agency or private agency is desirable.
- Certification from the Massachusetts State 911 Department's Public Safety Communications 5-Week Academy or CJIS certification from the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board (Strongly preferred).
- A Bachelors or Associates degree in Criminal Justice or a related field is also preferred, High School Diploma or GED equivalent is required.
- The ability to speak Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian-Creole or Amharic is also preferred, in addition to English.
- Ability to access, input, and retrieve information from a computer. Answer telephones maintain multiple files and must read and analyze large quantities of information. Must have enough mobility to get back and forth from office to offsite trainings.
- Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform essential functions.
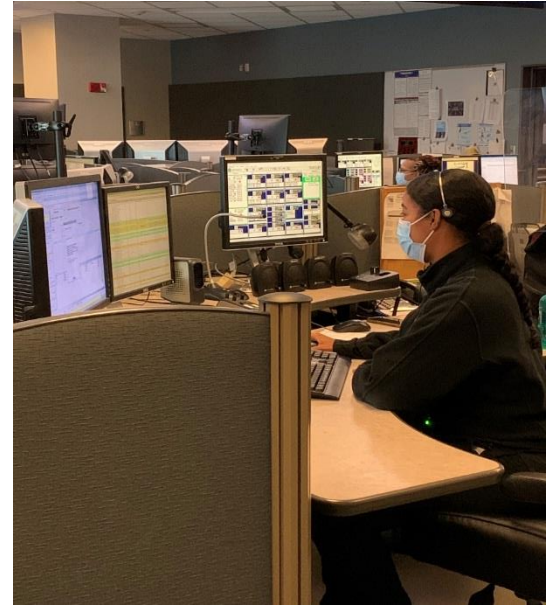
- Standard call center environment including fluorescent lighting, and central air conditioning. Moderate noise level, which can elevate with large volume of phone calls.
- Executes multiple tasks involving keyboarding, telephones, writing, bending, reaching, and lifting (up to 15 lbs.).

The City of Cambridge's workforce, like the community it serves, is diverse, and candidates must demonstrate the knowledge and the ability to work effectively with individuals and groups with a variety of identities, cultures, backgrounds and ideologies.

IV.   Application Process

To apply for the Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD) position you can visit the City of Cambridge website www.Cambridgema.gov/jobs. Applications can be emailed to employment@cambridgema.gov, faxed to 617-349-4312 or by mail to the address below. Once received your application will be reviewed and considered for the position. If you meet the minimum requirements you will be contacted.

Internal applicants must submit a job bidding form and 2 copies of both a resume and letter of interest; external applicants can submit 2 copies of both a resume and letter of interest by the closing date to:

Personnel Dept., Room 309
City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

V.   Testing and Screening Process

Because of the emergency nature of the work environment, this can be a high stress level job and requires you to make time-sensitive decisions. It is for this reason that the Cambridge Emergency Communications Department employs a series of tests to judge an applicant's aptitude for the position. Candidates are invited to testing sessions, usually in groups, once their resumes are reviewed. The testing takes place at the Robert W. Healy Public Safety Facility, 125 Sixth Street, Cambridge or virtual utilizing Zoom or Teams. The full slate of testing takes anywhere from three (3) to four (4) hours, depending on if you pass the typing test and other critical testing components. However, you may be asked to take the Typing Test and Criticall at one time and Personality and Geography at another time. There is no dress code for the testing session, however business casual is appreciated. The order of test is comprised as follows:

a. **Typing test**
All candidates will take the typing test first. All candidates will begin with a two (2) minute warm up typing test that is not measured. After, the typing test will begin. It is required that an applicant type for five (5) minutes at a rate of at least thirty (30) words per minute. If they are unable to achieve this mark, they will not be able to continue with the rest of the tests and will not be able to retake the test. The Typing Test is not easy; the Emergency Communications Department recommends that if you want to do well, you should practice on your own time on a classic keyboard with higher keys, rather than a modern laptop keyboard with flat keys. Mistakes do count against your overall score but hitting backspace to correct those mistakes may slow you down. Make sure you pay very close attention to detail. If you do pass the typing test, you will move on to the *CritiCall Test*.

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b. CritiCall Test

The CritiCall pre-employment test measures underlying skills and abilities a person must have prior to any training they might receive if they are hired as a public-safety dispatcher, including the ability to effectively navigate and use a computer. This section can take sixty (60) to 90 minutes.

