

April 11, 2026

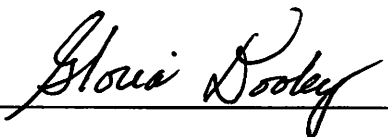
The Rusk County ESD #1 met on this date at 9:02 a.m. for a Strategic Planning Workshop with Board Member Jiffy Dukes presiding. Board Members present were Gloria Dooley, Wayne Griffith and Curt Collins. Board Members absent were David Burks. The workshop was opened with a prayer from Jiffy Dukes followed by the pledge to the American flag.

Representatives from the following departments were present: Reklaw, Carlisle, Laneville, New Salem, Eastside and Rusk Co. Rescue.

Board Member Jiffy Dukes welcomed everyone and introduced Mike Montgomery and Chris Barren who would be conducting the workshop and he turned it over to Mike. Mike explained that the goals for the day were to develop a plan for the whole District, develop guiding principles to drive the plan, develop the District's vision, core values and expectations while working with a sound financial base.

Attached/following this statement is a summary of the workshop. The group continued with the workshop during the lunch hour with open discussions on a variety of topics. The date for the next workshop will be June 5<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the workshop, a motion to adjourn was made by Board Member Jiffy Dukes, and duly seconded by Board Member Curt Collins. On a unanimous vote of the Board, the workshop was adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
President

# ESD Strategic Planning Workshop

Sat 11 Apr 2026 • 5h 16min

## Introductions and Workshop Purpose

The meeting opened with a round of introductions from consultants and Emergency Services District (ESD) board members. Participants highlighted their local ties, professional backgrounds, and experience in emergency services and consulting. The main goal of the workshop was established: to guide the ESD through the development of a strategic, district-wide plan focused on equitable, high-quality service delivery, fiscal transparency, and organizational modernization. Consultants emphasized that the strategic plan should be community-centered, represent all stakeholders (district, departments, and taxpayers), and position the ESD for future challenges and growth.

## District Overview and Context

### Financial Health and Growth

- The ESD has recently experienced rapid financial growth due to new sales tax revenue streams, which have significantly increased the district's annual budget. This expansion enables broader planning and resource allocation and shifts the organization's outlook from survival management to proactive, strategic development.
- The district operates with strong fiscal stewardship, with a history of minimal debt and a priority on responsible public fund management. Most departments' capital expenditures—vehicles, facilities, equipment, communications—are planned and funded through accumulating reserves and competitive grant seeking.

## **District Structure and Operations**

- The ESD currently comprises 12 volunteer fire departments and 4 contract/city combination departments, providing a mix of services across a large, primarily rural geography. Departmental profiles are maintained and updated (excluding departmental leadership names due to frequent turnover) for transparency and public awareness.
- Departments submit annual operational budgets to the district, which are then aggregated for district-level budgeting. Departments can request additional funding for unplanned needs, including unexpected equipment failures or new member gear.
- Data collection and reporting practices are evolving: most volunteer units use a shared Records Management System (RMS), while a small group continues to report by form. Ongoing efforts are moving toward standardized, extractable data and direct analytics for more accurate trend tracking.
- The region is characterized by high volumes of weather-related calls (e.g., tornadoes, severe wind, and post-storm tree clearing) that distinguish its call profile from typical Texas or US districts. Conversely, EMS call volume is lower here than state and national averages, with medical transport provided under contract by a single regional EMS entity.

## **Funding and Resource Allocation**

- Capital expenditure priorities reflect community needs: maintaining modern vehicle fleets, staying current with communications and dispatch technology, expanding and improving station infrastructure, and acquiring new protective equipment.
- The district has a practice of regular vehicle replacement, implementing

early replacement schedules to maximize resale value and reduce potential reliability issues, representing a best practice seldom achieved elsewhere.

## **Planning Process and Methodology**

### **Framework**

- The workshop was structured around a stepwise planning methodology: establishing guiding principles (mission, vision, values); conducting a thorough gap analysis (using SWOT+C: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, critical issues); and setting measurable, actionable goals and objectives using industry best practices for strategic planning.
- Guiding principles were collaboratively developed, including the refinement of the mission (firefighter safety and community service as core priorities), the drafting of an aspirational vision (being a recognized and trusted leader, with exceptional leadership and a culture of excellence), and the identification of core district values (integrity, stewardship, accountability, compassion/empathy, others before self, and leading by example).

### **Assessment and Environmental Scan**

- A gap analysis integrated a district-wide structural review—combining quantitative coverage assessments with qualitative input from department leadership, board members, and consultants—framing both operational strengths and enduring challenges.
- The district’s structure as a mixture of all-volunteer and hybrid departments presents organizational complexity, particularly amid evolving community expectations for urban service levels despite rural realities (response times, staffing, and resource availability).

