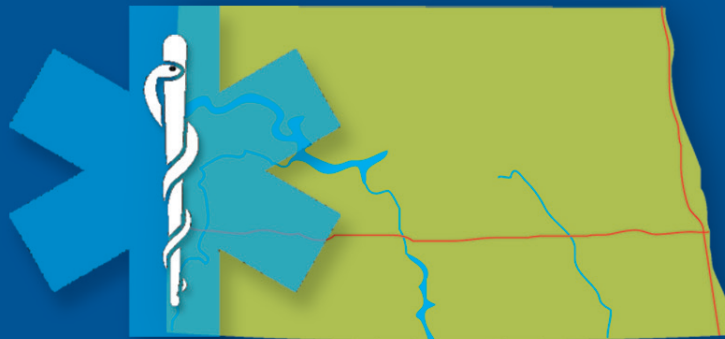


Volunteer Ambulance Service Sustainability: A Self-Assessment Tool



Created by
SafeTech Solutions, LLP

Adapted for
The North Dakota Rural EMS Improvement Project

Volunteer ambulance services across America are experiencing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Many are facing critical volunteer shortages. This tool is designed to help the volunteer ambulance service self-assess their strengths, weaknesses and long-term viability. It is also designed as a learning tool for services to understand how to maximize their appeal to a shrinking pool of potential volunteers.

This tool is based on the ongoing national study of both thriving and failing volunteer ambulance services and the essential elements necessary for sustainability by SafeTech Solutions. By asking the Key Assessment Questions, ambulance services and communities can begin to understand whether or not they possess the necessary elements to be sustainable. While services may survive without all elements, the absence of any of the key elements will increase the difficulty of recruiting and retaining volunteers.

On the next page you will find the Key Assessment Questions. Please answer each question as honestly as possible. Tally up the score for each Element section, and follow the directions at the end of the questions to evaluate your service's status. Explanations for each Element are provided at the end of the tool.

Question	A	B
1. Do you respond to less than 300 calls per year in your ambulance service's area?	YES	NO
2. Even though other public services in your community are provided with paid employees (such as public safety, road maintenance and schools), are there clear and compelling reasons that you understand for ambulance services in your area to be staffed by volunteers?	YES	NO
3. If your ambulance service went out of service, could a neighboring ambulance service consistently respond within 30 minutes or less to a 911 call?	NO	YES
4. Are some members of your service paid a salary or hourly wages for their work with the ambulance service (they are not volunteers)?	NO	YES
5. Do the people living in your ambulance service area care deeply about whether or not your service exists or survives?	YES	NO
6. Would volunteers and people in your community want to keep the ambulance service volunteer even if there were enough calls or money to make the service paid?	YES	NO
7. Are your local governments currently cutting public services because of revenue shortages?	YES	NO
8. Are your ambulance service members reluctant to move toward a paid ambulance service model?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 2: Local demographics and volunteering factors

Question	A	B
9. Does the area you draw volunteers from have a population of 1,500 or more?	YES	NO
10. Are more than 20% of the population over the age of 65?	NO	YES
11. Are a majority of working people in your service area employed outside the service area?	NO	YES
12. Is the socioeconomic environment of your community volunteer-friendly (people make enough money to have single income families and/or people have time to volunteer)?	YES	NO
13. Do special circumstances in your service area make volunteering difficult (i.e., many people working long hours in oil fields, agricultural, etc.)?	NO	YES
14. Do <i>most</i> employers in your service area allow people to leave work to respond to calls?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		



Element 3: Leadership of volunteer ambulance service

Question	A	B
15. Is the leader of your ambulance service clearly seen by volunteers and community people as a positive leader?	YES	NO
16. Does the leader have a track record of getting things done on time?	YES	NO
17. Does the leader have the respect and admiration of the volunteers?	YES	NO
18. Is the leader strong enough to enforce the important policies and practices of the service?	YES	NO
19. Is the leader adequately prepared for the job (does the leader have experience leading organizations, or has she or he had any leadership/management education or training)?	YES	NO
20. Is the leader taking an excess of call (more than 80 hours of call time per week)?	NO	YES
21. Does the leadership of your service change frequently (have you had three or more leaders in the past five years)?	NO	YES
22. Do potential volunteers want to follow your leader?	YES	NO
23. Is your leader enthused about being the leader of the ambulance service?	YES	NO
24. Are volunteers leaving or avoiding your service because of the leadership?	NO	YES
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 4: Culture of volunteer ambulance service

Question	A	B
25. Is the culture and atmosphere of your ambulance service inviting, professional and fun?	YES	NO
26. Do volunteers respect each other and enjoy being together?	YES	NO
27. Would volunteers describe the ambulance service as being like a family?	YES	NO
28. Are there people in your service who cause others to not join or stay?	NO	YES
29. Is conflict in your department rare and quickly resolved?	YES	NO
30. Does your ambulance service have strong policies about behavior and professional conduct that are understood and enforced?	YES	NO
31. Are the volunteers in your service recognized and rewarded for their service in a manner that is meaningful to them?	YES	NO
32. Are educational functions well attended?	YES	NO
33. Are volunteers proud of your service?	YES	NO
34. Would volunteers consider the atmosphere of your service enjoyable?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 5: Sustainable numbers of active volunteers

