

FirstNet-like support needed for next-gen 911, APCO panelists say

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NEW ORLEANS—Next-generation 911 is widely perceived in mission-critical communications as an essential component of the nationwide public-safety broadband network. In fact, next-gen 911 and [FirstNet](#) are two halves of a whole, according to Jay English, director of communications center and 911 services with the [Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#) (APCO).

“Basically, all of the massive amounts of voice data and video, multimedia emergency-services information coming in from the public will come into the [PSAP](#) and—via those same kinds of IP pipes—go out over FirstNet to first responders,” English said during an APCO session on the subject this week.

“Proper integration of [next-generation 911](#) services for those callers to the nerve centers that are the PSAPs to the responders that will handle the emergency, that is scalable and truly interoperable, is the future that we all want and it’s the reason that FirstNet exists.”

If next-gen 911 is seen as such a fundamental element of FirstNet, then why did Congress choose to fund FirstNet at \$7 billion, while next-gen 911 was allocated only \$115 million—and why is the next-gen 911 funding scheduled for later in the process, noted Jeff Vannais, communications supervisor with the East Hartford Police Department in Connecticut.

“The only way this is going to work is if we truly all work together—APCO, [NENA](#), all of the other groups that are involved—and we really need to mean it,” Vannais said.

“And, at some point, if we’re going to say that NG-911’s success is as important as FirstNet’s success, then we’ve got to put them on the same plane, and we’ve got to all mean that, as well.”

Ed Parkinson, director of government relations for FirstNet, noted during the session that the initial FirstNet funding stage--SLIGP grants – is occurring now. Next up is the \$7 billion for FirstNet, then \$100 million for [PSCR](#) and then \$20.4 billion for deficit reduction. Funding for next-gen 911 is scheduled to take place after those steps.

“FirstNet did not pass the law that created FirstNet, and Congress did not shove the FirstNet law down public safety’s throat,” Jeff Johnson, FirstNet board member, said during the session. “The First Responders Network Authority [FirstNet] was created by Congress and signed by President Obama at the demand of public safety speaking with one voice.

“It’s going to take that coalition again, and it’s going to take police, fire, EMS and a broader coalition to solve it. And I will tell you, having lived through that, that one of the first things we had to do was get in a room and just absolutely bloody each other with disagreement as we put aside our differences of opinion, which always stood in the way of us solving problems.”

FirstNet is in the process of hiring a 911 subject matter expert.

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