The following information is designed to help a future test taker prepare for the CritiCall testing process. The testing components consist of some of these tests and others as follows:

- Decision making – Ability to make decisions quickly and accurately while responding to emergencies.
- Call Summarization – Ability to hear, comprehend and summarize information.
- Data Entry – Ability to hear and record information accurately.
- Cross Referencing – Ability to locate and recognize information.
- Map Reading – Ability to use maps for determining routes and locations.
- Reading comprehension – Ability to read and comprehend written job-related material.
- Memory recall – Ability to learn and recognize associated information.

During these testing components, it is important you pay close attention to all instructions you are provided during the test. You will be offered a one-minute practice test to help you better understand how you are going to respond during each section. Taking the practice test is not a requirement, and it will not go against your final test score if you decide not to take it. During this part of the test, you will be required to listen to information that is being spoken to you, you must then use that information to answer questions and input the data as you are told. If you skip any questions on the test, you will be penalized, and it will affect your final score. A test taker does not need to possess any specialized dispatcher/call taker knowledge or training to be able to read, understand, or answer the test items. Once the CritiCall Test is complete, you will then move on to the *Personality Test*.

c. Personality Test

This test is not a measure of your skills so much as a measure of your attitude and work ethic. The dispatcher position is a demanding one, and candidates must be able to handle higher levels of stress, criticism, pressure, and commitment. On top of handling all these levels of stress, you must realize that you are speaking to a caller who may need assistance during an emergency. As a dispatcher your job is to send help as fast as possible while taking in all the pertinent information you can from the caller. You must maintain professional customer service always. We want people to feel heard and treated with respect while getting the best service possible from the City when they call 9-1-1. The grading system is complex, so it is best to answer honestly and truthfully. This test usually lasts about thirty (30) minutes. After the personality test, applicants move on to the *Geography Knowledge Test*.

d. Geography Knowledge Test

This is the only written exam of the four tests, and it usually lasts about a thirty (30) minutes to an hour depending on the test takers knowledge of the City's Geography. Because dispatchers will receive calls from all around the City of Cambridge, familiarity with the City is preferred, and will help a new hire adapt to the position more quickly. Coming into this test, you will be expected to know main streets, special landmarks such as bridges, train stations, and schools. This test also

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evaluates a candidate's ability to read a map. For example, you will be given a picture with a start and end location, and you will be asked to identify which is the quickest route to the location. Upon completion, candidates will be asked to complete a Department Application.

e. Department Application

Upon completion of the testing, you will be asked to complete a department application. This requires a large amount of personal information and documentation. We request that you submit the following documents, if you have them, on your testing day or as requested:

- Driver's License
- Social Security
- High School Diploma/ GED
- College Diplomas (if applicable)
- College Transcripts (if applicable)
- Birth certificate
- Selective Service Card (if applicable)
- Income Tax Returns for 2019 and 2020
- Credit Report
- Naturalization Papers (if applicable)
- Gun license/ Fid Card (if applicable)
- DD214 (if applicable)
- Paramedic/EMT Card (if applicable)
- References

If you cannot bring these documents on your testing day or unable to submit them upon request, you will be asked to return at another time to complete your submission. The application process can take thirty (30) minutes to complete. Once your application is submitted, your scores will be evaluated by the administrative staff. If you pass the required testing components, you will be selected for a formal oral interview. If not, you will receive notification that your testing scores did not meet our requirements. If you are not selected this time, you cannot return to retake the test within the same hiring period. However, you are welcome to apply in future processes.

f. Interview Panel

Upon successful completion of the screening and testing process, you will be asked to participate in an interview with members of the ECD Management Teams as well as external partners. The interviews will provide an opportunity to answer any questions that potential candidates may have as well as an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their ability to answer questions about their skills and qualifications. The interview process is scheduled for forty-five (45) minutes. If you are selected for an interview, and we feel like you meet or exceed the standard to be a dispatcher, we will do an extensive background check with members from the Cambridge Police Department, Professional Standards Unit.

g. Background Check

Based on the nature, access, and complexity of the work performed, we are required to complete a thorough background check to ensure suitability of the position of ETD. The background process consists of but not limited to, a review of your completed application, documents submitted, work

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history and criminal record. This process will also consist of reference checks from work and personal references provided and follow up by the Cambridge Police Professional Standards Unit on any matters that may arise through the background process. You will be asked to sign a release of information to facilitate this process.

