

ALLEN COUNTY FIRE & EMS DISTRICT

2026 Adaptive Framework

Vision, Implementation Plan & Strategic Operating Framework

~130,000

Allen County Fire & EMS
District Population (2025)

550 sq mi

District Service Area

\$49M

Projected FY2027 Budget

3-5 Years

Implementation Horizon

Prepared by: Executive Fire & EMS Team

Allen County Fire & EMS District • 2026

Disclaimer: This document is intended for planning and policy development purposes. Statements regarding system performance are based on aggregate observations and do not reflect any specific incident or determination of liability. National standards referenced herein are guidelines intended to inform planning and do not establish legal requirements or guarantees of performance. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented, this document may contain preliminary assumptions, errors, omissions, or information subject to change as planning, governance review, and implementation efforts evolve.

Executive Summary

Allen County’s Fire and Emergency Medical Services system stands at a critical inflection point. Increasing call volume, declining volunteer availability, evolving service demands, and rising fiscal pressures require a coordinated, disciplined approach to ensure consistent and reliable emergency response across the county.

This Adaptive Framework presents a clear, executable strategy for strengthening regional capability while preserving local oversight, accountability, and community representation. It reflects a deliberate progression, not a departure, from the system that has been built, advancing coordination, improving performance, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Vision Statement

To establish a coordinated, accountable, and sustainable countywide Fire & EMS system that delivers consistent, high-quality emergency services; protects firefighter and paramedic safety and wellness; respects local governance and labor agreements; and earns public trust through transparency, professionalism, and fiscal stewardship.

This vision is grounded in the principle that effective regional coordination does not require the removal of local oversight. It depends instead on clearly defined roles, disciplined governance, shared standards, and collaborative execution across all participating districts and stakeholders.

Five Core Objectives

- Establish Clear Governance and Accountability — Create a legally sound, transparent governance and oversight framework that defines authority, decision-making pathways, and performance reporting while preventing overreach and maintaining public confidence.
- Unify Strategy Through Executive Leadership — Implement an Executive Fire Chief model that serves as convener, coordinator, and system integrator, aligning countywide priorities while supporting district leadership, labor partners, and elected officials.
- Standardize Where Necessary to Improve Safety and Performance — Align critical operational elements—including response deployment, EMS oversight, training standards, QA/QI processes, and policy frameworks—to improve interoperability, firefighter safety, patient outcomes, and system reliability.
- Strengthen Workforce Sustainability and Professionalism — Address staffing standards, recruitment, retention, training, leadership development, and wellness through data-driven analysis and labor-management collaboration to ensure a stable and capable workforce.
- Ensure Financial Stewardship and Long-Term Resilience — Coordinate budgeting, capital planning, and asset management through a disciplined, incremental approach that supports operational needs, reduces duplication, and ensures responsible use of taxpayer resources.

Expected Outcomes

Successful execution of this framework will produce measurable, durable improvements across the system:

- Improved response consistency, operational efficiency, and firefighter safety
- A coordinated fire-based EMS system with standardized medical oversight and quality improvement
- Transparent governance with clear accountability and performance reporting

- Strong labor-management relationships supported by structured change management
- Sustainable staffing models aligned with risk, demand, and fireground safety standards
- Reduced administrative duplication and enhanced countywide interoperability
- Increased public confidence through measurable performance and clear communication

This strategy is intentionally phased. Early efforts focus on assessment, alignment, and trust-building, followed by deliberate, data-driven implementation and long-term optimization. Progress is guided by defined metrics, structured oversight, and continuous engagement with district leadership, labor organizations, and elected officials. This is not a one-time initiative, it is a durable framework designed to adapt to future challenges while maintaining stability, accountability, and operational excellence.

Governance, Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, and Interlocal Framework

Effective governance is the cornerstone of a successful countywide Fire & EMS system. The Allen County Fire & EMS District’s governance framework must balance coordination and accountability with respect for statutory authority and local oversight. The Executive Fire Chief operates within this balance by serving as the strategic leader accountable to the Fire & EMS Service Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, a structure intentionally designed to prevent overreach, maintain public trust, and ensure decisions are made collaboratively and transparently.

Defining Roles, Authority, and Decision-Making Pathways

Within the first 90 days, the Executive Fire Chief will work with County Commissioners, County Council, County Chiefs, legal counsel, district attorneys, and participating boards and entities to finalize and document the governance framework outlined in the interlocal agreement. This documentation will specify the scope of the Executive Fire Chief’s authority, the advisory and oversight role of the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, and the operational independence retained by each district. Clear definitions reduce ambiguity, limit conflict, and provide confidence to elected officials, labor partners, and the public that the system operates within established legal boundaries.

Fire & EMS Service Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee

The Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee will function as the primary accountability body for countywide strategy. Membership will reflect county leadership and participating districts, ensuring balanced representation and shared ownership. Committee responsibilities include approving strategic plans, reviewing performance metrics, overseeing grant and funding strategies, and receiving regular reports from the Executive Fire Chief. The Committee will not engage in daily operations or personnel management; its focus is policy direction, risk oversight, and long-term sustainability.

Board Representation and Composition

The Board of Trustees will be composed of nine (9) members, with six (6) appointed by the County Commissioners and three (3) appointed by the County Council. This balanced appointment structure ensures both executive and legislative input while maintaining a manageable and effective governing body.

Appointments will be made with consideration of geographic diversity across county quadrants and will prioritize individuals who currently serve on existing district boards, territory boards, or other participating governing bodies. This approach ensures members bring direct knowledge of current operations, governance structures, and community expectations. In accordance with applicable law, individuals serving in these capacities must possess relevant Fire and/or EMS experience, ensuring that board members have the technical understanding necessary to evaluate policy decisions, operational impacts, and system-wide initiatives. A key commitment of this framework is to maintain representation from each current operating authority within the nine-member structure through deliberate appointment, either through direct representation or through coordinated selection of experienced leaders familiar with those systems.

Board of Directors Composition

This document defines a 9-member Board (Beginning Jan 1st, 2027) of Trustees (6 appointed by County Commissioners, 3 by County Council). The Executive Fire Chief job description references a separate 4-member Oversight Committee (Present-December 31st, 2026) (1 County Commissioner, 1 County Council Member, 1 Allen County Fire District Board Member, 1 Provider Unit Member).

Subcommittee Structure

To support the work of the full Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, a structured subcommittee system will be established. These subcommittees allow for focused oversight, detailed review, and subject-matter expertise on key functional areas while maintaining clear reporting and accountability to the full committee. Initial subcommittees will include:

- Policy and Governance Subcommittee — Responsible for reviewing interlocal agreements, bylaws, SOP/SOG alignment, and governance processes to ensure legal compliance and operational clarity.
- Finance and Audit Subcommittee — Provides oversight of budgeting, financial reporting, capital planning, grant strategy, and fiscal accountability across the system.
- Merit and Professional Standards Subcommittee — Reviews hiring, promotion, and performance systems to ensure fairness, consistency, and alignment with established merit principles and applicable law.

Additional subcommittees may be established as needed to address evolving priorities such as training, safety, EMS oversight, or workforce development. All subcommittees function in an advisory and review capacity, bringing recommendations to the full Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee for consideration and action.

Transparency and Reporting

Reporting and transparency are central to this governance model. Within the first six months, standardized quarterly reporting will be implemented covering operations, EMS performance, staffing trends, financial indicators, capital planning, and wellness initiatives. These reports will be delivered to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee and made available, in appropriate form, to participating boards and the public. This reporting cadence ensures early identification of risks, reinforces accountability, and supports informed decision-making at every level of the organization.

Governance Review and Scope Integrity

As implementation progresses, governance processes will be refined but not expanded beyond their intended scope. Annual governance reviews will be conducted to ensure the framework remains effective, legally compliant, and aligned with county objectives. By maintaining disciplined governance, the Allen County Fire & EMS District can coordinate a complex, multi-district system without undermining local oversight or eroding public trust.

Executive Leadership Model and Countywide Operating Rhythm

The Executive Fire Chief's leadership model is designed to unify strategy across a complex, multi-district system. Success depends not on authority alone, but on trust, consistency, and disciplined execution. The Executive Fire Chief functions as a convener, coordinator, and facilitator, aligning district leadership, labor partners, and elected officials around shared goals while respecting the operational realities of each participating organization.

Listening and Alignment: The First 60 Days

The first phase of leadership implementation focuses on listening and alignment. During the initial 60 days, the Executive Fire Chief will conduct structured listening sessions with each district's fire chief, board leadership, union representatives, EMS leadership, and key county stakeholders. These sessions will document operational strengths, challenges, and expectations, forming the foundation for a shared understanding of system priorities and ensuring that subsequent decisions are grounded in operational reality rather than assumption.

