CommsCoach
by GovWorx

An ECC Leader's Workforce Playbook

A Complete Guide to Building, Developing, Retaining and Promoting High-Performing Teams

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The Challenge Facing Every ECC Leader

If you lead an Emergency Communication Center, you're likely facing some combination of these challenges:

Chronic understaffing

Vacancy rates hovering around 25% leave centers perpetually stretched thin.

Training attrition

Meaningful dropout in training classes, and graduates who struggle to perform once on the floor.

High first-year turnover

New hires leave before they ever become an asset to the team.

A widening experience gap

Seasoned veterans are retiring faster than new talent can fill the void.

Culture and morale erosion

Keeping telecommunicators motivated and engaged grows harder every year.

Tool fragmentation

A disconnected time-consuming collection of systems that adds work instead of reducing it.

Supervisors are taking and dispatching calls instead of coaching. Training programs are stretched thin. QA coverage barely scratches the surface of what's actually happening on the floor. And somewhere in the middle of all of it, you're expected to develop a next generation of telecommunicators who can handle one of the most demanding jobs in public safety.

The solution isn't just about hiring more people. It's about building a deliberate, data-driven systemic approach to developing the right people from the moment they apply, all the way through their career with your agency.

This guide gives you the blueprint to make that happen.

What This Playbook Covers

This playbook walks ECC leaders through the entire workforce development lifecycle. An efficient lifecycle is not a collection of disconnected HR tasks, but as a continuous, connected strategy for performance, retention and a resilient culture:

01. Hiring
Are you identifying candidates with the aptitude, composure, and temperament to succeed before day one?

02. Training
Is your training program building real readiness, or checking boxes? How do you actually know when a trainee is floor-ready, and what's behind each item on your APCO/NENA checklist? And once they're certified, does your training program continue to support your veterans with the same rigor it gave your new hires?

03. Floor Performance & QA
Do you have full visibility into performance on calls, radio, and SOP adherence, or just a random sample?

04. Coaching & Feedback
Are your leaders equipped to deliver timely, balanced, actionable feedback?

05. Promotion & Leadership
Are you evaluating the right leadership qualities to award promotions?

06. Bringing It All Together
Is your workforce data connected, searchable, and working for you across every stage?

How this guide is structured: For each stage, we start with a self-assessment to take stock of where your center stands today. Then we cover what effective practice looks like, and what to look for in tools that can help close any gaps. The goal is a clear-eyed framework for evaluating what's available and making the right call for your center.

STAGE 01: HIRING

Finding the Right People Before Day One

Evaluate Your Current State

- Do we have a consistent, structured assessment process or does it vary based on who's conducting the interview?
- Are we measuring anything beyond a resume review and a basic skills test?
- Can we assess how a candidate performs under actual pressure before we hire them?
- When a hire doesn't work out in the first year, can we trace it back to something we missed in screening? A particular training path or CTO?
- Are we confident our process is fair, consistent, and free from evaluator bias?
- Do we spend time and money background checking people who will never do the job?
- Do our assessment results inform how we coach each new hire or do they disappear into an HR file?

The Problem with Traditional Hiring

Structured interviews and written tests can't uncover what actually predicts success in a 9-1-1 career. Candidates who look great on paper often struggle under the pressure of live dispatch, and by the time you find out, you've invested months of training time and expense.

What you actually need to know before you make an offer — Can this person:

- Multitask under cognitive load?
- Stay composed when a caller is escalating?
- Enter data accurately while listening and speaking simultaneously?
- Make decisions when information is incomplete and time is short?

Traditional hiring tools may provide some aspects of these, but do they give you full performance insight that gives you the confidence to make a hiring decision?

What Good Looks Like

Effective pre-hire evaluation measures candidates across four dimensions:

Foundational Skills

Typing speed and accuracy, spelling, data entry. Baseline skills. Don't skip them, but don't stop here.

Role-Specific Skills

Map reading, direction-based communication, geographic orientation under pressure.

