



# Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD) Pre-Employment Preparation Guide



## **Table of Contents**

Introduction	Page 3
The ECC and the Role of the ETD	Page 3
Desirable Candidates	Page 4
How to Apply	Page 5
Testing Process	Page 5
CitiCall Dispatcher Skills Test	Page 6
CitiCall Dispatcher Personality Test	Page 7
Geography Test	Page 7
Department Application	Page 8
Interview Panel	Page 8
Background Check	Page 8
Selection	Page 8
Post Hire	Page 9
Conclusion	Page 9
Appendix A: Emergency Telecommunicator Oath of Office	Page 10
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## Introduction

Thank you for expressing interest in working as an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD). ETDs deliver an essential service to the community; they provide public safety communications for fire, police, EMS, and utility services as well as answer and process emergency 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls for service. Those who live, work, and enjoy spending time in the City of Cambridge can rest assured that their calls for assistance are handled rapidly, professionally, and compassionately by a highly trained and qualified Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher.

Due to the complex and highly demanding nature of emergency communications, the City of Cambridge Emergency Communications Department (ECD) requires candidates to successfully complete a series of examinations to assess candidates' abilities and aptitudes for the ETD position. This guide has been designed to help prepare candidates to successfully complete the hiring, screening, and testing processes to become an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher for the City of Cambridge.

## The ECC and the Role of the ETD

The Emergency Communications Center (ECC) receives nearly 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 person in need of non-urgent assistance. For example, citizens may call to inquire if a vehicle was towed or to report a larceny that occurred a week ago.

The ECC is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days per year including nights, weekends, and holidays, and we maintain minimum staffing levels dependent upon operational needs. Our staffing complement includes Emergency Telecommunications Dispatchers, ECC Supervisors, a fully capable Public Safety Information Technology team, Assistant Directors, and a Director. The Director oversees the entire Emergency Communications Department and reports directly to the City Manager. Due to the nature of public safety communications work, there are instances where forced overtime is mandatory to meet minimum staffing levels.



Emergency Telecommunications Dispatchers perform many important duties and maintain a wide range of responsibilities. The following are some of the numerous duties of an ETD:

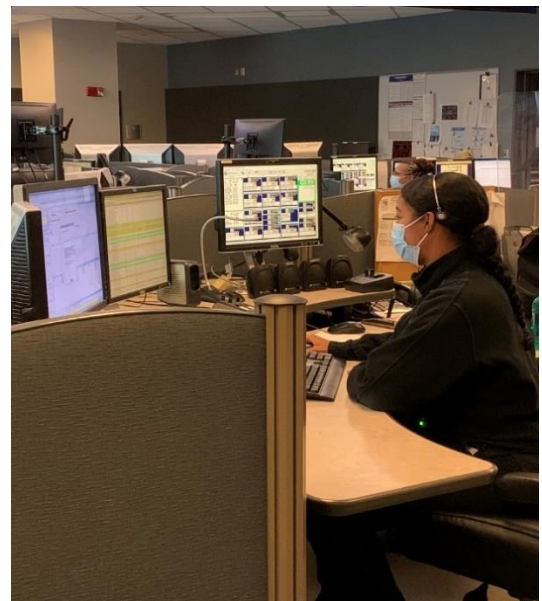
- Coordinating the operations and activities in the Emergency Communications Center (ECC).
- Testing, monitoring, and operating police and fire signaling systems.
- Receiving and processing police, fire, and EMS-related emergency calls guided by various national, state, and local protocols.

- Dispatching police, fire, EMS, and other emergency units and personnel as needed.
- Monitoring and operating radios, computers, telephones, and other specialized equipment in support of public safety communications and dispatch functions.
- Performing other dispatch, signal monitoring, and communications support duties as assigned.

### **Desirable Candidates**

Due to the demands of the role of the Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher, candidates should demonstrate they possess several required areas of knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications. Examples of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications are listed below. A full list can be found on the job posting located on the City’s website.

- Possession of a high school diploma or GED.
- Type at least 30 words or more per minute.
- Must have interest in, and be suitable for, work in a combined police, fire, and EMS dispatch center.
- Demonstrate maturity of judgment and character.
- Ability to learn and understand the basic field operations of police, fire, and EMS departments.
- Actively listen to callers on the telephone and first responders on the radio.
- Ability to gather information quickly and accurately.
- Can relay information to police officers, firefighters, EMS providers, etc. in a clear tone of voice.
- Ability to answer and satisfy the requests of public safety field units operating in the field.
- Have the capacity to provide instructions to callers, including emergency medical instructions.
- Read and understand a map and give directions.
- Ability to learn to use various types of technical equipment, including computer aided dispatch (CAD), signaling, alarm monitoring, telephone consoles, and general personal computers.
- Have natural customer service capabilities but can speak with a professionally authoritative tone of voice.
- Remain calm during emergency situations, peaking workloads, and multiple simultaneous responsibilities.
- Work well on a team with others and independently as appropriate
- Learn to prioritize incidents and manage multiple demands for attention.
- Work a schedule that includes rotating shift including days, nights, weekends, holidays, and occasional forced overtime.
- Take proper care of themselves so that they may care for others and contribute to a positive work environment.