Countywide Operating Rhythm

Establishing a consistent countywide operating rhythm is a core leadership objective. Within the first 30 days, the Executive Fire Chief will formalize a recurring executive meeting structure that includes district board members, chiefs, functional leads, EMS, training, logistics, finance, wellness, and administration, and labor representation. These meetings will follow a standardized agenda focused on operational coordination, performance metrics, upcoming initiatives, and risk management.

Decision-making processes will be documented and transparent. The Executive Fire Chief will implement a formal change management escalation and resolution framework defining how issues move from operational discussion to executive decision. This ensures timely resolution of system-wide issues and protects local chiefs from unilateral directives that fall outside the agreed governance framework.

Change Management Framework

Change management is the structured, disciplined process of planning, communicating, implementing, and sustaining organizational change in a manner that minimizes disruption, ensures compliance, and builds long-term acceptance across the workforce and all stakeholder groups. Within a countywide Fire & EMS system, effective change management ensures that modifications to operations, staffing, policy, training, governance, or financial structures are introduced in a controlled and transparent manner, with clearly defined purpose, appropriate sequencing, and the communication and support necessary to sustain change over time.

The Executive Fire Chief's change management approach is governed by seven core principles:

- **Clarity of Purpose** — Every change must be tied to a defined operational need, safety improvement, legal requirement, or strategic objective.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** — Chiefs, labor representatives, elected officials, and frontline personnel are engaged early to provide input, identify concerns, and build shared ownership.
- **Transparency and Communication** — Changes are communicated clearly, consistently, and in advance, reducing uncertainty and misinformation.
- **Phased Implementation** — Changes are introduced in deliberate stages where appropriate, allowing for evaluation, adjustment, and risk mitigation.
- **Compliance with Law and Agreements** — All changes affecting wages, hours, or working conditions are implemented in accordance with collective bargaining agreements and applicable law.

- Training and Support — Personnel receive the tools, guidance, and training necessary to adapt successfully.
- Measurement and Accountability — Outcomes are monitored through defined metrics to ensure changes achieve their intended purpose without unintended consequences.

No significant system change occurs without structure, communication, and accountability. This disciplined approach protects workforce stability, maintains operational continuity, and builds trust across districts and stakeholders.

Leadership Development

Leadership development is embedded in this operating model. By the end of the first year, the Executive Fire Chief will introduce a countywide leadership development initiative for chief officers and emerging leaders, aligned with standardized expectations for command performance, ethics, and professional conduct. This initiative supports succession planning and reinforces a shared leadership culture across the county. Over time, this operating model creates predictability, trust, and cohesion. The Executive Fire Chief's effectiveness is measured not by control, but by the system's ability to function collaboratively, respond effectively, and adapt responsibly to changing demands.

District Impact Summary: Tax Alignment, Response Standardization, and System-Wide Benefits

This Adaptive Framework strengthens every participating district, regardless of size or current capacity, by aligning funding, response, and performance while preserving local governance and operational identity. The benefits are grounded in the operational and financial realities that every district faces today.

Tax Alignment and Financial Coordination

Aligning tax rates and financial structures is not about uniformity, it is about equity, transparency, and long-term sustainability. Districts with higher tax rates gain increased capacity to support staffing, apparatus replacement, training, and infrastructure. Districts with lower funding benefit from greater regional stability, reduced reliance on neighboring resources, and more predictable long-term planning.

A coordinated financial strategy enables:

- Shared purchasing and capital planning, reducing costs for apparatus, equipment, and facilities
- Stronger competitiveness for state and federal grants through unified applications
- Reduction of administrative and operational duplication
- Stabilized service delivery across district boundaries, ensuring taxpayer investment is used efficiently

Response Standardization and Operational Impact

Standardizing response protocols, including closest-unit response, alarm assignments, and dispatch coordination, improves both operational efficiency and firefighter safety. For high-performing districts, this creates consistency in how outside resources integrate, ensuring shared expectations, communication standards, and command coordination. For districts with staffing variability, it establishes clear expectations and support structures, reducing coverage gaps and preventing over-reliance on neighboring departments during peak demand or major incidents.

System-Wide Benefits for All Districts

National standards emphasize not just individual performance, but system-wide reliability, effective response force, and depth of coverage. Even fully staffed, high-performing districts benefit from a coordinated system. Firefighter safety and operational effectiveness depend on system strength, not isolated performance. This framework delivers:

- Increased reliability of neighboring districts during automatic aid and multi-company incidents
- Consistent staffing and response expectations across the county
- Greater depth of coverage when units are committed or out of service
- Safer fireground operations through predictable, standardized response models
- Reduced operational strain from compensating for under-resourced areas
- Greater financial efficiency and access to shared resources
- Reduced risk and liability through aligned policies and training
- Long-term sustainability through coordinated planning and governance

Staffing Systems, Payroll Systems, and Network Integration

Successful coordination of a countywide Fire & EMS system requires alignment of core administrative and operational infrastructure. Variability in staffing systems, payroll processes, scheduling platforms, and technology networks across districts creates inefficiencies, increases administrative burden, and introduces compliance, compensation accuracy, and data integrity risks. The objective of this initiative is to align and integrate these systems into a coordinated, reliable framework that supports operational consistency, financial accountability, and workforce stability.

Phase 1: Assessment and System Inventory (0–90 Days)

Within the first 90 days, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate a comprehensive review of all existing staffing models, scheduling systems, payroll platforms, timekeeping processes, and network infrastructure across participating districts. This review will identify system capabilities, limitations, redundancies, compliance considerations, and contractual obligations associated with each platform. Input from fiscal officers, administrative staff, IT personnel, and labor representatives will be incorporated to ensure accuracy and operational relevance.

Based on this assessment, a coordinated alignment strategy will be developed and implemented within a 6-to-12-month timeframe, not driven by immediate consolidation, but by deliberate alignment of standards, processes, and system functionality to ensure interoperability and consistency across the county.

Staffing Systems Alignment

Staffing systems will be aligned to support consistent scheduling practices, minimum staffing requirements, and workforce accountability across all participating districts. This includes standardizing shift configurations where appropriate, aligning vacancy tracking and overtime management practices, and ensuring that staffing systems accurately reflect operational needs and contractual obligations. Scheduling platforms will be evaluated for compatibility or integration, enabling consistent reporting, transparency in staffing levels, and improved workforce planning.

Payroll Systems Alignment

Payroll alignment is critical to maintaining trust, compliance, and financial accuracy. Within the implementation period, payroll systems will be evaluated and aligned to ensure consistency in pay structures, pay periods, timekeeping practices, and reporting standards. Alignment will address:

- Pay cycles and payroll processing timelines
- FLSA work periods and overtime calculations
- Specialty pays, incentives, and contractual compensation elements
- Leave tracking, including vacation, sick leave, and injury leave
- Pension and benefit contributions in accordance with applicable systems

The objective is not to eliminate local control of payroll, but to ensure that all systems operate under consistent rules, produce accurate outputs, and meet all legal and contractual requirements.

Network and Technology Integration

Technology and network integration are essential to coordinated operations and administrative efficiency. The Executive Fire Chief will work with IT personnel and vendors to evaluate current network systems, data platforms, reporting tools, and cybersecurity standards. The goal is to establish interoperability between systems where feasible, enabling secure data sharing, centralized reporting, and improved access to critical information across districts. Key priorities include:

- Ensuring compatibility or integration between scheduling and payroll systems
- Establishing standardized data reporting formats for staffing, payroll, and operational metrics
- Enhancing cybersecurity protections and data integrity protocols
- Supporting interoperability for communications, records management, and administrative functions

Implementation and Oversight

Implementation will be phased and coordinated to minimize disruption to daily operations and payroll processing. Pilot integrations may be introduced prior to full adoption to validate system performance and identify necessary adjustments. Training will be provided to administrative personnel and end users to ensure smooth transition and consistent application. Progress will be monitored through regular reporting to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, with updates on system alignment, identified risks, and implementation milestones. Any changes affecting wages, hours, or working conditions will be addressed in accordance with collective bargaining agreements and applicable law.

Operations and Response Deployment Standardization

Operational effectiveness is the most visible measure of a countywide Fire & EMS system. While Allen County departments routinely support one another through mutual and automatic aid, the absence of standardized response models, alarm assignments, and deployment strategies creates variability in service delivery and operational risk. The objective of this initiative is to establish a coordinated operational framework that improves response efficiency, enhances firefighter safety, and ensures consistent service levels across jurisdictional boundaries, without disrupting existing command authority or local decision-making.

Phase 1: Establishing a Shared Response Baseline (0–6 Months)

The first operational priority is establishing a verified, countywide understanding of current response data. Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate a comprehensive analysis of call volume, response times, unit utilization, staffing configurations, and incident outcomes across all participating districts. This analysis will also form the basis of a formal Standards of Cover assessment, the structured methodology through which the district evaluates its deployment capabilities against community risk profiles, call type distributions, and response time objectives by geographic planning zone. The Standards of Cover process is the recognized framework for data-driven deployment decisions and is a foundational requirement for CFAI accreditation.