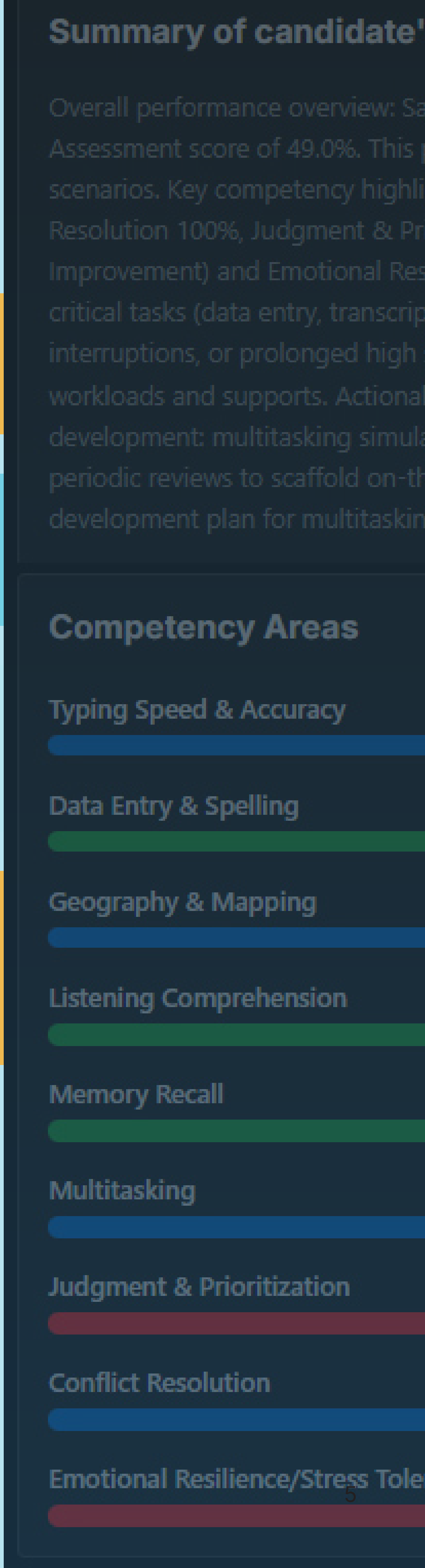
Aptitude Skills

Listening comprehension, memory retention, multitasking, decision-making under time pressure. The hardest to teach if someone doesn't have them naturally.

Behavioral Skills

Resilience under escalating pressure, managing conflict with distressed callers. Simulated scenarios that deliberately increase pressure reveal how a candidate actually responds, not how they say they would.

The output should be a scored, dimensional profile giving hiring managers clear, comparable data across every candidate.



What to Look for in Hiring Tools

- **Automatic, objective scoring:** The system should score candidates immediately upon completion without manual evaluator review. Manual scoring introduces bias, inconsistency, and delay. It also forces candidates through an additional round of interactions that automated scoring eliminates entirely.
- **Built for 9-1-1, not adapted from something else:** Generic HR tools measure general aptitude. You need a tool built around the specific pressures of emergency communications: simulated call scenarios, map reading under time pressure, multitasking assessments that mirror real dispatch environments.
- **Behavioral simulation, not just cognitive testing:** The most predictive assessments place candidates under escalating stress and measure how they respond emotionally and interpersonally, not just cognitively.
- **Flexible delivery:** Look for tools that allow candidates to test from home or on-site to fit your delivery model.
- **Live monitoring:** The ability to observe candidates via webcam in real time during testing can reveal composure and engagement that the score alone won't capture.
- **Efficiency for candidates and staff:** Look for tools that complete the process in a single session with automated scoring and clear next steps, no manual re-scoring, no extra scheduling steps.
- **Candidate self-selection:** The best tools give candidates a realistic preview of the job. Those who aren't suited often remove themselves from the process, saving you a background check, a training seat, and months of investment.
- **Built-in security and identity verification:** Safeguards that verify identity and prevent shortcuts protect the integrity of your results.
- **Results that connect to onboarding:** Pre-hire data should flow directly into each new hire's training plan, identifying strengths to build on and gaps that need structured support from day one.

