

EMS Community Planning and Integration

Consolidated Project Report

Cuming County, Nebraska

Prepared for:

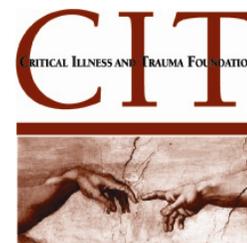
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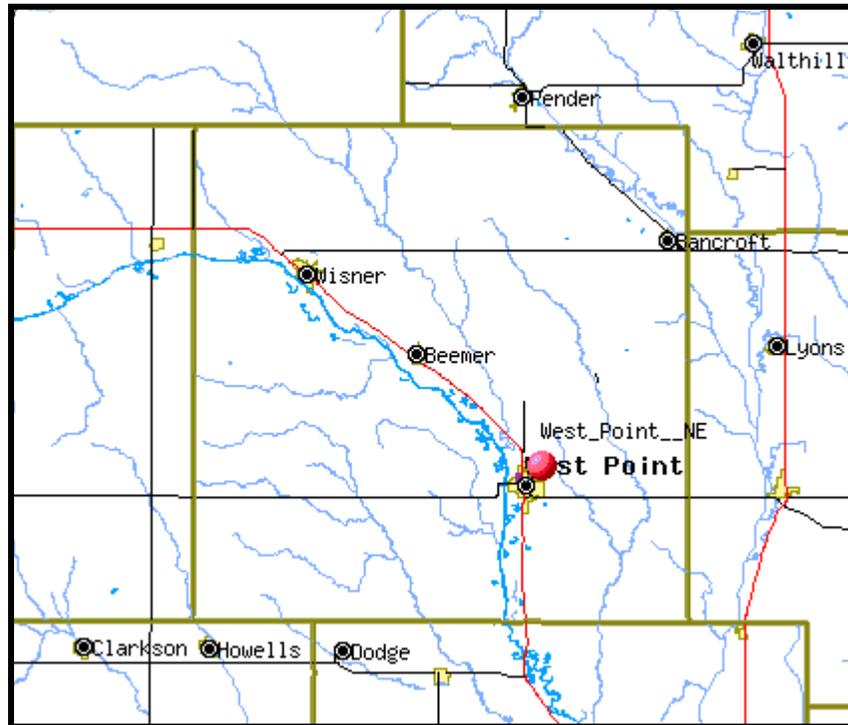
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August 1, 2005





Background

In August, 2004 the EMS Program office of the Nebraska Health and Human Services System initiated contact with CIT regarding conduct of an EMS Community Planning and Integration project in Cuming County, Nebraska. Following discussions involving Dean Cole, Gary Hastings and Kathy Nordby, CIT submitted a proposal to the Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department (ELVPHD). Following acceptance of a work plan, CIT began a cooperative effort with ELVPHD to conduct the project. The proposal outlined three site visits for CIT staff and consultants in Cuming County.

ELVPHD served as the point of contact for Cuming County and provided invaluable local support for the project. Gary Hastings also provided local support and shared his knowledge and familiarity with the local, regional and state EMS programs. Katrina Altenhofen served as the primary consultant on the project for CIT. Katrina is an EMT-Paramedic from Washington, Iowa, holds a Masters degree in Public Health and serves as the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) Coordinator for the State of Iowa. Joe Hansen, CIT's Executive Director, served as project director. Amy Gregory of CIT performed data entry and tabulation of internal and external surveys.

The Process

EMS Community Planning is a process by which internal and external expectations and perceptions of a community EMS system are examined by soliciting survey responses to written surveys and by bringing EMS providers, public health, public safety and general public together in a forum to improve understanding of and support for a high quality, sustainable EMS system. EMS Community Planning focuses on rural areas where community volunteers may comprise the entire roster of prehospital care providers.

The EMS Community Planning process and guide, developed by CIT, provide a consistent structure for:

- Understanding and shaping the community's perception of the local EMS service.
- Determining the appropriate level of care (i.e. BLS vs. ALS) in a community.
- Building citizen "ownership" of the EMS service for support in financial decisions.
- Increasing public awareness of the EMS service capabilities and limitations.
- Increasing the EMS service's awareness of how it fits into the community.
- Examining the EMS service's perception of the community.
- Understanding how the needs of different groups in the community are difficult to identify and how they are interrelated.
- Understanding how to set priorities where the public demands are often high and the budget is often limited.

The initial site visit, conducted in late November and early December, 2004 was conducted by CIT consultant Katrina Altenhofen. During this visit, visits were made to each of the four communities in Cuming County with EMS programs: West Point, Bancroft, Wisner and Beemer. The purpose of these visits was to orient local EMS Service providers to the Community Planning process. In addition, EMS personnel in each community completed internal survey instruments that measured their perceptions of the local EMS service and its relationship with the community it serves. The survey instruments were returned directly to the CIT office in Bozeman, MT for entry into a database (SPSS ver. 10). This process assures anonymity of responses and encouraged candor from the EMS providers completing the surveys.