Findings will be reviewed collaboratively with district chiefs and presented to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee to ensure transparency and shared understanding before any changes are proposed.

Phase 2: Standardizing Core Operational Elements (6–9 Months)

Based on the data analysis, the second phase will focus on standardizing core operational elements, including closest-unit response principles, standardized alarm assignments for common incident types, and interoperable radio and communications procedures. The Executive Fire Chief will facilitate working groups composed of operations chiefs, training officers, and labor representatives to develop these standards. The intent is not to impose a rigid model, but to establish common expectations that allow units from different districts to operate seamlessly during automatic aid and large-scale incidents.

Pilot Implementation and Evaluation (Months 9–15)

Implementation will be phased deliberately. Pilot deployments of standardized assignments and response models will occur within selected operational areas during months nine through fifteen. These pilots will be closely monitored using agreed-upon performance metrics, including response times, on-scene effectiveness, and firefighter workload, and adjustments will be made based on operational feedback before broader adoption.

Throughout implementation, command authority remains unchanged. Incident command continues to rest with the responding district in accordance with established protocols. The Executive Fire Chief's role is to coordinate standards, facilitate evaluation, and ensure alignment with countywide objectives. By year two, the Allen County Fire & EMS District will operate under a unified operational framework that improves efficiency and safety while preserving local command integrity.

Dispatch, Communications, and Systems Integration

Emergency communications and dispatch are the backbone of an effective Fire & EMS system. Call processing speed, dispatch accuracy, protocol consistency, and communication clarity directly influence response times, resource deployment, and firefighter and patient outcomes. Variability in dispatch practices, CAD systems, radio governance, and call processing standards introduces measurable risk, delays in call handling, inconsistent response assignments, communication breakdowns during critical incidents, and reduced situational awareness across jurisdictions. In a coordinated countywide system, these gaps cannot be tolerated.

The objective of this initiative is to align dispatch and communications systems to deliver timely, accurate, and coordinated emergency response across Allen County, ensuring that every call is processed and managed with consistency, speed, and precision.

Phase 1: Operational Baseline Assessment (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will work collaboratively with dispatch centers, county leadership, and public safety partners to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of:

- Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, capabilities, and interoperability
- Call processing workflows, including call-taking, prioritization, and dispatch timing
- Dispatch protocol application, including Emergency Fire Dispatch (EFD) and Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD)
- Radio communication structures, including channel and talk group usage and interoperability
- Existing performance metrics, including call processing times and dispatch intervals

This assessment will identify gaps in interoperability, inconsistencies in protocol application, and specific points where delays or inefficiencies impact response.

Coordinated Communications Framework

Based on this assessment, a coordinated communications framework will be implemented focused on alignment and performance, ensuring that all agencies operate under consistent, clearly defined standards. Key elements will include:

- CAD Alignment and Data Integration — Alignment or integration of CAD systems to support shared situational awareness, consistent unit recommendations, and real-time information across jurisdictions
- Standardized Dispatch Protocols (EFD/EMD) — Consistent application of dispatch protocols to ensure uniform call handling, prioritization, and response assignment regardless of jurisdiction
- Call Processing Performance Standards — Clear benchmarks for call processing and dispatch times, with ongoing performance monitoring and accountability
- Radio Governance and Interoperability — Clear structure for radio communications, including channel and talk group management, standardized terminology, and communication protocols during multi-agency incidents
- Response Alignment Through Dispatch — Ensuring dispatch practices support standardized response models, including closest-unit response, alarm assignments, and automatic aid integration

Fire-Based EMS System Design and Medical Oversight

Emergency Medical Services are a core component of public safety and represent a significant and growing portion of call volume across Allen County. Variations in EMS delivery models, medical oversight, quality assurance practices, and training standards create inconsistency in patient care and place operational strain on fire-based providers. The strategic objective of this initiative is to establish a coordinated fire-based EMS system that delivers consistent, high-quality medical care, supports Firefighter-Paramedics, and integrates seamlessly with countywide fire operations.

Phase 1: Governance and Medical Oversight Assessment (0–6 Months)

The first phase of EMS system integration focuses on governance and medical oversight. Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will work with medical directors, including the Chief Medical Director and the battalion-level Deputy Medical Directors assigned to each of the four district operational quadrants, along with EMS leadership and county stakeholders to document current EMS structures, protocols, and oversight mechanisms. This assessment will identify areas of alignment and divergence, as well as regulatory and contractual constraints. Based on these findings, a countywide EMS oversight framework will be proposed, emphasizing coordination, clinical consistency, and patient safety.

Civilian Paramedic Program — Staffing Bridge Strategy

A central component of Phase 1 EMS implementation is the Civilian Paramedic Program, a targeted workforce strategy designed to address immediate EMS capacity needs while simultaneously strengthening fire suppression staffing. Allen County faces two simultaneous pressures: growing EMS call volume and the need to ensure that Firefighter-Paramedics are positioned on fire apparatus rather than assigned exclusively to EMS transport units. The district cannot sustainably operate below safe fire suppression minimums to maintain EMS transport coverage.

The Civilian Paramedic Program resolves this tension by hiring civilian (non-firefighter) paramedics to staff EMS transport units, freeing Firefighter-Paramedics to return to fire apparatus. A civilian paramedic job classification, pay scale, and benefits structure will be developed within the first 60 to 120 days in coordination with HR, legal counsel, and labor representatives. An initial hiring cohort will be recruited and onboarded with the goal of filling identified EMS transport positions by month four. As civilian staffing becomes available, Firefighter-Paramedics will be reassigned to fire apparatus, prioritizing stations with the greatest suppression staffing deficits. Monthly progress will be reported to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, tracking positions filled, reassignments completed, and apparatus staffing levels by station.

Phase 2: Unified QA/QI Program (Months 6–12)

A unified quality assurance and quality improvement (QA/QI) program is a central component of this initiative. During months six through twelve, the Executive Fire Chief will facilitate the development of standardized QA/QI processes, data reporting requirements, and clinical performance benchmarks. These standards will be implemented across participating districts to ensure consistent review of patient outcomes, protocol compliance, and clinical performance. EMS data will be aggregated at the county level to support system-wide analysis and continuous improvement.

Training and Certification Alignment (Year 1)

EMS training requirements, continuing education standards, and certification tracking will be standardized within the first year to ensure that Firefighter-Paramedics operate under consistent expectations regardless of district affiliation. This alignment supports operational interoperability, improves patient outcomes, and reduces administrative duplication across the system.

Protocol Alignment (Year 1 Implementation)

Protocol alignment will be phased over a 12-month period. Existing protocols will be reviewed collaboratively, and unified protocols introduced as medical direction allows. The Executive Fire Chief will ensure compliance with state regulations and respect for existing provider agreements throughout this process. By the end of year two, the Allen County Fire & EMS District will operate under a coordinated fire-based EMS system characterized by consistent oversight, standardized quality processes, and reliable patient care delivery across all jurisdictions.

Staffing, Deployment Standards, Sustainability, and Fireground Safety

Staffing is the most critical and complex challenge facing Fire & EMS services in Allen County. Increasing call volumes, declining volunteer availability, rising training and certification requirements, and evolving safety standards have placed sustained and growing pressure on existing staffing models. Addressing this challenge requires a deliberate, data-driven, and system-wide approach that ensures firefighter safety, operational effectiveness, and long-term sustainability, while remaining fiscally responsible and respectful of local governance and labor agreements.

The Operational Imperative: Why Staffing Is a Life Safety Issue

At the core of this effort is a fundamental operational reality: fireground safety and effectiveness are directly tied to the number of personnel assigned to each apparatus and arriving on scene. NFPA 1710 (2020 Edition) establishes that a minimum of four firefighters per engine or truck company is essential to safely and effectively perform critical fireground tasks. These tasks, fire attack, search and rescue, ventilation, incident command, and rapid intervention, must occur simultaneously, not sequentially, to protect both firefighters and the public. The 2020 Edition further specifies that the initial full alarm assignment for a single-family structure fire requires a minimum of 17 personnel on scene, including a Rapid Intervention Crew of four, within eight minutes.

NIST fireground research has consistently demonstrated that:

- Four-person crews complete critical fireground tasks significantly faster than smaller crews
- Larger initial staffing results in quicker water on the fire and faster knockdown
- Rescue and search operations are completed more efficiently with adequate crew size
- Overall fireground risk to both occupants and firefighters is reduced with proper initial staffing

Equally important is the concept of the Effective Response Force (ERF), the minimum number of firefighters required on scene within a defined time to safely manage a working fire or complex emergency. NFPA 1710 identifies ERF achievement as a critical benchmark for ensuring fireground operations are conducted safely and effectively, and it is a primary metric against which the Allen County Fire & EMS District will measure deployment performance.

Response Time Standards and Their Implications

NFPA 1710 establishes a cascading series of response time objectives. For the first engine company, the standard is a 4-minute travel time achieved on 90% of fire responses. For assembly of the initial full alarm assignment, the complete Effective Response Force, the standard is 8 minutes. These are distinct benchmarks measuring different things: single-unit travel versus full crew assembly.