How this connects to what comes next: Every data point collected during hiring including composure under pressure, multitasking aptitude, decision-making style should travel with that person into training. When hiring and training share a single record, you're not starting over on day one. You're building on what you already know. Look for platforms where that handoff is automatic, not a manual export.

STAGE 02: TRAINING

Building Confidence Before They Hit the Floor

Evaluate Your Current State

- Is our training process documented and followed consistently: or does it vary significantly by trainer?
- Are trainees evaluated against objective, standardized criteria: or does scoring depend on the individual trainer's judgment?
- Do we have a reliable way to expose trainees to the full range of call types and pressure scenarios before they go live?
- How long does it currently take to bring a new hire to operational readiness, and where are the bottlenecks?
- How many hours per week do trainers spend writing documentation vs. actually coaching?
- When a trainee struggles after going live, can we trace the gap back to a specific phase of training or CTO?
- Do we have real-time visibility into every trainee's progress: or are we relying on trainer memory and paper files?

The Problem with Traditional Training

Most ECC training programs follow a familiar pattern: classroom instruction, shadowing, role-play, and a supervised period on the floor. It's labor-intensive, inconsistent, and hard to scale: especially when your best trainers are also working the console.

The specific failure points: quality varies by trainer; trainers must act as both caller and evaluator simultaneously; scenario variety is limited by what can be improvised in the moment; objective measurement is nearly impossible; and documentation consumes hours after an already long shift. The result: trainees who technically "completed" training but aren't truly ready, and supervisors with no reliable way to know the difference.

What Good Looks Like

Realistic simulation without trainer burden

Trainees need exposure to the full range of call environments: distressed callers, callers with heavy accents, noisy backgrounds, escalating emergencies, radio traffic under pressure before they encounter them live. This includes rare but critical call types that almost never surface in role-play. Scenarios should be consistent, repeatable, and adaptive, branching based on how the trainee responds.

Structured, phased progression with verifiable competency

Training should move through defined phases with clear milestones that tell you objectively when someone is ready to advance. Many centers have invested heavily in training but would benefit from true data-validated testing to confirm competencies to stakeholders.

Objective, consistent evaluation

Automated scoring measures every trainee against the same criteria regardless of trainer. Fairer for the trainee, more defensible for the agency.

Automated documentation

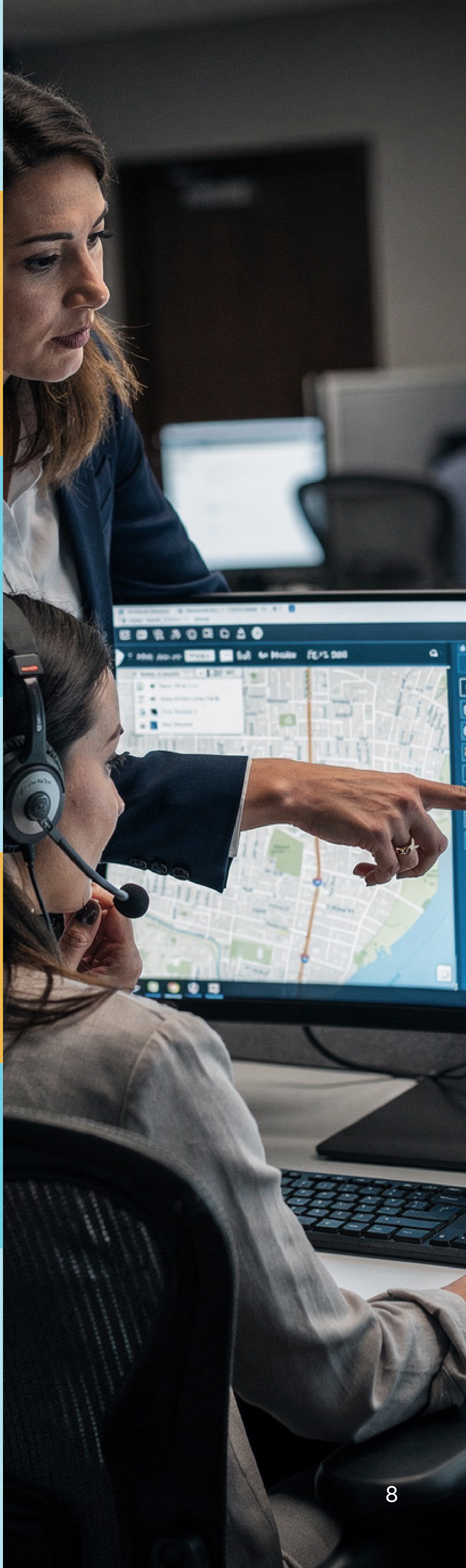
Observation reports should not be reconstructed from scratch after every session. Trainers should be adding qualitative insight to pre-populated, objective reports, not authoring repetitive documentation from memory at the end of a long shift.