Question	A	B
35. Do you maintain a roster of at least 14 <u>active</u> members (to be <u>active</u> , a volunteer must take calls at least twice per month and attend a majority of service meetings)?	YES	NO
36. Do you have a balance of certification levels on your roster (at least seven active members with EMT or above certification)?	YES	NO
37. Do you have clear policies defining what it means to be <u>active</u> ?	YES	NO
38. Over the past five years, has the number of <u>active</u> members on your roster decreased?	NO	YES
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 6: Maintaining a schedule

Question	A	B
39. Does your service schedule volunteers for shifts and ensure that at least two people are assigned to the schedule 24/7 for each primary response unit?	YES	NO
40. Do you hold those scheduled for a specific shift responsible for responding?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 7: Safe and human scheduling

Question	A	B
41. Are any volunteers routinely taking more than 80 hours of calls per week?	NO	YES
42. Is your roster of active members large enough to easily allow volunteers to take time off at all times of the day and week when they need it?	YES	NO
43. Is it difficult to find people to respond at certain times of day or certain times of the week?	NO	YES
44. Are volunteers relieved of duty if they have been on calls or transfers that have significantly deprived them of sleep?	YES	NO
45. Do members regularly go on transfers that take more than four hours round trip?	NO	YES
46. In the past year, has anyone in your service been on call for more than 96 hours straight?	NO	YES
47. Are any volunteers complaining of being on call too much?	NO	YES
Add up the total for each column:		



Element 8: Funding for the ambulance service

Question	A	B
48. Do you bill for patient transports?	YES	NO
49. Is your ambulance service currently experiencing difficulty in paying debt?	NO	YES
50. During the past three years, have you noticed a trend toward expenses exceeding revenues?	NO	YES
51. Do you have a current written budget for your ambulance service?	YES	NO
52. Are your financial books up to date?	YES	NO
53. Are revenues currently matching costs?	YES	NO
54. Are financial shortages inhibiting the purchase of needed vehicles, equipment or facilities?	NO	YES
55. Do you have a financial reserve equal to 25 percent of your annual budget?	NO	YES
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 9: Facilities, equipment and vehicles

Question	A	B
56. Are your facilities consistently clean, maintained and a source of volunteer pride?	YES	NO
57. Do you have access to facilities adequate for training and administrative duties?	YES	NO
58. Do your facilities have an inviting place for volunteers to gather and relax?	YES	NO
59. Are vehicles adequate for the job, maintained and consistently reliable on calls?	YES	NO
60. Are your vehicles a source of volunteer pride?	YES	NO
61. Is your equipment up-to-date and well maintained?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		

Element 10: Entry / continuance barriers and recruitment

Question	A	B
62. Is the recruitment of volunteers an organizational priority for every member of your service?	YES	NO
63. Do you have specific recruitment plans, goals and expectations?	YES	NO
64. Are financial barriers for joining your ambulance service keeping volunteers from joining?	NO	YES
65. Are the expectations for joining your service and continuance in your service clear, written and enforced?	YES	NO
66. Are the communities you serve well-informed about the services you provide and your current needs (if any)?	YES	NO
67. Have you engaged in any community-wide recruitment efforts in the past six months?	YES	NO
Add up the total for each column:		

Scoring This Self-Assessment

(Fill in the totals from each of the 10 Elements)

Question	A	B
Element 1: Need and/or desire for ambulance services to be volunteer		
Element 2: Local demographics and volunteering factors		
Element 3: Leadership of volunteer ambulance service		
Element 4: Culture of volunteer ambulance service		
Element 5: Sustainable numbers of active volunteers		
Element 6: Maintaining a schedule		
Element 7: Safe and human scheduling		
Element 8: Funding for the ambulance service		
Element 9: Facilities, equipment and vehicles		
Element 10: Entry / continuance barriers and recruitment		
Add up the total for each column:		

The Big Picture

Your overall score in Column A provides an indication of your current health sustainability as a volunteer ambulance service.

If Column A is:	
50 or above	Your ambulance service shares many of the elements found in the most successful and sustainable volunteer ambulance services.
34-49	Your ambulance service faces significant challenges in continuing as a volunteer ambulance service. Look closely at the individual elements to see where you need to focus attention.
33 or below	Without significant changes, your ambulance service may not be sustainable and may fail in the near future. Look closely at the individual elements to see where you need to focus attention.

To better understand your service's strengths and weaknesses, take a close look at the Elements in which Column A is not significantly higher than Column B. To learn more, read over the descriptions of the Elements below.

