

Charting the Future of 9-1-1: Introducing NENA's National 9-1-1 Report Card to the Nation

By W. Mark Adams

As we enter into the year 2000, on behalf of the NENA Executive Board, it is my pleasure to introduce you to one of NENA's most ambitious, and significant projects ever; the NENA 9-1-1 Report Card to the Nation. The Report Card to the Nation (RCN) represents NENA's commitment to continue our tradition of industry leadership into the next century.

The RCN will be a comprehensive document, prepared by NENA and members of the NENA "community." Our efforts will be guided by a nationally recognized, independent consulting firm, serving as Project Manager. The Report will analyze and describe the current state of 9-1-1. Included in this Report will be an assessment of the current level of reliability and accessibility of 9-1-1 in America. The RCN will also identify present and future challenges facing 9-1-1.

Our intent is to present a balanced and accurate summary of where we are as an industry. Beyond this, we expect the Report to assume a role as a "9-1-1 Encyclopedia or Almanac, setting forth important statistics, industry profiles, and baseline metrics for 9-1-1 as an industry.

It is our hope that if you are a PSAP manager, you will find the RCN and invaluable desktop reference tool for your daily work. You will be able to reference pay scales and hiring practices, staffing levels, and important operational policies and practices. Additionally, you will be able to benchmark your organization against other peer organizations throughout the country.

If you are a commercial member, the RCN will provide you with important industry statistics and baselines. You will understand who busy what, where they are located, and what type of services they need. In short, you will not only understand the 9-1-1 industry better, you will be able to assess your marketing efforts more efficiently.

The RCN's value will provide this and more. There are important byproducts of our preparing such a work, and NENA and 9-1-1 will enjoy tremendous residual benefits from producing, and maintaining this information.

For all of us in this industry, we will have increased our collective understanding of the underlying market forces that shape telecommunications. Some experts believe that we are about to experience exponential growth, both in dollars invested, and technology supplied, in public safety communications. Wireless assessments and fees alone represent new inflows of billions of dollars.

For the entire industry, developing and maintaining an industry profile will be the starting point to attracting long-term investments in our infrastructure, and attracting successful companies with realistic business plans to assist us in our work.

At the end of the day, 9-1-1 will simply work better if we are successful in attracting the “best of the best firms’ to our industry, and helping them succeed.

There are some key indirect benefits we will receive from producing the RCN as well. Your organization, NENA, will be a much stronger, and well-informed organization. We will have the latest picture of the true state of 9-1-1 each time we represent your interests before the FCC, and Congress. Accordingly, your membership in NENA will provide you with a much more credible and effective advocate.

Developing the RCN will also greatly enhance the data available to us as your Association. It will help us better define your needs, and to identify where we are going as a membership. The RCN provides us an opportunity to shape and define the future of 9-1-1 on our terms, in a proactive manner.

The job of producing the RCN is a monumental task and an ambitious project. Neither NENA, nor any other organization, has the resources and budgetary means to underwrite and execute such a project independently. However, because it is so important to our mission, we intend to lead this effort, and to develop the buy-in and underwriting for this project. We are developing a credible and effective plan to produce this Report. We will be calling upon you, our members, to help us in the near future.

We are ready to lead, and we hope you will join us in the journey. NENA believes that you should expect an industry Association dedicated to 9-1-1 to do this and more. We share your commitment, and your simple and noble goal of saving lives through 9-1-1.

It is with that same commitment and effort that we intend to bring together all interested and necessary parties to provide the most comprehensive 9-1-1 study ever compiled.

If you have a question or would like to be involved in working on the report, please feel free to call the National Office.

Report Card to the Nation Q & A

The NENA Report Card to the Nation (RCN) is a complex undertaking. We asked our leader, President Bill Hinkle to answer some questions about the RCN for our members. (NN=Nena News; H=Hinkle)

NN. Why is NENA doing this project now, with so many other challenges in 9-1-1?

H. We view this project as an ideally organized and structured way for us to do many things at once for our membership, and for our industry. The 9-1-1 industry is at a crossroads. We have more challenges coming now, than ever before. At the same time however, we, as an industry, do not have reliable data on how large we are, how many calls we receive, or where the calls come from. From a national perspective, there is a need for this baseline understanding of our industry. There simply is no better way to solve our problems than to define them based on the correct data. The RCN will provide that data.

NN. What is the role of NENA in this project?

H. NENA will be the principal entity responsible for the coordination and delivery of the report. While we will be hiring an independent Project Manager, the work of compiling the report will be greatly assisted by the entire NENA community, our staff, our members, our Board, our chapters, and our committees. This report will clearly be our work, and it will have our organization's seal of approval on it.

NN. Do we know what the report will tell us?

H. The report will accurately illustrate, in a very balanced and neutral manner, where 9-1-1 is today. It will also provide us with added insight into how changing technologies will impact the availability and reliability of 9-1-1 in the future.

NN. There is always a danger that some will say that the report is biased, or flawed. What are you doing to meet those challenges?

H. The report will be factual, and we expect it to be neutral. We intend to keep the report contents free from bias and opinion at all costs. All parties, from the PSAP community to the telephone industry, will be part of the report and receive equal degrees of candor and accountability.

NENA is dedicated to making the report factual, and candid. We are going to insure this in three ways. First, we are going to form a national advisory commission that will have supervisory oversight in how the report is compiled. In addition to public safety, we will have three representatives from our industry on the commission. There will be members from the wireless and wireline industries and a member of NENA's Business Alliance. It will be a group of very high-level professionals. WE are going to charge this committee with the responsibility of making sure we have a comprehensive, inclusive, and accurate report. Secondly, we are going to include input from all of the stakeholders in 9-1-1 in the report, ignoring no element in the 9-1-1 "puzzle." The key for us is to include all stakeholders, in all parts of the industry, across the country. Lastly, we are going to review this document as a NENA organization, first from the staff, to the technical committees, and then to the Executive Board. Each of us within NENA is going to review this document to make sure it is consistent with its stated purpose of promoting the industry and saving lives, and to make sure it is independent and accurate.

NN. Why are you hiring a project manager for the RCN?

H. We expect this project to have a very high level of credibility. To do this, we thought it would be prudent to hire an independent and seasoned manager who has completed projects of this scope and magnitude. We are going to hire an internationally renowned consulting firm to organize and review the preparation of the Report. By the time this is read, I am sure we will have hired a consulting firm that is a household name in the business community, and one that is nationally recognized for accuracy and credibility. In the end, we will have independence, credibility and expertise applied directly to the project.

NN. Is there any benefit to public safety members?

H. There will be an incredible benefit for NENA's public safety members. We expect to cover issues such as call volume, staffing, hiring practices, call protocol standards, and other economic and funding statistics, as well as other key metrics that are important for managing PSAPs. Beyond just the management concepts, the RCN will provide the PSAP manager with an overview of the entire industry including future trends, challenges and solutions, and current data on all aspects of the 9-1-1 marketplace. The RCN will be the repository for all questions and information our members may have.

NN. What about for NENA's Commercial members?

H. The benefits for our commercial members, and the companies for which they work, will be significant. The RCN will be the industry "almanac" and reference guide for all of the relevant market data in our business. From switches and routers, to CPE equipment and location services, the RCN will tell us how many, how old, and provide geographic analyses of key statistics for the industry. We see this type of information as critical for our commercial member, from marketing, to product development, to investor relations. If we provide comprehensive data, our commercial members should benefit across the board. Simply stated "The Report Card to the Nation is a project that will benefit **all** NENA members."