Preference is given to those candidates who can demonstrate the following knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications:

- Detailed knowledge of the City of Cambridge, including Cambridge streets and locations.
- Demonstrated experience in one of several areas of public safety, including one year of experience as a police, fire or EMS dispatcher, a police officer, firefighter, EMT, or paramedic.
- 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.
- Certification from the Massachusetts State 911 Department's Public Safety Communications 5-Week Academy or CJIS certification from the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board.
- Bachelors or Associates degree in Criminal Justice or a related field.
- In addition to English, the ability to speak Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian-Creole, or Amharic.
- The City of Cambridge's workforce, like the community it serves, is diverse. Candidates must demonstrate the capability to work effectively with individuals and groups with a variety of identities, cultures, backgrounds, and ideologies.

## **How to Apply**

To apply for the Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher (ETD) position, interested persons should visit the City of Cambridge Personnel Department website [www.cambridgema.gov/jobs](http://www.cambridgema.gov/jobs). Resumés and cover letters can be emailed to [employment@cambridgema.gov](mailto:employment@cambridgema.gov), faxed to 617-349-4312, or sent by mail to the address below. Once received, applications are evaluated. If potential candidates' resumés and cover letters meet the minimum requirements, they will be contacted.

Internal applicants (those who currently work for the City of Cambridge) must submit a job bidding form and two (2) copies of both their resumé and letter of interest. External applicants (those who do not currently work for the City of Cambridge) should submit two (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

## **Testing Process**

Cambridge Emergency Communications Department utilizes a series of assessments to evaluate candidates' suitability for the Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher position. After an evaluation of candidates' cover letters and resumés, qualified candidates are invited to testing sessions. Testing sessions are in-person or remote. When held in-person, the testing takes place at the Robert W. Healy Public Safety Facility, 125 Sixth Street, Cambridge. The entire testing process takes approximately four (4) hours. Depending upon various factors, the tests may be administered over two separate sessions or the testing may occur all at once. There is no dress code for the testing session, though business casual is appreciated. Testing components are described below.

### **CritiCall Dispatcher Skills Test**

The CritiCall Dispatcher Skills Test offers a miniature replica of emergency communications work. No previous experience as a dispatcher or specialized training is required to succeed during testing. By simulating dispatcher tasks, CritiCall enables candidates to preview the job while they test for the

position. This section of the testing measures the skills and abilities a person must have prior to any on-the-job training. Candidates should ensure that they follow instructions carefully. Practice examples are given for each section of the exam. Practice examples are not timed but each section has a time limit and the exam has a maximum time limit of two (2) hours.

Candidates are *highly* encouraged to visit CritiCall's applicant preparation website, located at <https://critical911.com/dispatcher-testing/applicants/>, where applicants will find practice tests and incredibly helpful test preparation information. The City of Cambridge CritiCall Test consists of various components:

### **Keyboarding**

This is a typing test. Candidates are offered a practice session that is not evaluated. Once candidates complete the practice session, they will begin the typing test. Follow the instructions as they contain pertinent information as to how to score well. Candidates must type at least 30 word per minute. We recommend practicing prior to taking the test and utilizing a classic keyboard rather than a flat laptop style keyboard.

### **Decision Making**

This assessment requires decision making while simultaneously performing other tasks, such as determining which type of emergency response unit to send to a call based upon instructions given during the exam

### **Data Entry**

Test takers enter information, received either vocally or in writing, utilizing a keyboard. Like the decision-making module, candidates will perform other tasks simultaneously.

### **Call Summarization**

This module measures a candidate's ability to hear and understand information. It also tests the ability to take notes on a computer while listening to vocal information. The assessment measures the candidate's ability to filter out non-essential distractions and summarize key facts.

### **Cross Referencing**

The cross-referencing portion of the test assesses alphabetic, character recognition, and numeric searching skills. The test taker responds to both written and oral requests for information.

### **Character Comparison**

Test takers are presented with a series of characters and text, which they must correctly identify against a group of similarly phrased alternate characters.

### **Memory Recall**

This section tests candidates' memory and selective attention for written and audible information. It requires character recognition and listening accuracy.

