Unit VIII – Exercise Design

This Unit identifies the components of a comprehensive Test, Training and Exercise program and explains the objectives of a progressive exercise program. The design methodology of a tabletop exercise for the COOP program is discussed and includes practices which promotes preparedness, validates plans and procedures, and improves response capability. Finally, participation in preliminary development of a COOP tabletop exercise will be achieved.
**Unit VIII – Exercise Design**

**UNIT OBJECTIVES**

- Describe the components of a Comprehensive Test, Training and Exercise program.
- Identify objectives of a progressive exercise program.
- Describe the design steps of an exercise and apply them to the COOP program.
- Design a tabletop exercise for the COOP program which promotes preparedness, validates plans and procedures, and improves response capability.
- Participate in preliminary development of a COOP tabletop exercise.

---

**Unit VIII – Progressive Agency Exercise Program**

At the conclusion of the unit, the participants will be able to:

1. Describe the components of a Comprehensive Test, Training and Exercise program.
2. Identify objectives of a progressive exercise program.
3. Describe the eight design steps of an exercise and apply them to the COOP program.
4. Design a tabletop exercise for the COOP program which promotes preparedness, validates plans and procedures, and improves response capability.
5. Participate in preliminary development of a COOP tabletop exercise.
The Objectives of a Test, Training, and Exercise Program

The overall objective of a COOP Test, Training, and Exercise (TT&E) Program is to develop, implement, and institutionalize a comprehensive, all-hazard program to improve the ability of agencies to effectively manage and execute their COOP plans. The program incorporates the three functional areas of testing systems and equipment, training personnel, and exercising plans and procedures. Specific objectives of a COOP TT&E Program are to:

- Validate COOP plans, policies, and procedures.
- Ensure that agency personnel are familiar with alert, notification, and deployment procedures.
- Ensure agency personnel are sufficiently trained to carry out agency minimum essential operations and functions when deployed at a COOP site or working in a COOP environment.
- Exercise procedures by deploying designated personnel and equipment to an alternate facility to ensure the ability to perform an agency’s essential functions and operations during emergency.
- Ensure that backup data and records required to support essential functions at the alternate facility are sufficient, complete and current.
- Test and validate equipment to ensure both internal and external interoperability.
- Ensure agency personnel understand the procedures to phase down COOP operations and transition to normal activities when appropriate.

Agencies should develop a TT&E program that incorporates all levels of the agency, including headquarters, regions, and field locations. Funding for the program is the responsibility of each agency. The TT&E program should include: policy, guidance, and standards; training courses and materials; exercises of varying types and scope designed to improve the overall organizational response capability to emergency situations; a multi-year TT&E schedule; and evaluation and remedial action programs.
The Components of a Comprehensive TT&E Program

The main objective of a COOP TT&E Program is to develop, implement, and institutionalize a comprehensive, all-hazards approach to improve the ability of agencies to maintain and execute the organization’s COOP plans and procedures. The TT&E program should be progressive in nature, building from simple, individual tasks to complex, multi-organizational interactions.

The program should contain a mixture of activities including training, tests, and exercises. Each activity should be evaluated and the results incorporated into a formal remedial action process. The results are recommended for use as performance measurements to rate the overall effectiveness of the COOP program.

Organizations should develop a comprehensive TT&E program to validate policies, plans, and procedures, ensure that personnel are sufficiently trained, and verify that resources and equipment are capable of supporting operations. Each organization should ensure that each of the following components are included in their program:

- Training
- Tests
- Exercises
- Schedules
- Evaluations
- Remedial Action Process
The Benefits of a Comprehensive TT&E Program are:

- Develops a long-term program
- Establishes strategic goals
- Becomes progressively more challenging
- Assures constant and continuous program improvement

Benefits of a Comprehensive TT&E Program

COOP planning requires a comprehensive TT&E program partly because non-emergency organizations are involved to a greater extent. A change in the organization’s operations can significantly change the COOP plan. Additionally, the viability and execution of the COOP plan is dependent upon current and reliable information on personnel. The TT&E program will ensure that staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the execution of the COOP plan. The benefits of a comprehensive TT&E Program include:

- Development of a long-term program;
- Establishment of program strategic goals;
- Development of a progressive and challenging program; and,
- Assurance of constant and continuous program improvement.