Recognizing the financial realities and geographic constraints of a 550-square-mile service area, the Allen County Fire & EMS District is operating under an 8-minute objective for initial full alarm assembly, aligned with the NFPA full deployment benchmark, rather than the 4-minute first-unit travel standard applicable to compact urban systems. This approach reflects fiscal responsibility and geographic reality, but it also introduces measurable increased risk, because conditions on the fireground and patient outcomes continue to deteriorate with time. When response intervals are extended:

- Fires grow exponentially, requiring more personnel to control upon arrival
- Rescue survivability decreases, increasing urgency and operational complexity
- Firefighter risk increases due to more advanced fire conditions at the time of arrival
- Delayed assembly must be offset by a stronger initial deployment and full crew size on arrival

If it takes longer to get there, you must arrive stronger.

For this reason, ensuring a minimum of four firefighters per apparatus is not optional, it is essential for firefighter safety and effective emergency response. Reduced staffing leads to sequential task completion, delayed intervention, and increased exposure to risk, directly conflicting with nationally recognized safety standards.

OSHA Compliance and Legal Obligation

OSHA standards reinforce that firefighter safety is not discretionary, it is a legal and operational obligation. Federal requirements, including the “two-in/two-out” rule, require that at least two firefighters enter a hazardous environment together while a minimum of two additional personnel remain outside, fully equipped and ready to perform immediate rescue if conditions deteriorate. This ensures crew accountability, rapid intervention capability, and continuous monitoring of crews operating in immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) environments. Aligning staffing levels with OSHA requirements is not merely a matter of compliance—it is about protecting firefighters, reducing liability, and ensuring every operation is conducted with the highest regard for safety and accountability.

Data-Driven Staffing Analysis (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will oversee a comprehensive staffing and deployment analysis across all participating districts, including:

- Authorized versus actual staffing levels
- Overtime utilization and vacancy rates
- Response coverage and reliability by zone
- Call volume trends and peak demand periods
- Station locations, apparatus assignments, and first-due response areas
- Historical performance data, including turnout times, travel times, and Effective Response Force achievement

Using GIS mapping, response modeling, and nationally recognized benchmarks including NFPA 1710 deployment and staffing standards, the county will identify coverage gaps and underserved areas, overlapping or inefficient response zones, and high-risk corridors impacting firefighter safety and patient outcomes. These findings will be developed collaboratively with district leadership and labor representatives to ensure accuracy, transparency, and shared ownership. The outcome will be the establishment of countywide staffing benchmarks aligned with operational risk, response expectations, and fiscal realities.

Strategic Implementation and Workforce Sustainability

Where volunteer or combination staffing models are no longer sustainable, the county will develop phased, evidence-based recommendations that may include strategic staffing increases aligned with risk and demand, station relocation or consolidation, or deployment adjustments to improve response reliability and coverage. The Civilian Paramedic Program, detailed in the EMS section, is one such evidence-based strategy, directly improving fire apparatus staffing while maintaining ALS coverage.

Recruitment and retention are central to long-term success. During the first year, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate countywide recruitment initiatives and shared eligibility lists, standardized testing and hiring processes, and regional outreach to expand the qualified candidate pool. Retention

strategies will focus on predictable and sustainable scheduling models, defined career pathways and advancement opportunities, ongoing training and professional development, and health, wellness, and injury prevention programs. All efforts will be implemented in alignment with collective bargaining agreements and through collaborative labor-management engagement.

Implementation will occur over a structured, multi-year timeline. Years one through three will focus on targeted staffing enhancements aligned with documented service needs and fiscal capacity. Progress will be measured through annual staffing and performance reports presented to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee.

Merit-Based Hiring, Promotion, and Performance Systems

Merit is not just a process, it is the foundation of trust, credibility, and leadership within the fire service. Fair, transparent, and defensible hiring and promotion systems ensure that the right people are selected, developed, and placed in positions of responsibility. When these systems lack consistency or integrity, confidence erodes, leadership suffers, and organizational culture weakens.

Across participating districts, variability in testing, evaluation criteria, and promotional standards creates inconsistency and limits the development of capable leaders. The objective of this initiative is to align merit-based systems across the county while fully respecting statutory requirements and existing collective bargaining agreements.

System Assessment (0–6 Months)

The first step is a comprehensive, data-driven review of current hiring and promotion practices. Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will assess eligibility requirements, testing methodologies, assessment centers, and evaluation processes across all participating districts. This review will identify best practices, eliminate inconsistencies, and establish a clear path toward alignment. Legal counsel and labor representatives will be engaged throughout to ensure compliance, fairness, and credibility.

Countywide Merit Framework

From this assessment, a countywide merit framework will be established, built on objective testing, structured assessments, and clearly defined performance expectations. The goal is not to replace local processes, but to strengthen them through shared standards that enhance fairness, defensibility, and leadership quality across the system. Implementation will be deliberate and aligned with existing promotional cycles. Initial standardized components will be introduced within year one, with additional elements phased in as agreements allow. The Executive Fire Chief will support districts by coordinating shared resources, assessment centers, evaluators, and training materials, reducing duplication while improving consistency and quality.

Performance Management

Performance management is a critical extension of the merit system. By the end of year two, standardized evaluation criteria for officers and supervisors will be implemented, focused on leadership, operational competence, accountability, and professional conduct. These evaluations will directly support leadership development, succession planning, and organizational accountability.

Administrative leadership candidates will undergo validated behavioral and leadership assessments as part of the selection process to evaluate decision-making, communication style, emotional intelligence, and leadership readiness, ensuring candidates are not only technically qualified but also equipped to lead people, manage conflict, and perform effectively under pressure.

Training, Certification, and Professional Development Framework

Training and professional development are foundational to operational readiness, firefighter safety, and public trust. Across Allen County, training programs have developed organically within individual districts, resulting in variation in curriculum, certification tracking, officer development, and continuing education standards. While each district has met its obligations independently, the absence of a coordinated training framework limits interoperability, increases administrative burden, and creates inequities in professional development opportunity. The objective of this initiative is to establish a unified, countywide training framework that strengthens operational capability while respecting local oversight and existing training infrastructure.

Assessment and Alignment (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will oversee a comprehensive review of current training programs, facilities, instructors, certification requirements, and compliance processes across all participating districts. This review will identify duplicative efforts, gaps in coverage, and opportunities for shared delivery, with particular attention to recruit training standards, annual in-service requirements, officer development programs, and specialized certifications, ensuring alignment with state and national standards.

Countywide Training Division Framework

Based on this assessment, a countywide Training Division framework will be developed. This framework will not replace district training officers, but will coordinate curriculum standards, certification tracking, and delivery schedules. Standardized core curricula will be established for recruit training, annual competencies, EMS continuing education, and officer development, allowing districts to deliver training locally while maintaining consistent expectations. A centralized training management system will be implemented to track certifications, compliance deadlines, and course completion across the county.

Phased Implementation

During year one, standardized curricula and certification tracking will be introduced, with pilot programs conducted to validate effectiveness and logistical feasibility. By year two, joint recruit academies and shared specialized training programs will be operational, leveraging existing facilities and instructors to reduce duplication and cost. Officer development programs will be introduced concurrently, focusing on command decision-making, leadership ethics, and operational risk management.

Leadership development will be a continuous, system-wide priority encompassing officer development, command-level training, and ongoing professional education focused on leadership, ethics, communication, and operational decision-making, ensuring a consistent, high-performing leadership culture across the organization. Oversight will be maintained through regular reporting to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, with annual training compliance reports summarizing certification status, training hours delivered, and identified risks.

Mental Health, Behavioral Health, and Wellness Integration

Firefighters and Firefighter-Paramedics operate in high-risk, high-stress environments that place sustained demands on physical and mental health. Historically, wellness and mental health support have been addressed inconsistently across districts, often relying on informal peer support or reactive interventions. The strategic objective of this initiative is to integrate mental health, behavioral health, and wellness into the core operational framework of the Allen County Fire & EMS District, recognizing that workforce health is directly tied to safety, performance, and retention.

Phase 1: Policy Alignment and Resource Assessment (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will work with district leadership, labor representatives, and healthcare partners to document existing wellness resources, peer support programs, and employee assistance services. This assessment will identify gaps, redundancies, and best practices. Based on these findings, a countywide wellness framework will be developed that establishes consistent expectations for support while allowing districts to maintain local delivery models.

Peer Support Program

Peer support is a central component of this framework. During year one, standardized peer support training and activation protocols will be implemented across participating districts. Peer support teams will be coordinated at the county level to ensure availability during critical incidents, line-of-duty injuries, or other significant events. Participation will be voluntary, confidential, and non-punitive, reinforcing trust and utilization.