To assist with the background process, we ask that all candidates participate actively with the investigators in providing timely follow up and open communication. Also, it is advantageous to advise your references that you are in the process for the ETD position and that you would appreciate their assistance in following up with the investigators as this will assist with speeding up the background process. The background process can take several weeks depending on the information provided, how many candidates we are hiring and completeness of application.

h.   Selection

Upon successful participation in the hiring process, candidates will be notified of their selection once approval is obtained by the City Manager. Those selected for hire will receive a conditional offer of employment and a start date to begin employment. All selected candidates will be required to attend ECD Orientation prior to beginning employment. Depending on the number of positions that we are authorized to hire, we will notify those candidates not selected that they will be placed on a list for future openings. We will notify all candidates either way whether they will be placed on the Dispatcher Candidate List or no longer under consideration. This process occurs typically within two (2) weeks of completed background.

VI.   Post Hire

If selected for the position, you will begin your onboarding with orientation and training. The training program is expected to begin immediately and may take up to nine (9) months for certification. If you are selected for the ETD position, there are a few things that you will be expected to complete during your probationary period as follows:

- Successfully pass a five (5) week ECD 911 Academy or State 911 Department Academy.
- Participate in two (2) week in service to review Cambridge Policies and Procedures.
- Oath of Public Safety Telecommunications' Code of Ethics (See Attachment A).
- Retain and apply skills learned in training while performing on-the job training for a period of six (6) – nine (9) months.
- Review and participate in the Daily Observation Reports (DOR) during training.
- Perform the essential functions of the position during the probationary period of one (1) year and thereafter.

VII.   Final Words

This guide should help give you an overview of what to expect during the screening, hiring and selection process for the position of Emergency Telecommunication Dispatcher (ETD). If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at (617) 349-6911, or email us at 911info@cambridge911.org. Thank you for your interest in the City of Cambridge, Emergency Communications Department.
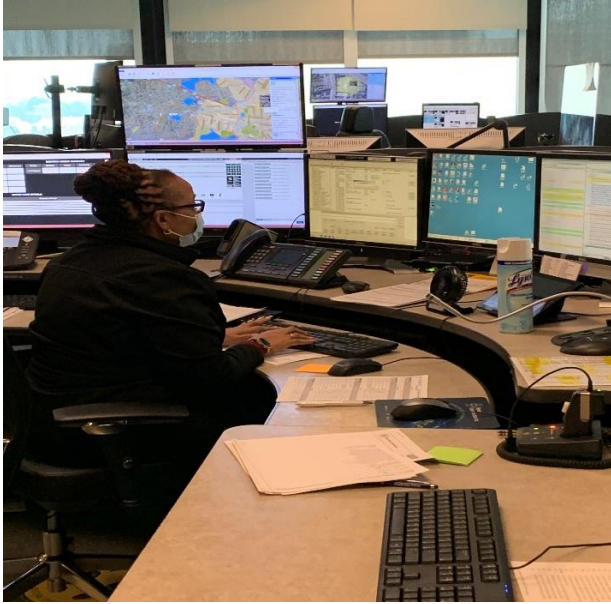
THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE IS AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER. WOMEN, MINORITIES, VETERANS, MEMBERS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ARE ENCOURAGED TO APPLY. CITY OF CAMBRIDGE RESIDENTS ARE ESPECIALLY ENCOURAGED TO APPLY.

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Attachment A

EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS DISPATCHER
OATH OF OFFICE

As a Cambridge Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher, I regard
myself as a role model to the communities and departments that I serve;

I will show reverence for the fundamental freedoms safeguarded by the Constitution of the United States of America and to the rules and regulations of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts;

I am individually accountable for reflecting higher standards and values in my professional and personal life;

I embrace respect for human life above all else;

I will exhibit honesty and integrity through ethical behavior;

I will demonstrate professional excellence through leadership, cooperation, and dedication to serving the public;

I recognize diversity among the members of the Cambridge Emergency Communications Department and the communities and agencies it serves, always allowing for fair and open access to its services;

I accept the honor of my position as an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher, and recognize it is a symbol of public faith.

So, help me God.

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