Organizations should consider utilizing joint initiatives, particularly with the development and conduct of exercises. Participation in joint agency initiatives, where applicable and feasible, will benefit organizations through awareness of available resources, development of relationships with other agencies, involvement with interagency working groups/committees, participation in multi-agency COOP exercises, and participation with other emergency teams as appropriate.
Training

Regularly scheduled training must be conducted to assure the readiness of all agency emergency and non-emergency personnel. Training plans are developed and implemented to prepare individuals and groups to accomplish certain tasks, using selected equipment, under specific scenarios. This training may encompass a deliberate blend of hands-on activities, seminars, orientations, workshops, on-line or interactive programs, briefings and lectures.

COOP training should not address the competencies required for “normal” tasks and operations. The purpose of the training is to prepare agency personnel to institute emergency operations at an alternate facility, to use equipment and procedures and to work with individuals with whom they have little contact during normal day-to-day operations.

The length of the training and the depth of the coverage of the information provided and discussed will vary based on the audience and method of training selected. Typically, if the audience is essential personnel, details of operations, communications, vital records and alternate facilities will require extended discussion. Awareness training for the entire workforce might include topics such as compensation during an event, alert/notification procedures, work location, information dissemination, etc. Major topics or components of the training syllabus could include: (1) Definition of COOP; (2) Essential elements of COOP; (3) Criteria or "triggers" for a COOP event; (4) Major operational elements of the specific organization’s COOP; and, (5) Maintenance of COOP plans. Operational elements can include the following:

- Leadership during a COOP event
- Impact of on the individual employee
- Phases of an event
- Alternate facilities
- COOP Activation and decision-making
- Implementation
- Essential functions and operations
- Transition/resumption to normal operations
Tests

Testing is the technique of demonstrating the correct operation of all equipment, procedures, processes and systems that support the organizational infrastructure, and validates that the equipment and systems conform to specifications and operate in the required environments, and that procedures and processes are viable. This verification and validation technique assures that backup equipment and systems closely approximate the operations of the primary equipment and systems. There are a variety of methods that can be used to test the functionality of backup environments. Examples of tests include:

- **Static tests** determine if all the essential components of the equipment and systems are in place and meet the specification and design requirements of the organization.

- **Dynamic tests** verify that all of the required equipment and systems function independently of each other, function in consort with each other and satisfy the operational requirements of the organization.

- **Functional tests** verify that the procedures for operating the equipment and systems in the backup environment are correct. This testing assures that when trained and qualified personnel are required to utilize the backup equipment and systems, the instructions for operation are clear and complete.

Regularly scheduled testing of agency equipment, systems, processes, and procedures used to support the agency during a COOP event should: (1) Provide for quarterly evaluations of alert and notification procedures and systems, including instructions for relocation to alternate facilities, with and without warning, and during duty and non-duty hours; (2) Evaluate the ability to access current vital records, systems, and data management software and equipment necessary to perform essential functions; (3) Evaluate the interoperability of communications; and (4) Evaluate the logistical support, services, and infrastructure systems (e.g., water, electricity, HVAC) at alternate facilities.
Exercises

Exercises are conducted for the purpose of validating elements of the COOP, both individually and collectively. Exercises should be a realistic rehearsal/simulation of an emergency, in which individuals and organizations demonstrate the tasks that would be expected of them in a real event. They should provide simulations that promote preparedness, improve the response capability of individuals and organizations, validate plans, policies, procedures and systems, and determine the effectiveness of the command, control, and communication functions and event-scene activities. Exercises may vary in size and complexity to achieve. Examples include:

- **Tabletop Exercises** simulate an emergency situation in an informal, stress-free environment, and are designed to elicit constructive discussion as participants examine/resolve problems based on existing plans. There is no equipment utilization, resource deployment, or time pressures. The exercise success is dependent upon group participation with identifying problem areas. This format is used to familiarize newly assigned personnel with established or emerging concepts – plans, policies, procedures.