Trainer evaluations

While most tools focus on individual trainee performance, an ineffective trainer creates a ripple effect across every person in that track, making trainer quality one of the highest-leverage variables in your entire program.

Comprehensive structure

Training is a career-long commitment, not a one-time event. Your platform needs to support continuous education, skill-gap remediation, and SOP updates with verifiable documentation proving your team learned it and is putting it into practice.



What to Look for in Training Tools

- Simulation built from real-world incidents: Look for tools where scenarios are drawn from actual emergency calls with realistic background noise, disruptions, and evolving conditions that adapt to trainee responses, not tools where every run-through plays out identically.
- Separation of role-play and evaluation: Look for systems where the simulation handles the caller role entirely, freeing trainers to observe and coach without splitting their attention.
- Ability to build simulations from your own calls: Look for tools that let you create scenarios from the call types and content most common to your center.
- Comprehensive, automatic evaluation: Look for tools that automatically evaluate completed simulations against the same standards used for your regular call reviews, delivering clear and actionable feedback.
- Full call-type coverage: Look for simulation libraries that include rare and high-acuity call types, not just common scenarios. Trainees should encounter every type of call in training before they encounter it live.
- Phased training path management: Look for tools that support your full range of training phases: academy through radio dispatch, SOP updates, performance improvement, annual reviews. Training infrastructure should be customizable to your agency's specific processes.
- Automated observation reports: Look for tools that prepopulate objective evaluation data for every session, leaving trainers to add qualitative notes rather than author reports from scratch.
- Trainer performance visibility: Often overlooked: look for tools that track trainer data over time, not just trainee data. Consistency gaps between trainers are a program integrity risk.
- Real-time progress dashboards: Unified visibility across every trainee and every phase in one place, so supervisors aren't chasing down individual trainers for status updates.
- Integration with hiring data: The most efficient systems carry pre-hire results into training, creating a customized learning path for each new hire based on what you already know about them.

How this connects to what comes next: A trainee's entire development record including every phase completed, every simulation scored, every milestone reached, should carry forward the moment they go live. When training and performance evaluations live in the same platform, supervisors don't have to reconstruct a picture from scratch when gaps appear. A relevant training module or simulation can be assigned immediately, directly tied to the specific skill area that needs reinforcement. It is also critical that it feeds into the same evaluation and QA system that you have in place for all calls and SOPs so that it is scored consistently with operational expectations.

STAGE 03: FLOOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS & QA

Seeing Everything, Not Just a Sample

Evaluate Your Current State

- What percentage of eligible calls and radio transmissions are we actually evaluating each month?
- How long does it typically take for a telecommunicator to receive feedback after a call?
- Are evaluation criteria applied consistently across all shifts and supervisors?
- Are we recognizing strong performance as consistently as we're identifying areas to improve?
- Are we building a culture of fairness based on the transparency of all call activity?
- Do we have time to conduct meaningful QA, or does it get crowded out by operational demands?
- Can we identify performance trends over time, or are we only seeing isolated incidents?
- Do we have any visibility into radio transmission quality, or only calls?
- When a telecommunicator may need a wellness check after a high-stress call, do we know proactively, or only if they raise it themselves?