The second phase of the Community Planning process involved identification of key persons and organizations in the community that interface with the local EMS provider or are consumers of the EMS agency. They include but are not limited to:

- General public
- Hospital administrators
- Physicians
- Emergency department staff
- Fire department
- Law enforcement
- Schools
- Town and county councils
- Local and area media
- Senior citizens groups
- Emergency managers

ELVPHD distributed survey instruments to these and other individuals in West Point, Bancroft, Beemer and Wisner with a request that the completed surveys be returned to ELVPHD. ELVPHD transmitted the surveys to CIT for data entry and tabulation.

Ms. Altenhofen and Mr. Hansen facilitated face to face meetings in all four communities in late March, 2005 to present tabulated results of the internal and external surveys. Gary Hastings and representatives from ELVPHD attended each meeting and ELVPHD staff took notes of the discussions. Meeting participants included a broad cross section of people from each community. EMS system challenges and strengths were shared and opinions sought on how to strengthen EMS agencies at both the community and county level.

CIT prepared final project reports for each community which were distributed through ELVPHD for review and comment. These reports include a description of the Community Planning process, results from both internal and external surveys and action plans for each community, based on written and oral input received during the process.

Consolidated County Report

The final step in the EMS Community Planning process entails development of a county-wide plan for system improvement. This report will serve as a basis for that plan and to stimulate discussion for a county-wide planning meeting.

Cuming County is located in northeast Nebraska, approximately 70 miles south of Sioux City, Iowa and 70 miles north of Omaha, Nebraska. The county covers 572 square miles and has a population of 10,203 according to the 2000 census. Cuming County is rural, with a population density of 17.8 persons per square mile. Its mean age is 39.2 and it has a high percentage of elderly ($\geq 65 = 22\%$ vs. 13% statewide). Its four incorporated towns are Bancroft (520), Beemer (773), Wisner (1,270) and West Point (3,660), which is the county seat. Agriculture comprises nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ of the county's economic base. The largest employer in the country is Tyson Fresh Meats which is located outside of West Point and employs approximately 360.

The county's only hospital is St. Francis Memorial Hospital with 25 beds, located in West Point. St. Francis has 24 hour ED coverage and provides surgical and obstetrical services. St. Francis also operates a 70 bed assisted living facility. West Point Living Center is a stand-alone 64 bed extended care facility located in West Point. Pender Community Hospital, a 47 acute care facility, is located in neighboring Thurston County and provides health care and emergency services to Bancroft, Beemer and Wisner. Colonial Haven, a 43 bed skilled care nursing facility is located in Beemer. Rotor wing air ambulance services are available from Sioux Falls and Omaha. ALS ground ambulance is available for interhospital transfers from Norfolk, approximately 20 miles from Wisner.

Profiles completed by each EMS agency provided information for the following table of attributes:

	West Point	Wisner	Beemer	Bancroft
Calls per Year	250	120	Unk	50
# Vehicles	3	2	2	2
# Responders	23	21	12	12
# EMT-Basic	6	5	-	10
# EMT-D	17	9	12	-
#EMT-I	-	4	-	-
First Responder	-	3	21	2
Fire Dept.Affil.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Funding	Fire Prot. Dist.	Fire Prot. Dist.	Fire Prot. Dist.	No subsidy

Based on strengths and challenges identified in each of the four community final reports, the following elements were identified as common strengths:

- Dedicated volunteers, many of whom have served for over 25 years
- Good teamwork
- Good Equipment
- Community support

Challenges common to all services were identified as:

- Recruitment and retention of volunteers
- Lack of personnel for daytime coverage
- Insufficient funding, particularly for capital equipment replacement
- Need for administrative assistance and grant writing
- Time required for initial training
- Increasing expectations (disaster preparedness/training & HIPAA)

Common short term strategies for improvement included the following:

- Increase visibility within community
 - Use media more effectively
- Develop more effective strategies for recruitment/retention of volunteers
 - Increase public awareness of need
 - Explore use of high school student to support staffing needs
 - Explore possible incentives for recruitment and retention
- Explore methods for better cooperation and communication between county EMS services
 - Identify opportunities for cooperative EMT training
 - Work together to increase visibility/public awareness

A common concern raised in all four communities was the need for support personnel that could fulfill several functions need county wide:

- Day-to-day administrative support functions (paperwork)
- Billing and accounts receivable management
- Grant writing (possible cooperative grant applications)
- Keep current with new laws/regulations
- Maintain communications between services and with county supervisors
- Coordinate public information and education efforts

This need for common support staff was discussed at all of the community meetings. County supervisors present at those meetings were supportive and receptive to seeking a solution to this and other issues raised during the Community Planning process.

CIT staff and consultants want to extend their sincere thanks to all of the EMS personnel and community stakeholders who contributed their time and attention to this project. Thanks also to Gary Hastings for his contributions throughout the project. Particular thanks go to Ginger Bailey and LaRayne Meyer of the Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department for their steadfast support and work on the project.