### **Prioritization**

Candidates must determine the priority status of a situation based upon parameters described during the testing instructions.

### **Map Reading**

This portion of the exam measures a candidate's ability to read and interpret a map, determine the most direct route to an assigned destination based upon traffic signs, and requires a candidate to understand the cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west).

### **Reading Comprehension**

The reading comprehension section measures an applicant's ability to read, comprehend, and retain details contained in a short paragraph.

### **Spelling**

Candidates must spell commonly misspelled or misused words correctly.

### **CritiCall Dispatcher Personality Test**

The CritiCall Dispatcher Personality Test assesses candidates' fundamental personality traits, such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, self-regulation, and other similar traits. This test helps both the candidate and the ECD determine if a candidate's general disposition is appropriate for emergency communications work. Candidates should answer questions honestly as there are built-in measures to ensure truthfulness in the testing.

### **Geography Knowledge Test**

This is the only handwritten portion of the exams. Candidates typically require about thirty (30) to sixty (60) minutes to complete this exam, dependent upon test takers' knowledge of the City's geography. ETDs receive calls from all areas of the City of Cambridge, therefore familiarity with the city is preferred. Furthermore, the more familiar a candidate is with City geography, the more successful the candidate will be during training if hired. Candidates should study main streets, special landmarks, bridge, train stations, schools, parks, and public safety facilities (e.g., fire stations, police stations, etc.).



## **Department Application**

Upon completion of the testing, candidates are asked to complete a department application. Department applications are like other job applications, but additional information is required. Candidates will need to list demographic information, all email addresses, education history, foreign language abilities, foreign travel, licensure and certification information, military record information, employment history, criminal offense and protective order history, property ownership information, and personal references.

If a candidate submits an application and successfully passes all the assessments, the candidate will be notified that they have been selected for a formal interview. Those candidates whose scores do not meet requirements will be notified. Candidates who do not pass the process are welcome to apply for future openings, but they will not be reconsidered for the current process.

## **Interview Panel**



If candidates successfully pass the above assessments, they are invited to participate in an interview with a panel of ECD management and other external partners. The interviews provide an opportunity for candidates to share about their skills and qualifications and to ask any questions they have about the position. Candidates should plan for the interview to last approximately forty-five (45) minutes.

## **Background Check**

Emergency Telecommunications Dispatchers hold a position of public trust and have access to highly confidential and protected information. Therefore, the final step in the pre-employment process is a thorough background check. The background check is completed by the Cambridge Police Department Professional Standards Unit. The background check includes, but is not limited to, a review of the candidate's completed application, verification of work history, contact with personal references, and a criminal records check. Candidates may also be required to furnish documents, such as a copy of a driver's license, social security card, educational transcripts, birth records, financial records, and other similar documentation. Candidates must sign a release of information to facilitate the background check process.

All candidates are asked to participate actively with investigators and provide timely follow up and open communication. Candidates are encouraged to advise their references of the ETD application process so that they expect a telephone call from an investigator and quickly respond to any messages. The background process can take several weeks due to a variety of factors, but rapid responses from candidates and their references can greatly speed up the process.

## **Selection**

Upon successful completion of all elements of pre-employment process, candidates will be notified that they have been selected for the position of Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher. Those selected for hire will receive an offer of employment with a proposed start date. Dependent upon the number of applicants and the number of open positions, there may be candidates who successfully pass the screening process but are not selected for a position. Those candidates not selected will be notified that they have been placed on a list for future openings.



## Post Hire

If hired, candidates, now referred to as trainees, begin onboarding with orientation and training. The training program may take up to nine (9) months to complete. Below is a list of some objectives of the training program.

- Successfully graduate from the ECD 911 Academy or State 911 Department Academy.
- Take the Public Safety Telecommunications' Oath of Office (see Appendix A).
- Retain and apply skills learned in the academy while performing six (6) to nine (9) months of on-the-job training under the supervision of a Communications Training Officer (CTO).
- Perform the essential functions of the position during the probationary period of one (1) year and thereafter.



## Conclusion

It is our sincere hope that this document assists candidates through the pre-employment process. Of course, candidates should always follow specific instructions provided to them by ECD leadership as each hiring process may be a bit different dependent upon various factors, such as the number of vacancies, the availability of testing space, COVID-19 restrictions, etc. If candidates have any questions, they can contact the Emergency Communications Department by telephone at (617) 349-6911 or by email at [911info@cambridge911.org](mailto:911info@cambridge911.org).

The City of Cambridge Emergency Communications Department thanks all candidates for their interest and wishes them the best in the journey to become an Emergency Telecommunications Dispatcher.

**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.**

## **Appendix 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.