Behavioral Health and Professional Counseling

Behavioral health support will be expanded through coordinated access to professional counseling services. The Executive Fire Chief will work with county partners and healthcare providers to establish confidential referral pathways and ensure coverage for fire and EMS personnel and their families. Annual wellness check-ins, focused on early identification of physical and mental health concerns, will be introduced as part of routine workforce support, not as a disciplinary evaluation mechanism.

Implementation will be phased to allow cultural adaptation and resource scaling. Initial peer support alignment will occur within the first six months, followed by expanded professional services by the end of year one. Ongoing evaluation will be conducted through utilization metrics and anonymous feedback, reported in aggregate to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee. By embedding wellness into the system's operational fabric, the Allen County Fire & EMS District will support a healthier, safer, and more resilient workforce.

Labor Relations, Collective Bargaining, and Workforce Engagement

Successful implementation of a countywide Fire & EMS system depends on strong, trust-based labor relations and disciplined workforce engagement. Firefighters and Firefighter-Paramedics are the system's most critical asset, and every effort to align operations, staffing, training, or governance must be undertaken collaboratively with recognized labor organizations. The objective of this initiative is to establish a structured labor-management partnership that supports system-wide alignment while honoring collective bargaining rights, existing agreements, and local autonomy.

Labor-Management Committee (0–90 Days)

Within the first 90 days, the Executive Fire Chief will establish a standing Labor-Management Committee composed of representatives from participating districts, union leadership, and management. This committee will serve as the primary forum for discussing system-wide initiatives, identifying potential impacts to working conditions, and coordinating implementation timelines. The committee's role is consultative and collaborative, ensuring that labor input is integrated early in the planning process, not after decisions are made.

Change Management and Labor Compliance

All major system initiatives, staffing adjustments, training alignment, EMS integration, and operational standardization, will be accompanied by clear communication, defined objectives, and realistic timelines consistent with the seven change management principles governing this framework. No initiative affecting wages, hours, or terms of employment will be implemented outside of the collective bargaining process. This disciplined approach protects labor rights and reduces resistance rooted in uncertainty or misinformation.

Collective Bargaining Alignment

While contracts currently remain district-specific, the Executive Fire Chief will facilitate dialogue among labor organizations and management to identify areas where alignment is beneficial, such as training standards, wellness provisions, or promotional processes. Over time, shared language and frameworks will emerge through negotiation. Legal counsel will be engaged to ensure compliance with state labor law and all contractual obligations.

Reporting and Accountability

The Executive Fire Chief will provide regular updates to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee on labor engagement activities, identified risks, and progress toward alignment goals. By prioritizing transparency, respect, and collaboration, the Allen County Fire & EMS District can implement meaningful system improvements while maintaining strong labor relations and long-term workforce stability.

Financial Stewardship, Budgeting, Capital Planning, and Grants

The financial strategy for the Allen County Fire & EMS District is built on a disciplined, incremental approach designed to achieve operational reliability, meet nationally recognized standards, and ensure long-term sustainability, while maintaining transparency, public accountability, and respect for local fiscal oversight.

Projected Budget Framework

The projected FY2027 operating budget is approximately \$0.279 per \$100 of assessed value, in addition to the state-authorized Cumulative Fire Fund (Cum Fund) projected at \$0.0333 per \$100 of assessed value. The Cum Fund is a dedicated capital funding mechanism under Indiana law used for apparatus replacement, equipment acquisition, and facility improvements, and is essential to long-term asset management. These rates support a projected total district operating budget of approximately \$49 million in FY2027, representing 6.5% allocated to leadership and administrative support, consistent with nationally comparable agencies.

The long-term financial projection anticipates a gradual increase to approximately \$0.37 per \$100 of assessed value by 2030, plus the Cum Fund at approximately \$0.0333, resulting in a combined projected rate of approximately \$0.4033 per \$100 of assessed value. This phased approach reflects the reality that achieving consistent staffing, operational reliability, and compliance with nationally recognized standards requires deliberate and sustained investment rather than immediate, disruptive change.

Incremental and Strategic Approach

This financial plan is intentionally structured as a measured, incremental strategy. The objective is not rapid expansion, but sustainable alignment of resources with service demand, operational risk, and long-term system needs. Investments will be phased based on data and demonstrated priorities, including staffing stabilization, apparatus replacement cycles, training alignment, EMS system integration, and infrastructure improvements. This approach ensures:

- Predictable and manageable fiscal impact for taxpayers
- Alignment of investment with measurable performance outcomes
- Responsible workforce and capital growth based on actual demand
- Flexibility to adapt to economic conditions and policy changes

Financial Baseline and Coordination

Indiana law governing fire districts and territories requires that all assets, liabilities, contractual obligations, and debt service be clearly identified and lawfully assigned. Within the first three to six months, a comprehensive countywide financial baseline will be established, including operating budgets, capital plans, debt obligations, and major cost drivers across all participating entities. This process will include verification of outstanding obligations, bonds, lease-purchase agreements, apparatus financing, and facility-related debt, along with associated revenue sources, covenants, and statutory considerations. This baseline provides the foundation for coordinated financial planning and ensures transparency for the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, elected officials, and the public.

Forecasting, Capital Planning, and Grants

Building on this baseline, multi-year financial forecasting models will be developed to project operating and capital needs over a three-to-five-year horizon. These projections will incorporate staffing plans, apparatus replacement schedules, training requirements, and EMS system demands,

allowing leadership to anticipate needs and avoid reactive decision-making. Capital planning will be aligned with asset management strategies, including standardized equipment specifications and lifecycle replacement schedules. Joint purchasing opportunities will be pursued to reduce costs and improve consistency across districts.

A coordinated grant strategy will further support financial sustainability. Federal and state funding opportunities, including AFG and SAFER grants, will be pursued to offset personnel, equipment, and program costs. Grant priorities will be aligned with documented system needs and supported by consistent data and governance oversight.

Key Budget Variables

Several factors may influence the overall budget trajectory and provide opportunities to offset or reduce tax rate impacts:

- Local Income Tax (LIT) Distribution — Currently approximately 0.1%, subject to County Council allocation decisions
- EMS Revenue — Included in current budget projections as an ongoing operational revenue source
- Net Assessed Value (NAV) Growth — Increased property values generating additional revenue without requiring rate increases
- State Legislative Changes — Including potential impacts from Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1)—Indiana legislation with direct implications for fire district funding authority, tax rate caps, and consolidation governance—and other applicable statutory frameworks
- Operational Efficiencies — Shared services, coordinated purchasing, and reduced administrative duplication across districts

Commitment to Safety, Standards, and Accountability

This financial framework is directly tied to achieving nationally recognized standards for staffing, response, training, and safety. All financial decisions will be guided by multi-year forecasting, annual budget review, and oversight by the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee. Transparent reporting will ensure clear visibility into how resources are allocated and what outcomes are achieved. This is not a fixed funding model, but a flexible, adaptive financial strategy that allows the Allen County Fire & EMS District to respond to changing conditions while maintaining a clear commitment to fiscal responsibility, operational excellence, and long-term sustainability.

Legal, Policy, SOP/SOG, and Compliance Framework

A coordinated countywide Fire & EMS system must operate within a clear, consistent, and legally defensible policy framework. Variations in policies, standard operating procedures (SOPs), standard operating guidelines (SOGs), and compliance practices across districts create operational risk, liability exposure, and confusion during multi-agency incidents. The objective of this initiative is to establish a harmonized legal and policy framework that supports interoperability, protects firefighters and districts, and ensures compliance with applicable laws and standards, while preserving each district's local oversight authority.

Assessment and Documentation (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate a comprehensive review of existing policies, SOPs, SOGs, and administrative directives across participating districts. This review will identify areas of alignment, conflict, and omission, with particular attention to operational procedures, EMS protocols, safety policies, disciplinary processes, and compliance requirements under state and federal law. Legal counsel will be engaged to evaluate all findings through a risk and compliance lens.

Policy Alignment Framework

Based on this assessment, the Executive Fire Chief will facilitate the development of a countywide policy alignment framework. This framework will establish standardized core policies and operational expectations necessary for interoperability, including incident command procedures, safety practices, EMS clinical governance, and reporting requirements. Local policies may remain in place where differences are operationally justified, but alignment will be required where inconsistency creates risk or undermines coordinated response. The framework will be reviewed by district leadership, labor representatives, and legal counsel prior to Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee endorsement.

Phased Implementation and Compliance Monitoring

Implementation will occur in phases to minimize disruption. During year one, aligned policies will be adopted for core operational and safety functions. During years two and three, additional administrative and support policies will be reviewed and aligned as needed. Training and communication will accompany all policy changes to ensure understanding and compliance at every level of the organization.

The Executive Fire Chief will establish a regular compliance review process, with findings reported to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee. This process ensures that policies remain current, legally compliant, and operationally effective.

