



VIRTUAL ACADEMY®

— 9-1-1 —

Because...You Deserve More

S.M.A.R.T. TRAINING

The Intersect of COVID-19 and Civil Unrest

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As leaders in Public Safety, we are constantly defining scopes and goals for our organizations and mission. New information, additional intelligence, changing political landscapes, and increasing public expectations requires adjustment to our vision and focus almost overnight. For public safety in America, this year has transitioned from dynamic to volcanic, and has added deep complexity to our mission and goals. In such an environment, SMART goals seem a novel idea that might work “next year”.

But what about SMART Training? During this season of grief and unrest, can we deliver training to our team that is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relatable, and Timely? If so, will our teams be positively impacted?

Can we develop topic-based training fast enough to meet the ever-changing need of the moment?

The answer is a resounding “YES”, and there is data to support it.

The Tennessee Emergency Communications Board (TECB) has been working diligently to provide SMART Training to over 2,000 of the state’s 9-1-1 Telecommunicators. Since 2015, the TECB has provided in excess of 30,000 hours of in-person and virtual training across the State. However, COVID-19 changed the landscape and eliminated almost all in-person course

offerings for 2020. Coupled with conference cancellations and increasing public expectations when calling 9-1-1, the TECB had to pivot to ensure quality training would still be delivered.

Fortunately, the resource was literally at their fingertips. In 2017, the TECB selected Virtual Academy as their virtual training platform and provided free access to the state’s frontline heroes. Through this partnership with Virtual Academy, the TECB has been providing training that is:

- Specific to 9-1-1 and public safety demands
- Measurable through reporting and feedback mechanisms
- Attainable through 24/7 virtual access
- Relatable to the immediate crisis facing public safety
- Timely by offering situational training for current needs

COVID-19

The apprehension of an impending global pandemic reverberated nationwide and through public safety early in 2020. Initially, ‘immediate needs’ conversations focused on surge staffing, updated protocols for Emergency Medical Dispatch, decreased capability in responses, securing supplies for cleaning and sustenance, and planning for possible 14-day quarantine of staff. While most of these challenges are common during any major disaster, there is typically a shorter response time frame and a long recovery phase. Public safety agencies had to grapple with the question, ‘How will this change when there is no recovery phase in sight?’

Public safety agencies were forced to discuss the deeper impacts of COVID-19 on their staff. How will quarantines affect FMLA and paid leave? Should we force staff to shelter at the Comm Center for 14 days at a time? Can we take our employees' temperature while at work? Since all in-person training has been canceled, how can we ensure we are up to date on protecting both our staff and our mission?

The TECB understood that many 9-1-1 centers were all faced with these same questions. Additionally, the staff noted a marked increase in individuals accessing courses related to Human Resources, Stress Management, Leadership, and Administration. By February, the courses taken provided a glimpse into the mindset of the state's 9-1-1 leadership and staff. By March, the TECB provided access to additional training, webinars, and resources specific to COVID-19 to every 9-1-1 telecommunicator across the state, 24 hours a day.



In April 2020, the TECB recorded the largest delivery of training content in a single month. Not including additional resources, roll call training, and webinars, the state delivered 2,161 hours of content in 30 days. During the five months of travel restrictions and lockdowns, 9-1-1 professionals in Tennessee consumed over 7,000 hours of training. The greatest training area of focus during the pandemic was stress management. The ability to provide immediate access to operationally specific content is the definition of SMART Training.

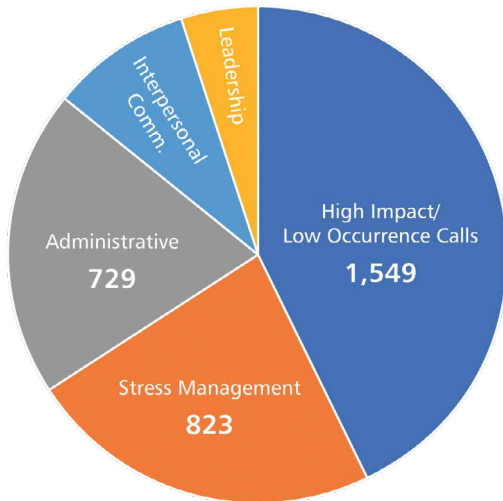
Civil Unrest

As COVID-19 cases in the U.S. crossed the 100,000 mark, the city of Minneapolis experienced riots that would be the catalyst for civil unrest across the country. Over the course of the following weeks, calls to defund the police became a national talking point. Crime rates and call volumes rose proportionately, and 12-18 hour shifts became the new norm for Public Safety personnel. All the strategies and tactics for COVID-19, now coupled with public protection, became nearly unattainable as public safety budgets struggled on life support.

There was a complete dichotomy between COVID-19 and the riots of 2020. With COVID-19, agencies and teams could implement an OODA loop mentality: Observe, Orient, Decide, and then Act. They had time to observe the outcomes of the actions and adjust accordingly. Through implementing the OODA loop mentality, governments at all levels could respond with greater intelligence and wisdom. Their decisions and actions were driven by local needs and with local input.

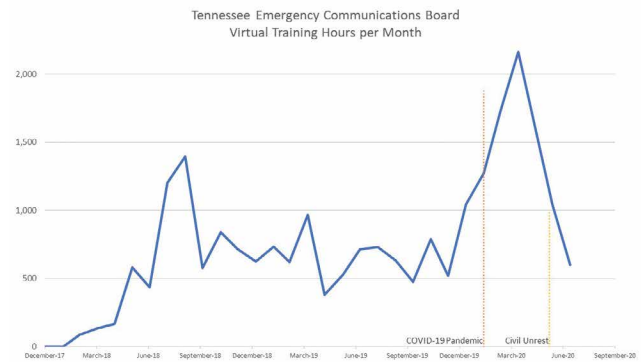
The riots, however, led to a more visceral, survival mode. Actions and reactions across the country were thrust upon local governments at a moment's notice. Protesters and rioters showed up on the literal doorsteps of the 9-1-1 Center with zero time to plan. How does the survival, "flight-or-fight" response affect training needs across the public safety family?

Top 20 Courses by Focus Area
Feb–Jun 2020 | # of Students



Tennessee immediately noted a dramatic decrease in the number of hours of training. During the month of June 2020, training hours plummeted 73% from an all-time high just two months prior. The type of content also changed drastically, from strategic (COVID-19) to tactical (civil unrest). Frontline Telecommunicators were now focused on how to support and maintain the safety of their response family. Courses focused on High Impact/Low Occurrence call types (such as "Responding to Active Violence Events") increased drastically and ultimately outpaced stress management.

SMART Training allowed the TECB to positively support the 9-1-1 Districts through both major events. In all, over 3,600 courses were taken within the State between February and June. It is important to note that this isn't just any five-month period, but likely one of the most fluid, highly impactful time frames in the last 50 years. The success is not only evident in the content hours taken, but also in the ability to provide specific training, measure the outcomes, make it attainable and relatable, and deliver it in a timely manner.



**That isn't just SMART,
it's also very wise.**

**For specific questions pertaining to
the data contained in this publication,
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