Element 1: Need and/or desire for ambulance services to be volunteer

Inspiring people to volunteer large amounts of time to an ambulance service necessitates that there be a clear need and/or desire for a volunteer-based ambulance service within the community. This means there must truly be a genuine need (a shortage of financial resources to pay for staff) or there must be a proud, established and supported tradition of ambulance volunteerism in the community that the community members desire to maintain. People do not want to volunteer in a situation where they perceive that they are being taken advantage of. Your score for this Element reflects the nature of your service area and may be difficult to change.

Element 2: Local demographics and volunteering factors

For volunteerism to be sustainable, there must be enough willing, capable, economical able, available and age-appropriate people to draw from. This means there must be a large enough pool of people to draw from. The study of successful volunteer ambulance services suggests that there must be a population of 1,500 or more to draw from. Some services in smaller populations are successful by making their service highly appealing to potential volunteers through other elements, such as culture and leadership. Aim for a score of 4 or more in this element. Your score for this Element reflects the nature of your service area and may be difficult to change.

The Big Picture (continued)

Element 3: Leadership of volunteer ambulance service

One of the most important elements of a successful volunteer ambulance service is its leadership. In a number of surveys (from all kinds of volunteer organizations), volunteers consistently report that the leadership of the organization has a big impact on whether they join and stay in a volunteer organization. The best volunteer ambulance services have clear and capable leaders. These individuals are respected by the volunteers and by people within the community. They are people that other volunteers want to follow and have a demonstrated ability to lead the organization and get things done. The leadership in successful services does not constantly change, and the leader has time to lead and is not exhausted from taking too many call hours. Aim for a score of 7 or more in this element.

Element 4: Culture of volunteer ambulance service

Successful volunteer ambulance services create a volunteering culture that is inviting, warm, fun and family-like. But these services also have clear professional and educational expectations and enforced policies. In these organizations, creating a respectful volunteering environment is a priority. Bad attitudes, ongoing interpersonal conflict, and non-professional behaviors are not tolerated. Ongoing and interesting training and education are priorities, and volunteers are recognized and rewarded in a manner that is meaningful to them. Aim for a score of 7 or more in this element.

Element 5: Sustainable numbers of active volunteers

A volunteer ambulance service scheduling two people 24/7 should have a roster of at least 14 active volunteers with a balanced certification mix to meet the service's need. Consider "active" volunteers to be those who take calls at least two times per month (with exceptions for health, vacations and special needs) and attend more than 50 percent of ambulance service meetings. With two people scheduled at all times, 14 active members could limit each volunteer's responsibility to 24 hours of calls per week (this does not account for vacations and other absences). Aim for a score of 4 in this element.

Element 6: Maintaining a schedule

Using an "all-call" system where there is no call schedule and specific individuals are not designated to be on call is not reliable, does not distribute call time responsibly, and does not distribute call opportunity fairly. While many services have operated with an "all-call" system in the past, the difficulty in attracting and keeping volunteers today makes this an unreliable means of ensuring that 100 percent of all calls will be answered promptly. An all-call system adds stress to volunteering when there are few active volunteers. Aim for a score of 2 in this element.

The Big Picture (continued)

Element 7: Safe and human scheduling

Regardless of how few or many calls a service responds to, being “on call” is stressful and activity-limiting. There is always the potential for back-to-back calls. Adequate rest, sleep and time off are essential to patient, provider and public safety. In most circumstances, no volunteer should ever be on call more than 80 hours in any given week, and ideally calls should be limited to 48 hours per week. If the service has multiple calls in a 24-hour period, no volunteer should be left on call if they have not had adequate sleep. Particular attention should be paid to long transfers and providing relief when volunteers have made a long transfer. Aim for a score of 5 or more in this element.

Element 8: Funding for the ambulance service

Sustainable volunteer ambulance services must have adequate funding for facilities, training, equipment vehicles, insurances, administrative costs, medical direction and rewards. When volunteer services do not have adequate funding, it increases the stress of volunteering and decreases the service’s appeal as a place to volunteer. Successful volunteer services know their costs and revenues and plan and follow a budget. A sustainable ambulance service should have a reserve of 25 percent of their annual budget. Aim for a score of 6 or more in this element.

Element 9: Facilities, equipment and vehicles

Volunteer participation and pride are tied to having the right facilities, vehicles and equipment. Facilities should be clean, inviting and provide: adequate space for housing vehicles and storing equipment; adequate space for training; comfortable and relaxing crew quarters; and administrative office space. Vehicles must be adequate for the job, maintained, and rarely break down. Medical and rescue equipment must be up-to-date, maintained, and a source of volunteer pride. Aim for a score of 5 or more in this element.

Element 10: Entry / continuance barriers and recruitment

Sustainable volunteer ambulance services make the recruitment of volunteers a service-wide priority. They have clear, written and enforced expectations for volunteers and potential volunteers. These expectations are reasonable in terms of making it possible for potential volunteers to enter without undue financial expectations, but they also spell out ongoing expectations, including volunteer behavior, professionalism, performance expectations and activity expectations. Aim for a score of 5 or more in this element.

NOTES

The North Dakota Rural EMS Improvement Project
SafeTech Solutions, LLP
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