The Problem with Manual Evaluations

Manual QA is done by a training or QA specialist listening to recordings and scoring them covers less than 4% of eligible calls in most agencies. That means the vast majority of what happens on your floor goes unseen.

The consequences are significant: strong performance goes unrecognized; coaching opportunities are missed until a problem becomes a pattern; feedback arrives weeks after the event; inconsistency across shifts creates a perception of unfairness and the work culture is affected; and when employees only hear about problems, morale suffers. Manual review simply cannot scale when QA is competing with everything else a supervisor is managing.

What Good Looks Like

Comprehensive, automated QA changes the impact.

Every telecommunicator gets complete feedback, so positive performance is recognized consistently and coaching conversations are grounded in data.

Feedback arrives quickly, while context is still fresh.

Consistent criteria across every call and every shift builds trust.

Supervisors see performance trends over time, not just isolated incidents

Automated flagging of high-stress calls allows supervisors to initiate proactive wellness checks rather than waiting for a telecommunicator to raise their hand.

What to Look for in QA Tools

- True automation, not assisted manual review: There's a critical distinction between a system that automatically evaluates calls and one that pulls data into a form still requiring a human to complete. Look for tools where AI genuinely scores the call. The only way to scale to 100% is using technology.
- Coverage of calls and radio traffic: Many QA tools cover calls only. Radio communication is equally critical, a missed detail or unclear transmission can have serious consequences. Look for tools that evaluate both.
- Prompt automated delivery: Feedback that arrives weeks after an event is nearly useless for development. Look for tools where scoring is available to supervisors promptly after the call.
- CAD integration: The most insight-rich evaluations match call transcripts with CAD event data, giving supervisors the full context of an incident, not just the audio.
- Customizable evaluation criteria: Your SOPs are specific to your agency. Look for tools that can be customized to reflect your exact standards, not just applied from a generic template.
- Intelligent filtering: 100% coverage generates significant data volume. Look for tools that surface what matters most such as high performers to recognize, stressful calls to review, improvement targets, without overwhelming supervisors.
- Wellness flagging: Automatic flagging of high-stress calls enables proactive supervisor outreach before problems surface.
- Direct connection to training: Look for tools where QA findings connect directly to development recommendations, not just scores.
- Balanced, context-aware feedback: Evaluations should include both positive recognition and growth-area feedback, so telecommunicators feel supported by oversight rather than attacked by it. This reduces fear of QA, builds confidence that recognition is merit-based, and meaningfully improves team culture.
- Telecommunicator wellness supported: Look for tools designed with the human on the other end of the headset in mind. It's more than just scoring accuracy, it is about fostering an environment where staff feel protected, developed, and fairly evaluated.

How this connects to what comes next: QA data is only as valuable as what you do with it. When findings automatically surface coaching priorities and training recommendations and supervisors can act on them inside the same system, the gap between evaluation and improvement closes dramatically. A QA score shouldn't be the end of the process. It should be the beginning of the next one.

STAGE 04: COACHING AND FEEDBACK

Making the Conversation Count

Evaluate Your Current State

- Are coaching conversations happening regularly, or mostly in response to problems?
- Do supervisors have objective data to anchor feedback, or are conversations based primarily on personal observation?
- How long after a call does a telecommunicator typically receive coaching on it?
- Are telecommunicators receiving recognition for strong performance as consistently as developmental feedback?
- Is feedback perceived as fair and consistent, or does the team sense that standards vary by supervisor or shift?

The Problem with How Most Agencies Coach

Feedback in most ECCs is either reactive (something went wrong) or token (an annual review that's more paperwork than development). The space in between regular, meaningful, balanced coaching is often left to chance.

Part of the problem is time. Leaders managing wait times, training, scheduling, and administrative tasks don't have bandwidth for structured coaching. Part of the problem is data. Without objective performance information, coaching feels personal rather than evidence-based and that creates defensiveness on both sides. When feedback is inconsistent, delayed, or perceived as unfair, telecommunicators disengage, veterans look elsewhere, and supervisors find themselves managing morale and cultural problems on top of everything else.

