

## **CHAPTER 8:**

# **Conclusions**

Achieving interoperability is a challenging job, particularly in these times of budget shortfall for all levels of government. Without the collective voices of elected and appointed officials, without partnership, cooperation, and leadership at all levels, it's a job that will not get done. This guide can be the first step in developing interoperable radio communication systems that ensure we can talk. It can be the catalyst that initiates the public sector discussion required to develop interoperability.

Just as our economy and society are becoming more global, the business of protecting life and property on the local level has become more mobile, more sophisticated, more information dependent, and more dispersed. Needs are changing. The growing need for interoperability is affecting strategic decisions to share radio systems and dispatch centers, to build systems with extended coverage areas, and to establish systems as utilities rather than viewing radio communication systems in the traditional sense as an internal tactical and operations function. This conceptual growth and development is natural and useful. Ten years ago most cellular and paging suppliers were providing only local service, but they have recently combined their radio spectrum to create national services. As users become more dependent on mobility in a wider area, public safety radio has to evolve.

The more public safety and public service users are on the same system, the more inter-agency interoperability, both during day-to-day routine operations and during a crisis. Criminal deterrence and apprehension is improved, fire and EMS response is more efficient, and highway maintenance is safer. This means better public safety for all. As you begin to discuss and plan for interoperability, remember the following considerations.

### **Focus on and understand first responder needs.**

First responders to emergencies include law enforcement agencies, fire departments, emergency medical services, and public service providers.

Understanding the interoperable communication needs of these responders should be a first step in improving interoperability.

## **Planning should include both short- and long-term strategies.**

There are numerous strategies for improving interoperability. Some involve improving coordination and cooperation among responding agencies and jurisdictions, and can be implemented in the short term. Other strategies require longer term planning and implementation of new communications systems, policies, and operating procedures.

## **Focus on partnership rather than competition. Develop a common voice to facilitate budget and policy decisions. Make decisions through consensus where possible, with a strong bias toward inclusion.**

Recognize that strength in improving interoperability is built by working together with agencies and jurisdictions that have traditionally been viewed as competitors. Developing a common voice with these agencies and jurisdictions at all levels of government will help budget and policy decisionmakers support efforts to improve interoperability. Making decisions through consensus, including as many of the various interests involved as possible, will strengthen these partnerships as well as the level of commitment to these partnerships by individual interests.

## **Encourage realistic expectations, solutions take time. Encourage investment in pilots, planning, and discussion. Utilize existing resources wherever possible.**

Improving interoperability is a complex endeavor. There are no “one

size fits all” solutions. It may require agencies and jurisdictions to develop new and improved working relationships and could involve substantial changes in how individual agencies operate in terms of communication. Expect to make progress, but allow adequate time for the progress to be substantial. Sometimes the most progress is made through small steps that test strategies and approaches. These can provide a firmer foundation for future success.

## **Attempt to maximize economies of scale, but balance the size of the effort against diminishing return.**

Economies of scale can be realized by sharing resources among agencies and jurisdictions. Leverage these economies through the participation of other agencies and jurisdictions, recognizing that as the size of the effort increases, the difficulty of implementing solutions may also increase while the benefits may not increase correspondingly.

## **Grant guidelines should encourage partnering to improve interoperability.**

Most current State and Federal grants targeted at improving public safety communications are awarded to individual agencies or jurisdictions. Improving interoperability requires coordination and cooperation between agencies and jurisdictions. All awards should encourage guidelines, criteria, or requirements that encourage or provide incentives for agencies and jurisdictions to partner with others and work toward improving interoperability.