- **Drills** are a coordinated, supervised activity normally used to exercise a single specific operation/function in a single agency, and are used to provide training with new equipment, to develop new policies/procedures, or to practice/maintain current skills.

- **Functional Exercises** are fully simulated interactive exercises that validate the capability of an agency to respond to a simulated emergency testing one or more functions of the plans and focus on policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities of single or multiple emergency functions before, during, or after any emergency event.

- **Full-Scale Exercises** simulate actual emergency conditions through field exercises designed to evaluate the operational capabilities of the agency’s COOP in a highly stressful environment. This realism can be accomplished through mobilization and actual movement of agency emergency personnel, equipment, and resources.
Schedules

The TT&E Program Schedules should contain a mixture of activities including training, tests, and remedial exercises. Each activity should be evaluated and the results incorporated into a formal remedial action process. The results are recommended for use as performance measurements to rate the overall effectiveness of the COOP program. At a minimum, the organization should:

- Conduct orientation and training for identified COOP personnel (individual/team);
- Periodically test alert and notification procedures;
- Plan periodic exercise of operational plans, alternate facilities, interoperable communications;
- Plan joint agency exercises;
- Periodically validate and test equipment;
- Establish remedial action plan/process; and,
- Update plans and procedures as appropriate or annually.

Each organization should establish working groups to develop the TT&E program and assign overall program responsibility to one person. The group should consider training needs of both managers and staff. Finally, the group should prepare a schedule for a 12 month period which identifies the following:

- What types of activities will be used – training, tests and exercises?
- Who will be trained?
- Who will attend exercises?
- Who will conduct the activities?
- When and where each session will occur?
- How frequent will tests occur?
- How will activities be evaluated and documented?
Evaluations

The evaluation of an exercise should identify systemic weaknesses and suggest corrective actions that will enhance agency preparedness. Following an exercise, a comprehensive debriefing and after-action report should be completed. All data collected for the TT&E program should be incorporated into a remedial action plan that provides input for annual COOP revisions. A No-Fault Concept (e.g., non-punitive) should be utilized during all exercises.

Although there are many types of evaluations, two basic forms to collect data are suggested for use with COOP TT&E program:

- **Employee Observation/Comment Forms** is designed to collect information from any employee working during COOP exercise. It should be used to record comments about any action, strength, weakness observed during operations.

- **Ups and Downs Quick Report** is designed to record a snapshot of strengths and weaknesses at the conclusion of the COOP exercise. It should summarize what the unit or section feels were the three things that worked best and the three things that they feel require additional work or training.

The inputs from both the Employee Observation/Comment Forms and the Ups and Downs Quick Report should be incorporated into a COOP Remedial Action Plan. Recommendations for changes to the organization’s COOP Plan and accompanying SOPs should be developed and incorporated into the COOP Annual Review Process. In addition, recommendations that affect the alert and notification process, the COOP activation process, COOP implementation, or operational issues with the mobilization process should be developed immediately following the exercise and incorporated into the COOP plan.
Remedial Action Process

Organizations should establish procedures to ensure that the information obtained from the TT&E program is incorporated into a remedial action process. The remedial action plan should identify deficiencies and propose corrective actions/solutions. This evaluation process should include an annual review/update of the COOP plan and all support documents.