What Good Looks Like

Good coaching isn't a skills problem. Most supervisors know how to have a development conversation. It's a resource problem. Give supervisors the right information at the right time in an actionable format, and the conversation takes care of itself.

Balanced feedback as the default
When every evaluation includes both strengths and development areas, telecommunicators come in knowing they'll hear what they did well, not bracing for what they did wrong.

Objective data that depersonalizes the conversation
"Here's what the evaluation showed" lands differently than "here's what I think." Evidence-based feedback is easier to deliver and easier to hear.

Timely coaching connected to actual events
The most effective coaching happens close to the event, while the call is still fresh for everyone.

Trend data for longer-horizon development
Showing a telecommunicator how their performance has evolved over months turns coaching from a one-time conversation into an ongoing narrative of growth.

What to Look for in Coaching Tools

- Automated feedback reports ready to share: Look for tools that generate clear, balanced evaluation reports supervisors can share directly without translating raw data into a readable format first.
- Trend visibility over time: Longitudinal performance data is what makes development conversations meaningful and trackable.
- Aggregated summaries: Look for tools that automatically compile feedback into daily, weekly, and milestone-based summaries.
- Integration between QA and coaching workflow: Look for tools that make it easy to flag evaluations for coaching, add personal notes, and track whether feedback was delivered.

How this connects to what comes next: Coaching is most effective when grounded in the same performance record that follows a telecommunicator through their entire career. When feedback, QA scores, training history, and development milestones all live in one place, supervisors aren't piecing together a picture from memory — they're working from a complete, continuously updated profile. That's what turns one-off coaching moments into a genuine development program.

STAGE 05: PROMOTION AND LEADERSHIP

Building the Next Generation of Leaders

Evaluate Your Current State

- Are promotion decisions based on documented evaluation of leadership potential or primarily seniority and availability?
- Do we have objective performance data on each candidate over time?
- Are we evaluating how candidates handle conflict, deliver feedback, and manage under pressure or primarily their call-taking numbers?
- Have we seen a strong telecommunicator become a struggling supervisor, and could we have identified the risk earlier?

Promoting for the Right Reasons

Promotion decisions are often driven by seniority, availability, or shift dynamics rather than structured evaluation of leadership potential. The result: supervisors who are technically skilled but under-prepared for the coaching, communication, and conflict-resolution demands of the role. The cost isn't just to the individual, a supervisor who can't coach effectively or manage under pressure creates the exact environment that drives experienced telecommunicators out the door.

What Good Looks Like

Leadership potential in the ECC environment looks different than technical performance. Before promoting, look for evidence of these competencies:

Leadership & People Management

Inspires confidence under pressure, coaches and mentors effectively, handles personnel issues calmly, and builds a team culture where people can perform in high-stress situations.

Deep Operational Knowledge

Solid dispatch experience with fluency in CAD systems, protocols, call taking and prioritization, radio operations, geography, and multi-agency coordination.

Crisis & Decision-Making Skills

Maintains composure during mass casualty events, active shooters, or multi-incident surges; makes fast, sound decisions with incomplete information while managing multiple situations simultaneously.

Communication

Communicates effectively up (to management), down (telecommunicators), and sideways (to field units and other agencies); strong written communication for documentation and incident reports.

Emotional Intelligence & Stress Management

Recognizes when a telecommunicator is struggling from a traumatic call or cumulative stress; knows when to intervene, offer support, or pull someone off the floor; manages their own emotional responses in real time.

Quality Assurance & Training

Reviews calls, identifies training gaps, ensures protocol compliance, and delivers ongoing coaching fairly and consistently.

Conflict Resolution

De-escalates interpersonal friction promptly, addresses behavioral issues, and maintains a professional environment on high-stress shifts.

Accountability & Documentation

Accurate documentation, chain-of-command adherence, and fair accountability practices are the last line of review before something becomes a formal complaint.

Adaptability

Rolls with policy changes, new CAD platforms, updated protocols, and unexpected staffing shortfalls without losing composure.

Ethical Judgment

Handles sensitive information appropriately and does the right thing even when it's not the easiest thing.