Interagency Coordination, Automatic/Mutual Aid, and Regional Partnerships

Fire and EMS incidents do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Effective service delivery in Allen County depends on strong coordination not only among participating districts, but also with neighboring jurisdictions, public safety agencies, hospitals, and regional partners. The objective of this initiative is to formalize and strengthen interagency coordination and automatic/mutual aid relationships to improve response effectiveness, resource utilization, and regional resilience.

Agreement Review and Baseline Assessment (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate a review of current mutual aid agreements, automatic aid protocols, and interagency response plans involving law enforcement, emergency management, hospitals, and neighboring fire departments. This review will identify strengths, gaps, and inconsistencies that impact response times, command integration, and resource deployment.

Standardized Mutual and Automatic Aid Frameworks

Based on this assessment, the Executive Fire Chief will facilitate the development of standardized mutual aid and automatic aid frameworks where appropriate. These frameworks will define response expectations, command integration, communication protocols, and reimbursement mechanisms, improving predictability and interoperability while respecting the autonomy of participating agencies. All proposed changes will be developed collaboratively and reviewed by legal counsel and governing bodies prior to implementation.

Joint Planning and Training

Regional coordination will be strengthened through regular joint planning and training. During year one, the Executive Fire Chief will establish periodic interagency coordination meetings to address large-scale incident planning, disaster preparedness, and special operations. Joint training exercises and tabletop simulations will be conducted to reinforce shared procedures and build relationships among agencies before emergencies occur. Implementation of enhanced interagency coordination will be phased over two years, with progress measured through after-action reviews, response metrics, and partner feedback.

Public Communication, Community Engagement, and Transparency

Public confidence is essential to the success of a coordinated countywide Fire & EMS system. Stakeholders should understand not only how services are delivered, but why decisions are made and how those decisions impact service delivery, responder safety, and long-term fiscal responsibility. This initiative establishes a disciplined, proactive communication strategy designed to build trust, ensure message consistency, and reinforce accountability, while respecting local governance and preserving the unique identity of each community served.

Communication Structure and Message Discipline

Within the first 90 days, the Executive Fire Chief will establish a clear communication structure that defines roles, authority, and messaging responsibilities at both the county and district levels. A standardized communications protocol will guide messaging related to major initiatives, high-impact incidents, and long-term system changes, ensuring accurate, timely, and coordinated communication that reduces confusion and conflicting information.

The Executive Fire Chief will work with elected officials to implement a structured public engagement plan that includes community meetings and town hall-style gatherings held throughout the county, providing residents and community leaders with direct access to system leadership, opportunities to ask questions, raise concerns, and help shape the future of Fire & EMS services in Allen County.

Community Presence and Engagement

The Allen County Fire & EMS District recognizes that public trust is built not only through emergency response, but through consistent, visible presence in the communities served. Firefighters and Firefighter-Paramedics are neighbors first, and the relationship between this district and its communities should reflect that reality every day, not only when tones drop.

The Executive Fire Chief will establish a formalized community engagement framework that encourages and recognizes personnel participation in civic life across the county, encompassing charitable fundraising activities, neighborhood and community events, station open houses, school and youth outreach, and engagement with senior populations and vulnerable community members. Faith organizations, civic clubs, and neighborhood associations are natural partners in this effort and will be engaged as part of the district's broader community presence strategy. Community engagement is not ancillary to the mission, it is part of it.

Data Transparency and Performance Reporting

Transparency will be driven by data, not narrative. The system will implement quarterly public-facing reporting that includes:

- Response time performance and reliability metrics
- Staffing levels and deployment effectiveness
- EMS outcomes and system utilization
- Financial performance and resource allocation
- Community engagement activity summary

Internal Communication and Workforce Alignment

Effective external communication depends on strong internal alignment. The Executive Fire Chief will ensure that firefighters and EMS personnel receive timely, accurate, and consistent information through regular leadership briefings and system updates, defined communication channels for operational and strategic changes, and established feedback mechanisms to identify concerns and improve implementation.

Volunteer and Township Fire & EMS Partnership Framework

Southeast Allen County represents a distinct and essential component of the countywide Fire & EMS coordination initiative. The region includes Monroeville Fire, Monroeville EMS, Monroe Township, Jackson Township, Madison Township, Hoagland Fire & EMS, and other first responders operating under volunteer, combination, or emerging professional service models. These organizations have long delivered critical emergency services through strong community involvement, volunteer commitment, and localized governance.

The Role of Volunteers in a Coordinated System

Volunteers are a valued and necessary part of Allen County's service model, and this framework is designed to support and strengthen their participation. As coordination and alignment advance, volunteers will continue to play meaningful roles in emergency response, community engagement, and operational readiness. The objective is not to eliminate volunteer service or displace township-based providers, it is to ensure they are engaged as full and equal partners in planning and implementation. Their institutional knowledge, operational experience, and community trust are indispensable to building a system that is effective, sustainable, and publicly supported.

Over time, the countywide framework will create structures that reduce the administrative and compliance burden currently shouldered by volunteer organizations operating independently. Shared resources, coordinated training, and unified purchasing will give volunteer providers access to capabilities and support that many currently lack, strengthening rather than diminishing their capacity to serve.

Integration Approach for Southeast Allen County

Integration in Southeast Allen County will focus on clearly defined, legally defensible roles for volunteer participation that complement professional staffing where it exists or may develop over time. These roles will be developed collaboratively with representatives from township providers, legal counsel, and operational leadership to ensure clarity in supervision, training expectations, response oversight, and operational integration.

Professionalism is a shared expectation across the countywide system. In Southeast Allen County, professionalism is defined not by employment status, but by adherence to training standards, safety practices, accountability, and incident command principles. Change will be phased, deliberate, and respectful of local governance. Listening sessions, working groups, and joint planning efforts will address concerns related to liability exposure, injury coverage, insurance requirements, training resources, and response oversight. Where gaps exist between current practices and required standards, solutions will be developed collaboratively.

Legal and Regulatory Compliance for All Providers

Allen County has a responsibility to ensure that all participating fire and EMS operations, career, combination, or volunteer, operate within applicable legal, regulatory, and safety requirements. This includes compliance with state and federal law, OSHA regulations, NFPA standards, physical and medical fitness requirements, training and certification standards, and appropriate liability and insurance protections. These requirements apply consistently across all providers and exist to protect responders, governing bodies, and the public.

Accident, Injury, and Risk Management Reporting Framework

Effective risk management depends on timely, accurate, and consistent documentation of accidents, injuries, exposures, and other reportable events. Variability in reporting practices across districts can create liability exposure, delay care, hinder claims processing, and limit the system's ability to identify trends and mitigate risk. The objective of this initiative is to establish a standardized, countywide framework for documenting, reporting, and managing all risk-related incidents while ensuring compliance with applicable laws, insurance requirements, and internal policies.

Standardizing Reporting Requirements (0–6 Months)

Within the first six months, the Executive Fire Chief will coordinate with district leadership, risk management personnel, legal counsel, and insurance providers to define reportable events and required documentation standards. These will include:

- Line-of-duty injuries and illnesses
- Exposure incidents (bloodborne pathogens, hazardous materials, carcinogen exposure)
- Apparatus accidents and property damage
- Civilian injuries occurring during operations
- Near-miss events and safety-related incidents
- Workers' compensation claims and lost-time injuries

Standardized definitions ensure consistency in reporting thresholds, eliminate ambiguity, and support accurate system-wide data collection.

Unified Documentation and Notification Protocols

A unified documentation process will be implemented to ensure completeness and defensibility. All reportable events will require timely completion of standardized incident documentation, including narrative reports, injury/exposure forms, supervisor reviews, and required medical or witness documentation. Clear timelines will be established for initial reporting, supervisory review, and final submission.

Clear notification pathways will ensure that appropriate parties are informed promptly based on the nature and severity of each event, including immediate supervisors and command staff, district administration and risk management representatives, workers' compensation carriers, medical providers, and the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee for significant events.

Data Integration and Continuous Improvement

All reported incidents will be tracked within a centralized or interoperable reporting system to allow for countywide analysis of trends, injury patterns, apparatus accidents, and operational risk factors. Regular risk management reports will be generated and reviewed with leadership and the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, identifying opportunities for policy changes, training improvements, or operational adjustments to reduce future risk.

Training, Compliance, and Implementation Timeline

During year one, all personnel, including line staff, officers, and administrative personnel, will receive training on reporting requirements, documentation standards, and notification procedures. Supervisors will receive specific training on their review, verification, and follow-up responsibilities. Compliance with reporting protocols will be monitored, and deficiencies will be addressed through corrective action, training, or policy reinforcement.

Cultural Alignment and Workforce Integration

The success of a countywide Fire & EMS system is not determined by structure alone, it is defined by its people. Each district brings its own history, identity, and operational culture. This initiative is not about eliminating those identities; it is about aligning them under a shared standard of professionalism, accountability, and performance that strengthens the entire system.