Training and orientation curriculum should be instituted to create awareness and enhance the skills required to develop, implement, maintain, and execute the COOP program. The content and curriculum of the training should be evaluate to assure familiarity with the conduct of emergency operations. Each element of the COOP program should be evaluated through a combination of different tests and exercises with formal written data collection tools to document performance. Post-event reports should be prepared to assess performance.

A remedial action process should be established by each organization. This plan should include input from all TT&E activities and any available post-incident reports. Organizations should establish procedures to ensure that the information obtained from the TT&E program is incorporated into a remedial action process. The remedial action plan should identify deficiencies and propose corrective actions/solutions. This evaluation process should include an annual review/update of the COOP plan and all support documents. Organizations should:

- Conduct a formal audit of the entire plan annually.
- Evaluate all areas of the program and develop corrective actions based on this data.
- Identify systematic weaknesses and provide suggestions for correction after each exercise.
- Conduct a debriefing and develop and after action report after each exercise.
Exercise Development Process

Conducting an exercise is not an independent activity, it requires a thorough planning and development process before, during, and after the event. There is not a distinct beginning or ending point, rather a complex development process. This process involves numerous tasks that have affects on each other as well as future exercises. The Exercise Development Process includes many activities which are vital for success including the following:

- **Review COOP Plan** – what are the roles and responsibilities; what are the main functions?

- **Assess COOP capability and resources** – what is the capability of the personnel; what equipment, systems, resources are available at the alternate facility?

- **Address costs and liabilities** – verify sufficient funds, hidden and apparent costs, for staff salaries, equipment, materials, contract services, travel expenses, etc.


- **Organize a Design Team** – select a team to develop and conduct the exercise, include assignment of a team leader and ensure sufficient staffing for administrative tasks.

- **Schedule Tasks** – prepare a detailed project management plan which outlines required activities, establishes timeframes for completion, and assigns responsibility to personnel (e.g. Gantt Chart).

- **Develop Work Plans** – utilize the Gantt Chart as a basis to develop a narrative for the major activities required for the exercise.

- **Follow the Eight Exercise Design Steps** – each step is discussed on subsequent slides.
### Sequence of Tasks for Success

#### Pre-Exercise Phase
- Review Plan
- Assess Capability
- Address Costs and Liabilities
- Gain Support/Issue Exercise Directive
- Organize Design Team
- Prepare a Schedule
- Design Exercise (Eight Design Steps)

#### Exercise Phase
- Prepare Facility
- Assemble Props and Other Enhancements
- Brief Participants
- Conduct Exercise

#### Post-Exercise Phase
- Assess Achievement of Objectives
- Participate in Post-Exercise Meetings
- Prepare Evaluation Report
- Participate in Follow-up Activities

#### Exercise Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Conduct Exercise</th>
<th>After Conduct Exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review Plan</td>
<td>Conduct Post-Exercise Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Needs Assessment</td>
<td>Write After-Action Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess Capability</td>
<td>Conduct Follow-up Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine Exercise Scope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send Exercise Directive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Purpose Statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List Major and Detailed Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize Design Team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Evaluation Format</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalize Exercise Enhancements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Messages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine Expected Actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize Evaluation Team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a Schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Exercise (Eight Design Steps)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Evaluation Team Leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Evaluation Methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select and Organize Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train Evaluators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Exercise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eight Exercise Design Steps

The Eight Exercise Design Steps are used to develop all four types of exercises – Tabletop, Drill, Functional, Full-scale. This design process is labor intensive, but is necessary to ensure a positive, rewarding exercise program. Utilizing the Eight Exercise Design Steps will focus the work efforts and assure that the exercise is goal-oriented.

Since planning an exercise requires a multitude of tasks, including the design process as well as administrative matters, the project team leader must have a committed staff to assist with preparation, execution, and evaluation. The team leader is responsible for the entire exercise including development and managing all administrative and logistical matters. In an interagency exercise, the team leader will need liaisons from each of the participating agencies.