- Community engagement and local knowledge are strong: residents frequently know department members personally, leading to direct (sometimes informal) call practices and quick mobilization on non-traditional service requests (e.g., tree clearing after storms).

## **Strategic Challenges and Future Needs**

- Volunteer recruitment and retention emerged as an urgent concern; the district's wide geography, rural nature, and changing demographics make it increasingly challenging to maintain active responder ranks, especially for daytime incidents. Board members noted the need to balance volunteerism with the introduction of paid staff in critical management and operational roles.
- The group discussed and prioritized the creation—and immediate recruitment for—two new district roles: executive director and business manager. These positions are critical to sustaining district growth and offloading operational/financial management from board volunteers.
- The ESD is also planning for a future where paid firefighting staff may supplement volunteers, especially during shifts/times with consistent under-response. However, the stated intention is to preserve and support the volunteer model to the greatest feasible extent.
- Dispatch and communications infrastructure are under ongoing review. The district currently utilizes county sheriff's office dispatch, but has equipped facilities for an eventual transition to in-house dispatch if needed for service reliability or operational control.

## **Critical Discussions and Decisions**

### **Capital Planning and Inventory Management**

- The workshop underscored the importance of meticulous capital planning, with regular updates to fleet and equipment inventories, proactive asset replacement, and transparent reporting practices.
- Communication equipment, particularly the move toward multi-band radios and collaborative investment with law enforcement, represents a major, recurring capital commitment, managed through early payoff strategies and continuous reinvestment of sales tax and grant funds.
- The district is seeking to formalize a long-term capital plan, including 5- and 10-year outlooks for major expenditures and infrastructure, while acknowledging that shifting costs (e.g., vehicles, radios, station construction) and legislative risks can limit the precision of any long-range forecast.

## **Defining Service Expectations and Future Benchmarks**

- The board and consultants jointly established that setting realistic, community-informed response time benchmarks is essential. Current averages reflect rural geography, volunteer availability, and travel distances—as well as the necessity of managing community expectations to prevent unrealistic comparisons with urban standards.
- Data-driven approaches, such as heat mapping call density and deploying staff/stations based on emerging development patterns, were discussed as future tools for optimizing service, facility placement, and fleet distribution.

## **Mission, Vision, and Values—Guidance and Culture**

- The collaborative revision of the mission, vision, and values statements was central to the workshop. The group sought to keep these both concise and actionable, providing a reference point for district culture, personnel expectations, decision-making, and public communications.

- "Service for every citizen" was affirmed as an operational brand, reflecting the district's dual commitment to equity and responsiveness for all residents and visitors.

## Gap Analysis and Strategic Priorities

### SWOT+C Results

- **Strengths:** Strong financial position, modern equipment, robust volunteer culture, board responsiveness, improved training standards, well-maintained assets.
- **Weaknesses:** Shifting recruitment/retention patterns, gaps in daytime/weekday response capacity, incomplete department certification levels, inconsistencies in policy/SOP documentation, and limited centralized inventory management.
- **Opportunities:** Adding paid staffing (both management and operational), expanding in-house training, leveraging data analytics/heat maps, further modernizing systems, and piloting incentive programs for volunteers.
- **Threats:** Legislative/regulatory changes, water supply limitations, major local development pressures (e.g., new industry influx, population growth), reductions in volunteerism, and future funding volatility (sales/property tax).
- **Critical Issues:** The most urgent issue is initiating the recruitment and onboarding of an executive director and business manager to ensure sustainable district operations and governance. Other immediate tasks: standardizing department profiles, gathering missing data (ISO ratings, equipment inventories, capital/financial details), and prioritizing SOP/SOG development.

### Strategic Goals and Next Steps

- SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals are being developed for key benchmarks: raising certification standards, reducing average response times, increasing volunteer ranks, filling critical management positions, and finalizing actionable capital and operational plans.
- Action items identified include updating department profiles, compiling and publicly sharing inventory and asset data, launching a structured response incentive program to boost volunteer engagement, refining job descriptions for new roles, and scheduling a follow-up workshop for collaborative review and refinement of the strategic plan.

## **Forward Planning and Workshop Continuity**

- The workshop concluded with consensus to hold a short, focused follow-up meeting (targeting early June by videoconference) to review plan drafts, finalize open action items, and ensure continued alignment between consultants, board, and departments. Board liaisons will be appointed for ongoing coordination, data gathering, and plan implementation.
- The plan's aims are to ensure the ESD remains proactive, financially sustainable, and operationally effective—respecting community traditions while preparing for growth, regulatory change, and a shifting emergency services landscape.