



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

APRIL 1, 2022

Follow-up on Emergency Medical Services: Actions needed to address upcoming retirements and workforce diversity

The Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division and regional partners are implementing new plans to mitigate Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) staffing shortages and collect race and gender data. These efforts will advance diversity in the EMS workforce. In response to our recommendations, EMS and its partner agencies centralized planning for EMT training. This approach increased training consistency, leveraged division resources, and provided additional courses for agencies to offer new recruits. Evaluations in 2022 and 2023 will provide outcome data that EMS and the region will use to ensure an adequate pipeline to supply the EMT workforce needed in the 2026–2031 EMS levy. EMS and its partner agencies began to collect and report workforce diversity data amid a larger effort to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in King County's fire and emergency services.

Gaps remain in workforce planning for paramedics and diversity data transparency. Without full implementation of our recommendations, the risk of paramedic shortages and inadequate information to guide efforts to increase workforce diversity remain. The region's new program for EMT training is important to support the paramedic workforce, as paramedic candidates are required to have three years of EMT experience. However, additional testing, certification, and training required for paramedics can take an additional two years. This underscores the necessity of strategic planning to maintain an adequate paramedic workforce, especially as service demand remains high.

EMS and its partners developed strategies to collect consistent race and gender data but not all agencies have participated yet. Without complete data, the division and region will not be able to measure the effectiveness of recruiting and retention efforts or progress toward diversity goals.

Of the five audit recommendations:

	3 DONE		2 PROGRESS		0 OPEN
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.		Partially implemented Auditor will continue to monitor.		Remain unresolved Auditor will continue to monitor.	

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.



Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



The Emergency Medical Services Division should work with levy partners on developing, implementing, and documenting strategic workforce planning practices, such as the practices identified in this report.

STATUS UPDATE: By late 2020, EMT position vacancies exceeded the level anticipated in the 2020–2025 levy strategic plan. The main reason for this was staff retirements. EMS and its regional partners allocated a one-time funding increase to cover additional EMT training courses and committed to a more thorough review of workforce needs and costs for the remainder of the levy period. In July 2021, EMS and its regional partners completed an updated review and analysis of staff turnover and expansion at fire agencies in King County. The review analyzed methods for estimating yearly number of students, EMT classroom costs, and logistical costs such as instructor and classroom availability.

In September 2021, the region endorsed an expanded Regional Initial EMT Training Program. The new framework uses labor forecasts from the Washington state Employment Security Department for King County to project potential number of new hires and sets aside sufficient program funding. Partner agencies will collect and provide additional data to inform annual evaluations of the training program. In addition, the region is developing methods to expand number and diversity of instructors.

WHAT REMAINS: The division has addressed the need for strategic workforce planning for EMTs. To complete this recommendation, the division should conduct a similar effort focused on paramedics. EMS should complete this work in time to implement strategies during the 2020–2025 levy and incorporate strategic plans to maintain an adequate paramedic workforce in the 2026–2031 EMS levy. It should include the specific workforce planning practices we detailed in the audit: analyzing data on paramedic attrition, hiring, and training and conducting cost analysis.

Recommendation 2

On August 2, 2019

DONE



Recommendation 3

PROGRESS



To mitigate risk and obtain key information to inform workforce diversity efforts, the Emergency Medical Services Division should modify its contracts with partner agencies to require them to collect, maintain, and report data on self-identified race and gender of staff and applicants.

STATUS UPDATE: Over the past two years, EMS has worked within the structure of the regional system to advance efforts to collect workforce diversity data. EMS partnered with the King County Fire Chiefs Association (KCFCA) Diversity Subcommittee to lay the groundwork for evolution in King County's fire and emergency service agencies toward a more diverse and equitable workforce. Data collection is foundational to measuring progress in this effort. In 2020, the EMS Division collaborated with the KCFCA on a contract to collect baseline information on the race and gender data partner agencies currently maintain about their staff and applicants. The consultant presented

their results to the EMS Division and KCFCA in March 2021, which included race data for 18 of 28 agencies and gender data on current staff for 27 of 28 agencies. They found that few partner agencies collected race and gender data on job applicants, and most do not track trainee data by race and gender. The consultant developed a robust Strategies and Toolkit for Increasing Diversity in Fire & Emergency Services document that centers data collection as an integral way to measure progress. The EMS Division and KCFCA’s Diversity Subcommittee adopted the toolkit as the standard guidance for agencies to apply in collecting race and gender data as well as to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion more generally. The subcommittee met in February 2022 to continue work toward identifying workforce diversity goals and measures. EMS indicated that it will publish race and gender data from partner agencies as well as progress toward equity goals in its annual reports.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, EMS needs to continue to collaborate with KCFCA to collect consistent race and gender data of staff and applicants and publish the data in its annual report.

Recommendation 4	On August 2, 2019	DONE	
Recommendation 5	On August 2, 2019	DONE	

Luc Poon conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor’s Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.