Results that connect to onboarding

Pre-promotion data should flow directly into each new hire's training plan, identifying strengths to build on and gaps that need structured support from day one.

What to Look for in Leadership Tools

- Evaluation of leadership-relevant skills: Look for tools that capture behavioral and communication data so your promotion decisions are grounded in the full picture.
- Solid analysis for transfers: Look for tools that provide an unbiased, standardized way to assess whether a transfer has the skills your ECC requires, rather than relying on their previous agency's reputation or self-reported experience.

How this connects to what comes next: With a comprehensive assessment tool, you will be able to evaluate a candidate's skill set whether they've been inside your center or in another. The historical data you have on your internal employees will give you additional feedback, but having a holistic, unbiased tool will allow you to evaluate all candidates, regardless of history, fairly.

STAGE 06: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

One Platform, One Record

The Case for a Unified System

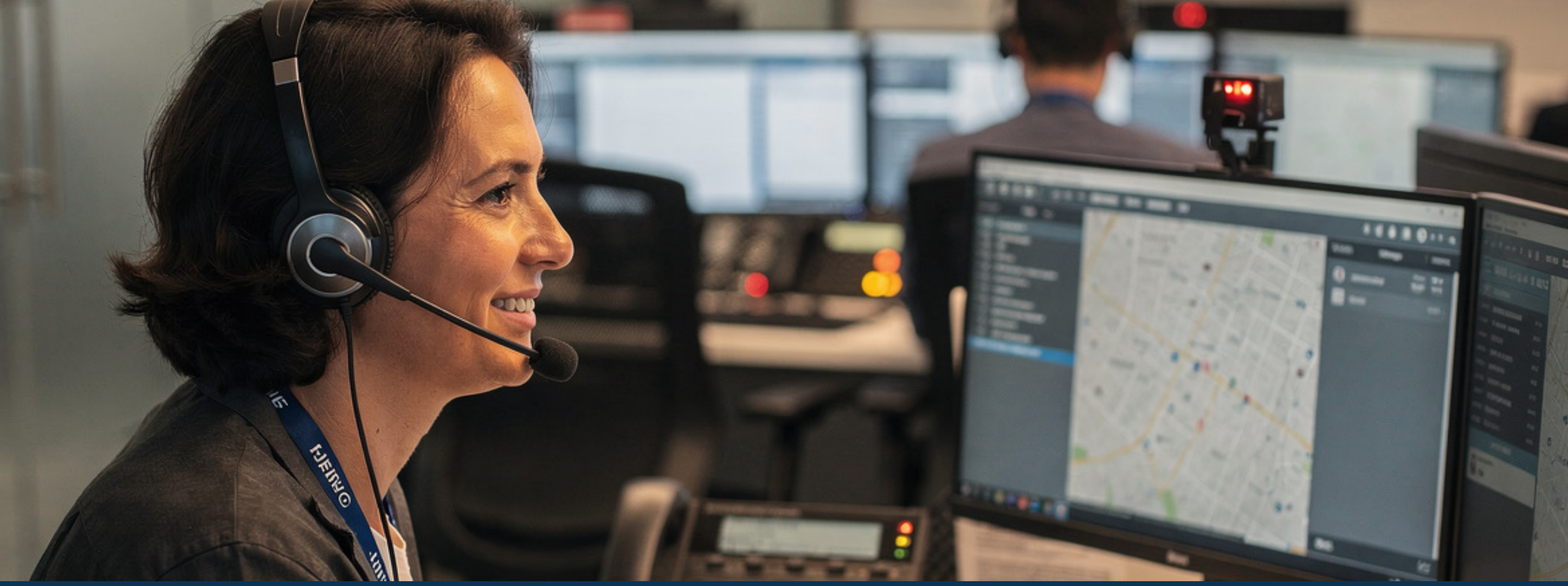
Every stage of this playbook points toward the same conclusion: fragmented tools create fragmented outcomes. When hiring data lives in one system, training records in another, evaluation and QA scores in a third, and coaching notes in a supervisor's memory, nothing connects, and the people managing it all spend more time piecing together information than acting on it. A single platform that contains and connects your entire workforce performance record changes what's possible for ECC leaders.