Exercise design is a complex task which requires a team effort. The design team must be familiar with the COOP plan and have a sound understanding of the organization. The team will assist in developing the exercise objectives, content, and procedures. Additionally, the team will coordinate to develop a feasible scenario and prepare the sequence of events and associated messages. Since team members assist with preliminary training and exercise development, they are also good candidates to serve as simulators or controllers. The Eight Exercise Design Steps are:

- Needs Assessment
- Scope Definition
- Purpose Statement
- Objectives
- Narrative
- Major and Detailed Events
- Expected Actions
- Messages
Step One – Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment will assist the organization in ascertaining the reasons to conduct an exercise and the best approach to examine potential or identified deficiencies. The complexity of the exercise is determined by the complexity and detail devoted to preparing the event. A simple tabletop requires minimal scripting, whereas a full-scale exercise necessitates maximum design effort but less effort during the conduct of the actual event. A functional exercise is extremely complex and will require considerable preliminary work as well as maximum attention to manage and guide “play” during the event.

Each organization should conduct a Needs Assessment to identify potential deficiencies, resource shortfalls, capability levels, and problem areas. Past exercises, if applicable, should also be reviewed. The design team should review the current COOP plans and procedures to determine:

- Response Activities
- Required Resources
- Personnel Needs
- Execution of Procedures

Additionally, the design team should conduct a systematic inventory of the COOP plan and procedures:

- Concept of Operations
- Mission Essential Functions
- Direction and Control
- Alert and Notification
- Time-Phased Implementation (Activation, Alternate Operations, and Reconstitution and Termination)
Step Two – Scope Definition

To define the scope of the exercise, the design team must derive meaningful limits to each of the elements examined in the Needs Assessment. Within the context of the exercise, the organization will not be able to address all hazards, practice all operations, or include all possibilities in a single exercise. The Needs Assessment will assist the design team to determine which areas should be addressed through the exercise. The design team should ensure that each element is clearly and narrowly characterized. Significant consideration should be given to those elements with the highest priority and which can be realistically managed within the type of exercise selected. After the scope is defined, the design team should evaluate and identify potential participants at the organizational level. A brief explanation of the elements examined in the Needs Assessment are provided below.

- **Hazards** – limit one hazard to an exercise, although others may develop as the scenario unfolds. Selection should be based on plausible scenarios as defined in the organization’s Vulnerability Analysis.

- **Facilities** – determine the most beneficial location for operations as defined within the organization's COOP plan.

- **Functions** – list the procedures that would be most valuable to practice. Identify mission essential functions which are most critical to the organization's operations.

- **Organization and Personnel** – narrow the list of participants through the functional areas which will be practiced. Identify vital organizational units and select individuals with specific roles within the COOP plan.

- **Exercises** – decide which type of exercise would best address the details in the four previous elements. Remember to develop a progressive exercise approach – begin with simple tabletops and drills before moving on to functional and full-scale events.
Step Three – Purpose Statement

The Purpose Statement is a broad declaration of the exercise goal which serves to focus and control the event. The statement should be succinct and clear so that it communicates the exercise plans to the organization’s management, the event participants, and any other interested parties including the media, if applicable. The purpose should clarify the reason why the event is being conducted.

The design team will use the Purpose Statement as a basis for developing the Exercise Objectives. Furthermore, the statement will direct the subsequent effort of the design team regarding the preparation of the Narrative, Major and Detailed Events, Expected Actions, and Messages for the exercise.

The Purpose Statement should be easily prepared, and two approaches can be utilized:

- **Single Sentence** – combines the five elements from the Needs Assessment into one, long sentence; the date, time, and location is usually added to the statement.

- **Paragraph Format** – addresses the five elements from the Needs Assessment through several concise sentences; lists the participants; includes information on date, time, and location.