Cultural alignment will be intentional, structured, and led from the front. The Executive Fire Chief will actively engage firefighters, officers, and leadership across all districts through formal listening sessions, direct engagement, and ongoing communication. The objective is to understand existing cultures, identify shared values, and address concerns early, before they become barriers to progress.

Alignment will be reinforced through consistent expectations. Standardized training, leadership development, safety practices, and operational procedures will establish a common foundation across all districts. Professionalism, accountability, and mutual respect will not vary by location, they will be the standard across the county. This is not forced uniformity; it is disciplined alignment.

| Initiative | Description & Timeline |
|---|---|
| Countywide Listening Initiative (0–6 Months) | Structured listening sessions with firefighters, officers, and leadership in every district to document cultural strengths, concerns, and alignment opportunities. Findings will directly inform the implementation strategy. |
| Shared Values Framework (0–12 Months) | Development and adoption of clearly defined countywide expectations for professionalism, conduct, safety, and accountability, applicable to all districts and personnel regardless of assignment. |
| Leadership Alignment Program (Year 1) | Standardized leadership training focused on command presence, communication, decision-making, and accountability, building consistency at the officer level across every district. |
| Cross-Department Training Collaboration (Year 1) | Joint training opportunities, multi-company drills, and shared operational exercises to build cross-district relationships and operational familiarity before emergencies require it. |
| Internal Communication System (Ongoing) | Consistent communication channels and feedback mechanisms to ensure transparency, surface concerns early, and maintain workforce engagement throughout implementation. |
| Cultural Health Metrics (Annual) | Regular evaluation of workforce engagement, retention, leadership development, and organizational alignment, with results reported to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee. |

Change will be phased deliberately to allow for adaptation, but the direction will remain clear and consistent. Transparency, inclusion, and visible leadership will guide the process, ensuring that personnel understand not just what is changing, but why it matters.

Cost Efficiency, Resource Optimization, and Long-Term Value

A coordinated countywide Fire & EMS system is not just an operational advancement, it is a disciplined financial strategy designed to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and stabilize long-term costs while enhancing service delivery and safety. The efficiencies described below are not achieved through workforce reductions or decreased service levels; they are realized through coordination, standardization, and the elimination of administrative and operational redundancy.

Immediate and Measurable Efficiencies

- **Administrative Consolidation** — Alignment of payroll, HR, reporting, compliance, and records management will eliminate redundant processes across districts. Estimated impact: 5–10% reduction in administrative overhead over time through consolidation and shared services.
- **Supply Chain and Purchasing Power** — Centralized procurement and standardized specifications for turnout gear, EMS supplies, fuel, and operational materials will leverage bulk pricing and reduce waste. Estimated impact: 8–12% savings on high-volume consumables and equipment through coordinated purchasing.
- **EMS Resource Integration and Billing Optimization** — A unified EMS deployment and billing structure improves unit utilization, reduces duplication, and strengthens revenue capture. Standardized billing practices reduce claim denials and improve reimbursement timelines.
- **Apparatus and Capital Planning** — Transitioning to a countywide, data-driven fleet replacement plan ensures strategic purchasing, standardized apparatus specifications, and extended lifecycle management. Estimated impact: reduced emergency purchases, lower maintenance costs, elimination of redundant reserve apparatus, and capital cost smoothing over multi-year cycles.
- **Health Insurance and Benefits Alignment** — Larger, unified risk pools increase negotiating leverage and reduce administrative fragmentation. Estimated impact: 8–12% long-term cost containment through plan alignment and purchasing scale, while maintaining competitive benefits for all personnel.
- **Information Technology Integration** — Consolidation of CAD, RMS, scheduling, reporting, and communications systems reduces licensing, maintenance, and duplication while improving interoperability. Estimated impact: reduced software and vendor costs, improved cybersecurity and data integrity, and enhanced system-wide analytics.

System-Wide Operational Efficiencies

- **Training Standardization** — Reduced duplication, improved consistency, and lower delivery costs across all districts
- **Fleet Maintenance Coordination** — Shared maintenance strategies reduce apparatus downtime and repair costs
- **Facility Optimization** — Smarter station planning avoids unnecessary capital expansion and redundant infrastructure

Revenue Growth and External Funding Advantage

A unified system strengthens eligibility and competitiveness for state and federal grants, including AFG, SAFER, and other funding opportunities. Larger, coordinated systems consistently outperform fragmented entities in grant acquisition, increasing external funding that offsets local taxpayer burden and supports capital and operational investments.

Long-Term Financial Outcome

The cumulative effect of these efficiencies is a more financially stable, operationally capable, and publicly accountable system. By investing in coordination now, the Allen County Fire & EMS District avoids the higher long-term costs of reactive decision-making, deferred maintenance, duplicative administration, and inconsistent service delivery.

Integrated Countywide Implementation Timeline

The successful execution of a countywide Fire & EMS strategy depends on disciplined sequencing, realistic pacing, and clear coordination across governance, operations, finance, and workforce initiatives. This integrated timeline provides leadership, oversight bodies, and the public with a transparent roadmap for implementation while preserving the flexibility necessary to respect local authority, collaboration, and changing conditions. Rather than imposing rigid deadlines, the timeline establishes structured phases that allow progress to occur deliberately, lawfully, and sustainably.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Phase 1 Foundation & Alignment 0–6 Months</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize interlocal governance framework and district amendments • Complete system-wide assessments across staffing, operations, EMS, training, assets, and finances • Establish all governance and functional committees • Register with CFAI and designate Accreditation Manager (initiating 3–5 year pathway) • Complete Standards of Cover baseline analysis • Define countywide protocols and communication standards • Implement payroll and DEA compliance processes • Launch Civilian Paramedic Program, job classification, hiring, and initial onboarding • Introduce staffing benchmarks and begin data-driven deployment analysis |
| <p>Phase 2 Implementation & Integration 6–12 Months</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch unified EMS oversight and medical direction framework • Adopt multi-year budgeting and capital improvement plans • Pilot standardized response assignments and interoperable communications • Implement countywide QA/QI program • Establish formal change management process • Launch Training Division and officer development programs • Expand Civilian Paramedic Program; accelerate Firefighter-Paramedic reassignments • Complete payroll, staffing, and network system alignment |
| <p>Phase 3 Institutionalization Years 1–3</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize leadership development and succession planning • Fully integrate wellness and peer support programs • Conduct annual strategic and governance reviews • Standardize performance evaluation systems across all ranks • Refine policies and SOP/SOG alignment • Submit Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover to CFAI • Complete FESSAM self-assessment across all 11 categories |
| <p>Phase 4 Optimization & Legacy Years 3–5</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine deployment, staffing, and EMS outcomes using performance data • Refresh long-term financial forecasts and capital plans • Pursue CFAI accreditation hearing (peer review, commission vote) • Conduct post-accreditation Annual Compliance Reporting • Ongoing Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee review and public reporting |

Phase 1: Foundation, Assessment, and Alignment (0–6 Months)

The initial phase establishes the governance, legal, and administrative foundation necessary for long-term success. The interlocal governance framework and district alignment amendments are finalized to formally establish the Allen County Fire & EMS District, supported by monthly and quarterly governance review processes. Comprehensive countywide assessments are completed across staffing, operations, EMS, training, assets, facilities, and outstanding debt to create a verified baseline for decision-making. This phase also initiates CFAI accreditation registration, a 3-to-5-year process, and the Standards of Cover analysis that underpins both deployment planning and accreditation eligibility. The Civilian Paramedic Program is launched to begin addressing immediate EMS staffing needs. The emphasis throughout Phase 1 is listening, data collection, transparency, and collaboration.

Phase 2: Implementation and Early Integration (6–12 Months)

With foundational structures in place, Phase 2 transitions planning into action. Multi-year budgeting, capital improvement planning, apparatus replacement cycles, and a coordinated grant strategy are adopted to align fiscal stewardship with operational priorities. Operational integration begins through pilot programs and phased implementation of standardized response assignments and interoperable communications. The Civilian Paramedic Program continues to expand, accelerating the return of Firefighter-Paramedics to fire apparatus. A formal change management process is established, and the countywide Training Division and officer development programs are launched.

Phase 3: System Integration and Institutionalization (Years 1–3)

Phase 3 embeds coordination into standard practice. Leadership development, succession planning, and standardized performance evaluation systems are institutionalized. Mental health, peer support, and workforce wellness programs are fully integrated into operations. Annual strategic, operational, and governance reviews evaluate progress and ensure alignment with county objectives. The CFAI self-assessment process advances through documentation of all 11 FESSAM categories, with the Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover submitted as foundational deliverables.

Phase 4: Optimization, Sustainability, and Legacy (Years 3–5)

The final phase centers on optimization and long-term sustainability. Performance metrics refine deployment strategies, staffing models, EMS outcomes, and training effectiveness. Long-term financial forecasts and capital plans are refreshed regularly. The CFAI accreditation hearing, peer review and commission vote, is pursued in this phase, representing the culmination of the assessment and improvement work initiated in Phase 1. By this stage, the countywide Fire & EMS framework operates as a mature, coordinated system built on transparency, professional standards, and shared responsibility.

