

Strengthening Collegiate EMS Through Non-EMT Integration

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Abstract

Collegiate EMS programs face national challenges including limited EMT availability, high turnover, and barriers to certification that exclude many pre-health students. Longhorn EMS (LEMS) addresses these challenges through a structured, non-EMT support team model that sustains operations, delivers public health education, and builds an EMT pipeline. Support members participate in training, simulations, and observational ride-outs while developing leadership skills. From Fall 2023–Fall 2025, one-third of support members transitioned to EMT roles, with many assuming leadership positions. This model expands access, strengthens workforce readiness, and supports sustainable collegiate EMS operations.

Introduction

Collegiate EMS programs face persistent national challenges, including limited EMT availability, high member turnover driven by academic demands, and substantial financial and time barriers to EMT certification. These constraints can unintentionally exclude motivated pre-health students from meaningful participation in emergency response and public health work, reducing both workforce capacity and educational access. As a result, many collegiate EMS organizations struggle to balance operational sustainability with inclusive engagement and leadership development.

Longhorn EMS (LEMS) at The University of Texas at Austin addresses these challenges through a deliberately structured, predominantly non-EMT support team model. This support team is fully integrated into organizational operations, maintaining essential workflows such as event staffing, logistics coordination, training support, and administrative functions that enable certified EMTs to prioritize patient care. In parallel, support team members play a central role in LEMS's public health mission, serving as the primary instructors for Stop the Bleed, Harm Reduction, and CPR/First Aid programs delivered across campus and to the surrounding community.

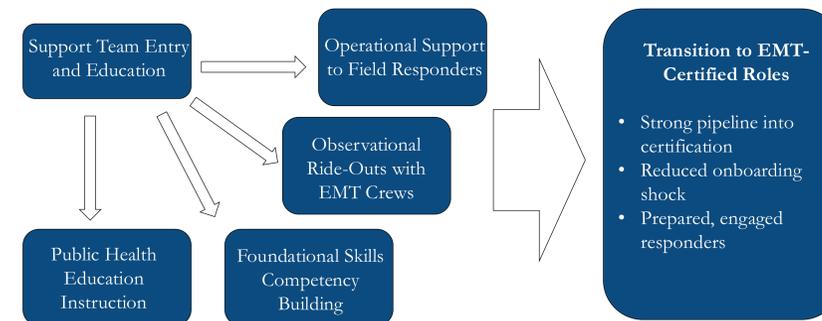
Program Objectives

- (1) increase organizational resilience and continuity despite fluctuations in EMT availability,
- (2) expand early access to prehospital and public health experiences for non-EMT students, and
- (3) create a structured pipeline for skill development, leadership training, and progression into certified EMT roles.

Development/Implementation

The LEMS support team was developed in 2020 by organizational leadership in response to persistent EMT shortages, high turnover, and barriers to certification common in collegiate EMS. The program was intentionally designed to preserve operational readiness while expanding access to meaningful pre-hospital and public health experiences for pre-health students. Initial implementation leveraged existing organizational infrastructure and student government–allocated funding to LEMS, supporting training resources, simulations, and public health programming.

Structured Integration Pathway for Non-EMT Support Members



Evaluation

From Fall 2023 to Fall 2025, approximately one-third of support-level members annually transitioned to EMT-certified responder roles, demonstrating a strong and consistent pipeline into clinical certification. As shown in Figure 1, overall membership remained stable across semesters, with the support team consistently comprising the majority of active members and serving as the primary source of new responders. Fourteen support members currently hold leadership positions, reflecting early integration of operational and educational experience. Informal feedback suggests observational ride-outs and skills-based exercises improve engagement, reduce onboarding shock for new EMTs, and foster preparedness for clinical responsibilities.

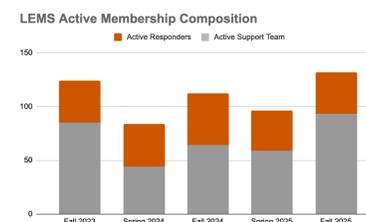


Figure 1. LEMS Active Membership Composition (Fall 2023–Fall 2025). Active membership by semester, showing responders and support team members. Support members consistently comprise the majority of the organization, sustaining operations while supporting a stable responder workforce over time.

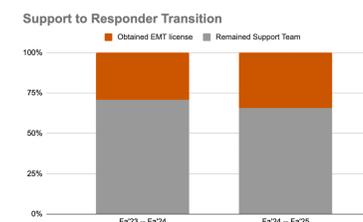


Figure 2. Support-to-Responder Transition Rates Across Academic Years. Proportion of support team members who obtained EMT licensure versus those who remained in support roles across two academic periods, demonstrating a consistent pathway from support participation to EMT certification.

Discussion/Conclusion

LEMS demonstrates that structured non-EMT involvement strengthens collegiate EMS readiness, expands educational access, and enhances patient care capacity by creating a reliable pipeline into EMT-certified responder roles. Key outcomes of program implementation include sustained operational capacity despite EMT turnover, consistent transition of support members into responder positions, and early leadership development among non-EMT members.

Challenges associated with implementation include the need for ongoing supervision, careful scope delineation to prevent role confusion, and variability in support members' timelines for pursuing EMT certification. Additionally, program evaluation has relied primarily on membership trends, role transitions, and informal feedback rather than standardized outcome measures, limiting the ability to quantify educational or clinical impact.

Future plans include formalizing evaluation metrics, expanding structured training and mentorship pathways, and strengthening partnerships with university and local EMS stakeholders to support certification access. By continuing to refine this model, LEMS aims to further reduce barriers to entry for pre-health students while maintaining high standards of care and organizational sustainability.

References

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