Consider what that looks like in practice:

- One place for every data point that matters. Pre-hire assessment scores, training phase completions, simulation results, QA evaluations, coaching interactions, development assignments, and career milestones are all significant data points in managing the development of a telecommunicator. Having them all in a single, searchable record for every person on your team will change your operations from focusing on paperwork to investing in your team.
- Searchable call, radio, and CAD data. When incident records, call transcripts, and CAD event data are digitized and connected, you can find what you need quickly, whether that's for a performance review, an investigation, or a formal inquiry.
- Intelligence that compounds over time. Individual data points are useful. Connected data over time is transformative. When a single platform tracks a person from application through every shift of their career, patterns emerge that no single-stage tool can surface, and leaders can make decisions with a clarity that siloed systems simply don't allow.
- A measurable return on investment. Managing multiple vendors, contracts, and integrations has a real cost in time, budget, and administrative overhead. But the bigger number is what turnover, failed hires, and inconsistent training cost your center every year. A unified system built specifically for ECC workforce development can reduce those costs meaningfully, and for many centers, the savings alone justify the investment.

What to Look for in Tools

- True native platform, not just integrations: Look for a system where data flows automatically between hiring, training, QA, coaching, and development, not a collection of tools with manual exports connecting them. The hand-offs should be invisible.
- Comprehensive search across all data types: Look for platforms where call recordings, transcripts, CAD data, and evaluation records are all searchable in one place: by date, telecommunicator, incident type, or evaluation outcome.
- Documentation built for accountability: Look for tools with timestamped, audit-ready records that can support formal reviews, investigations, or legal inquiries without requiring manual reconstruction.
- Templates and guided onboarding: Implementing a new platform is only valuable if you can actually use it. Look for tools that come with industry-standard templates across all evaluation areas, as well as dedicated implementation support that helps you get the most out of every feature from day one, not tools that leave you to figure it out on your own.
- Scalability across agency sizes: The right platform should work whether you have 1 telecommunicator or 275. Look for tools with a track record across centers that meet the requirements of your centers.



A Career, Not Just a Job

The ECCs with the strongest retention aren't necessarily the ones paying the most - or the ones with the biggest budgets. They're the ones where telecommunicators feel seen, evaluated fairly, coached consistently, and genuinely invested in. Where feedback isn't something that happens to you, it's something that helps you grow. Where new hires are set up for success from day one, and veterans are challenged, recognized, and given a reason to stay.

Building that kind of center requires a system. Not a patchwork of disconnected tools that fall apart when leaders are stretched thin, but a connected, continuous approach that moves with each person from the moment they apply through every stage of their career.

Budget is a real constraint for many ECCs, and not every center can invest in a full platform overnight. But it's worth knowing that the cost of turnover — recruiting, training, and losing institutional knowledge — is significant. The right approach doesn't just improve outcomes; for many centers, it more than pays for itself.

When the data flows continuously from the application through every shift of a career the whole system gets smarter. And so does every person in it.

When that system is in place and backed by data, the outcomes speak for themselves:

Morale and Culture improve. Turnover drops. Performance rises.

And when all of that is documented? You can prove it to your leadership, your community, and yourself.

Taking the Next Step

This playbook is a framework, not a finish line. Start by identifying where your biggest gap is today.

Is it at the front door?

Are you hiring candidates who struggle under pressure?

Is it in training?

Are trainees reaching the floor before they're ready?

Is it in visibility?

Are you operating with a fraction of the performance data you need?

Is it in coaching?

Are supervisors too buried to have meaningful development conversations?

Is it in promoting?

Are you promoting the right leaders to help level-up your employees?

Pick the gap creating the most pain. Build from there. Connect the stages as you go.

The agencies winning the workforce challenge aren't waiting for the staffing crisis to resolve itself. They're building deliberate, data-driven systems designed to elevate every person on the team. That's what it means to manage a career, not just a shift.

Learn more at govworx.ai

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