Comprehensive Countywide Implementation Checklist

This checklist consolidates all major planning, implementation, and oversight actions required to execute the countywide Fire & EMS strategy. It serves as an executive control document to ensure that no critical element is overlooked and that progress can be monitored systematically by leadership and the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee. The checklist is not intended to impose rigid sequencing, but to provide a clear inventory of responsibilities and milestones across the system.

Governance and leadership actions include: execution and maintenance of interlocal agreements, establishment of the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee, definition of executive authority and reporting structures, implementation of standardized quarterly reporting, and annual governance reviews, ensuring accountability, transparency, and legal compliance throughout the system's evolution.

Operational and EMS actions include: completion of system-wide response and deployment analyses, Standards of Cover assessment, development and phased implementation of standardized alarm assignments and closest-unit response principles, establishment of unified EMS oversight and QA/QI processes, launch and expansion of the Civilian Paramedic Program, alignment of EMS training and certification tracking, and implementation of coordinated dispatch and communications protocols.

Workforce and labor actions include: completion of staffing analyses, development of staffing benchmarks, implementation of phased staffing enhancements where needed, establishment of the Labor-Management Committee, alignment of training and professional development programs, rollout of leadership development initiatives, and integration of wellness and behavioral health resources.

Training, policy, and compliance actions include: alignment of core SOPs and SOGs, implementation of standardized safety and incident command policies, establishment of a countywide training coordination framework, deployment of centralized certification tracking, and ongoing compliance audits.

Facilities, fleet, and financial actions include: completion of asset inventories, adoption of standardized specifications, alignment of capital improvement plans, implementation of multi-year financial forecasting, coordinated grant strategy execution, and annual capital status reporting.

Public communication and regional coordination actions include: implementation of communication protocols, regular community engagement activities, publication of performance summaries, maintenance of mutual aid and interagency agreements, and execution of joint training and planning exercises. This checklist will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee to confirm progress, identify gaps, and recalibrate priorities as needed.

Fire & EMS Consolidation — Formal Checklist

The following checklist provides a comprehensive reference for all legal, operational, governance, and transition actions required during consolidation. Items should be tracked, assigned to responsible parties, and reported to the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee at regular intervals.

I. Authority and Legal Foundation

- Confirm statutory authority for consolidation
- Identify consolidation mechanism (interlocal agreement, unification, dissolution, or withdrawal)
- Obtain legal opinions from counsel for all entities
- Identify governing body structure post-consolidation
- Establish taxing authority and applicable rate limits
- Address bond obligations and debt service allocation
- Confirm compliance with open meetings and public records laws
- Amend or evaluate all mutual aid agreements
- Review and assign all existing contracts
- Establish indemnification and liability protections
- File all required state approvals and notices

II. Governance and Oversight

- Establish governing board composition and appointment structure
- Define appointment or election process for board members
- Define term lengths and removal authority
- Adopt board bylaws and standing rules
- Establish executive authority and defined limits
- Define role of elected officials in oversight
- Establish audit and financial oversight procedures
- Define public reporting requirements and cadence
- Establish conflict-of-interest standards and disclosure requirements

III. Organizational Structure and Leadership

- Finalize organizational chart and reporting hierarchy
- Define Executive Fire Chief authority and accountability
- Establish command staff roles and responsibilities
- Define civilian versus sworn leadership positions
- Establish span-of-control standards by rank and function
- Adopt succession planning framework
- Finalize job descriptions for all positions
- Establish discipline authority and review process
- Establish promotional authority and process

IV. Labor Relations and Employment

- Identify all bargaining units
- Determine bargaining unit structure post-consolidation
- Review and harmonize collective bargaining agreements
- Align wages, pay steps, and seniority recognition

- Standardize schedules and overtime calculation rules

V. Payroll and Compensation Systems

- Select and implement unified payroll and scheduling system
- Align pay periods and processing schedules
- Establish FLSA work periods and overtime calculations
- Define overtime and specialty pay calculations
- Address retroactive pay obligations if applicable
- Ensure pension contribution compliance across systems

VI. Benefits and Retirement

- Select and align health insurance plans
- Align benefit eligibility rules and enrollment timelines
- Address health coverage continuity requirements
- Coordinate Medicare eligibility and integration
- Confirm pension system participation and contribution requirements

VII. Fire and EMS Operations and Service Delivery

- Define fire suppression model and deployment standards
- Define EMS delivery model, standards, and compliance requirements
- Develop and implement Civilian Paramedic Program job classification and hiring plan
- Establish minimum staffing requirements per apparatus and shift
- Define station coverage and deployment geography
- Complete Standards of Cover analysis by planning zone
- Confirm NFPA, DEA, and applicable regulatory compliance
- Evaluate GIS coverage, station locations, and consolidation opportunities

VIII. Policies and Procedures

- Inventory and harmonize all SOPs and SOGs
- Adopt unified EMS protocols and clinical guidelines
- Establish HIPAA compliance procedures and training
- Adopt safety and fitness-for-duty policies
- Standardize attendance, uniform, and conduct policies

IX. Training and Professional Development

- Establish academy and lateral entry training standards
- Define certification equivalencies and recognition procedures
- Establish continuing education requirements for all ranks
- Implement officer development and leadership programs

X. Fleet, Facilities, and Assets

- Complete inventory of all district assets and outstanding debts
- Assign legal ownership of stations, apparatus, and equipment
- Establish fleet replacement schedules and specifications
- Standardize purchasing, maintenance, and procurement processes

XI. Technology and Data Systems

- ❑ Select and implement CAD and RMS systems
- ❑ Integrate payroll and timekeeping systems
- ❑ Ensure radio interoperability across all districts
- ❑ Establish data retention standards and cybersecurity protocols

XII. Financial Planning and Budgeting

- ❑ Develop consolidated operating and capital budgets
- ❑ Establish reserve fund policies and minimum thresholds
- ❑ Analyze tax rate impacts and assessed value projections
- ❑ Establish grant management and reporting procedures

XIII. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- ❑ Develop and execute public communication and engagement plan
- ❑ Engage elected officials and community stakeholders
- ❑ Address service equity concerns across all districts

XIV. Transition and Implementation

- ❑ Establish transition timeline with milestone accountability
- ❑ Define go-live date for consolidated operations
- ❑ Execute payroll and benefits cutover plan
- ❑ Monitor early performance and address emerging issues

XV. Risk Management and Compliance

- ❑ Confirm insurance coverage for all personnel and operations
- ❑ Align workers' compensation and Hurt-on-Duty programs
- ❑ Ensure OSHA and CMS compliance across all operations

XVI. Cultural Integration and Workforce Stability

- ❑ Conduct leadership alignment sessions across all districts
- ❑ Establish and maintain communication cadence with workforce
- ❑ Monitor morale and retention indicators continuously
- ❑ Conduct post-implementation review and lessons-learned process

Long-Term System Sustainability and Leadership Legacy

The ultimate measure of success for the Allen County Fire & EMS District is its ability to endure beyond individual leaders, economic cycles, and political change. The purpose of this initiative is to ensure that the structures, practices, and relationships established through this strategy become institutionalized, resilient, and adaptable over time. Sustainability is achieved not through static plans, but through disciplined governance, continuous improvement, and shared ownership.

Embedding Accountability into Governance

Long-term sustainability begins with governance. Annual strategic reviews conducted by the Board of Trustees/Oversight Committee will evaluate system performance, financial health, workforce stability, and community outcomes. These reviews will inform updates to multi-year plans and ensure alignment with evolving county priorities. By maintaining regular oversight, the system avoids drift and remains responsive to emerging challenges.

Workforce Sustainability and Succession Planning

Workforce sustainability is reinforced through leadership development and succession planning. Countywide officer development programs, standardized performance evaluations, and mentorship initiatives will prepare future leaders to operate effectively within a coordinated system. This investment reduces disruption during leadership transitions and preserves institutional knowledge across the organization.

Financial and Operational Resilience

Financial and operational sustainability are supported through continuous data-driven decision-making. Regular updates to financial forecasts, capital plans, and performance metrics allow the system to adapt to changes in demand, funding, and regulatory requirements. Grant strategies and regional partnerships will continue to supplement local resources and enhance resilience.

Sustaining Public and Workforce Trust

Equally important is sustaining trust, with the public, with labor, and with the communities served. Transparent communication, consistent labor engagement, and respectful collaboration with local boards and elected officials ensure ongoing support for the system. Public confidence is maintained by demonstrating that coordination improves service delivery, protects firefighters, and uses taxpayer resources responsibly.

This strategy is designed not as a one-time initiative, but as a framework for enduring excellence. By institutionalizing collaboration, professionalism, and accountability, the Allen County Fire & EMS District can build a system that serves its communities effectively today and remains strong for generations to come.

Service to our Communities. Protection for our Responders. Responsibility to All.