A key use of the Purpose Statement is to serve as the basis for the development of the Exercise Directive. The directive is usually a letter or memorandum from the head of the organization, and is used to garner support from the organization’s management as well as the participants. Additional information to include in the directive includes point-of-contact information, and if applicable the date, time, and location of the event.
Step Four – Objectives

Exercise Objectives are developed from the Purpose Statement and describe the anticipated performance from the participants necessary to demonstrate competence. Exercise Objectives must be clear, concise and focus on participant performance. The SMART system is both thorough and easy to remember.

- **Simple** – state the objective simply and clearly; brief and easy to understand.
- **Measurable** – establish a performance level in which the result is observable.
- **Achievable** – ensure that the level of performance can be accomplished within the exercise parameters; the objective should not be beyond the capability of the participant(s).
- **Realistic** – prepare a pragmatic goal which is both sensible and achievable.
- **Task-Oriented** – focus the objective on behavior or procedure; each objective should concentrate on an individual mission essential function or operation.

The Exercise Objective delineates the expected performance from the participants which are required to demonstrate competence. The objective states who should do what, under what conditions, and according to what standard. For example: Upon notification of a COOP Activation, the agency command staff shall notify/contact all employees within 30 minutes.

In a small exercise three or four objectives may suffice, but in a joint interagency exercise, 100 or more would not be uncommon with each participating agency providing their own specific objectives. Objectives should be written in a manner which is clearly understood by the exercise evaluators who must be able to determine if the objective has been achieved.
Step Five – Narrative

The Narrative is like a short story which establishes the scenario and sets the scene for the subsequent activities, provides background, and motivates action. The Narrative answers the following questions:

- What event?
- What is the level of threat/danger?
- How did the notification transpire?
- What responses were taken?
- What time did the event occur?
- What are the damage reports?
- What was the sequence of events?
- Was there advance warning?
- Where is the event location?
- What is predicted for the future?

The Narrative is very specific and is usually one to five paragraphs in length. Upon receiving the background information provided in the Narrative, the participants are transferred to the situational terms of the exercise. Depending upon the action required to achieve the purpose and objectives of the exercise, there may be a requirement to have a preliminary and one more additional narratives within the exercise plan to simulate the disaster and realistically establish the scenario. An example is the National Hurricane Center Advisories for tropical cyclones which may need to unfold over several narratives to effectively communicate the event.

The Narrative is usually printed and distributed to the participants at the beginning of the exercise; this method is very effective in a tabletop format. However, other delivery methods are equally effective and can be utilized for all types of exercises. Examples include video, radio, or television news formats. These methods add another dimension of realism for the participants.
Step Six – Major and Detailed Events

The goal in developing the Major and Detailed Events is to provide a structure that will coordinate the simulated event with the anticipated participant actions and ensure exercise unity.

- **Major Events** – big problems resulting from the disaster; should be likely events based on case studies or operational procedures which call for realistic action.

- **Detailed Events** – describe a number of specific problem situations to which COOP team members would be required to respond. Each event should prompt one or more expected actions for one or more organizational units.

When preparing Major Events, the design team should identify the major occurrences that follow the events described in the Narrative. Then the design team should determine which events would best generate situations in which the Exercise Objectives would be tested and/or demonstrated. The design team should focus their efforts on those situations.

The goal to scripting Detailed Events is to collect specific problem situations that would cause COOP team members to respond. Each Detailed Event should be designed to prompt one or more Expected Actions for one or more organizational units. Properly prepared Detailed Events make the task of creating Messages much easier for the Design Team. When the design task is limited, it may not be necessary to distinguish between Major and Detailed Events.

There are several approaches which can be taken to prepare the Major and Detailed Events. Remember that the Major Events are coordinated with the Narrative and require realistic actions that will meet the Exercise Objectives. Many designers script the Detailed Events and Expected Actions simultaneously. Others may work backwards, preparing an action for a specific organizational unit and then creating a problem connected to a Major Event which would require that action to be taken. Both methods are effective and useful in the design process.
Step Seven – Expected Actions

Expected Actions are those that are desired participant responses which are developed from the Exercise Objectives and demonstrate competence. Since the goal of the design process is to engage participants in such a way to elicit planned responses, the exercise script must be developed carefully so that each event, action, and message accomplishes its intended result. It is necessary to identify the Expected Actions, to write Messages, and determine what actions should be evaluated.

Expected Actions are closely coordinated with the Exercise Objectives. As stated previously, Exercise Objectives are the general desired actions. Expected Actions are a breakdown of the Exercise Objectives – the actions performed by an organizational unit/individual to demonstrate the objective. There are four types of Expected Actions for participants:

• Deploy or deny personnel or resources
• Gather or verify information
• Consider information, discuss amongst group/players
• Defer activity to later, prioritize activities

A complete and expert knowledge of the organization’s COOP plan and its accompanying procedures is required when preparing the Expected Actions for any exercise. The design team should, therefore, ensure that the Expected Actions are thoroughly reviewed for technical content and effective plan coordination. Generally, every Detailed Event will result in one or more Expected Actions for various organizational units. Each exercise participant (not necessarily individual, but organizational unit) should have at least one Expected Action. A matrix of events, actions, and messages per each organizational unit is an effective way of tracking the various design process elements.
Step Eight – Messages

An Exercise Message causes event participants to make decisions and take actions which meet the Exercise Objectives. A standard message contains four components:

- **Source of Message** – who sent the message and how credible is this source?
- **Method Sent** – how is the message getting to the recipient (phone, radio, word of mouth)?
- **Content of Message** – does it provide all information necessary to make the decision?
- **Recipient** – if the recipient is not the decision-maker (delegated authority), where should the message be sent?

Exercise Messages should provide sufficient information to the participants to elicit a desired response, action or decision. The design team should consider which individual or entity would most effectively transmit the Message and generate the expected response. Messages used in an exercise must be credible not only in source but also in delivery method. Messages should be written on a standardized Exercise Message form which contains each of the components listed above. Additionally, the Exercise Message form may also include information on delivery time, message number, and space for the participant to enter the actions which they would take.

Although it is not necessary to have each Detailed Event generate responses from all participants, the design team should ensure that each participant is required to respond to at least one Message during the event. Spontaneous Messages may also be required during the conduct of the exercise because participants do not always respond in the manner expected. The Controllers or Simulators may need to improvise during the exercise, so it is beneficial to staff these positions with one or more of the design team members.
Tabletop Exercise – The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the Facilitator in a Tabletop Exercise is to assist in the pace, flow, and play of the exercise by assisting in problem solving, stimulating discussion, and eliciting answers and solutions from the group. The basic purpose of the exercise is to resolve problems as a group much like a brainstorming session. The Facilitator creates an environment which is stress-free, and problems are addressed individually without time constraints. Varying opinions and approaches to issues are encouraged, and discussion is conducted in an atmosphere of uniform respect without regard to rank/seniority and without fear of reprisal. The Facilitator also should:

- **Introduce Narrative and Distribute Messages** – two approaches, or combination of each can be used to establish the scenario and present discussion topics.
  - **Problem Statements**: facilitator verbally presents general problems which are then discussed one at a time by the participants (problems could be addressed first to individuals then opened for group discussion).
  - **Messages**: facilitator delivers pre-scripted messages to participants one at a time, discussion follows including the issues raised by the message, determine if additional information is required, consider what actions might be taken in accordance with the organization’s COOP plan.

- **Set the Stage** – welcome participants, conduct introductions, explain purpose and objectives, establish ground rules and procedures, and read the Narrative.

- **Involve the Group** – model and encourage group discussion, do not allow individuals to dominate discussion and promote reticent members to participate.

- **Solve Problems** – create effective problem solving with real solutions not superficialities.

- **Control and Sustain Actions** – use techniques in design process to maintain interest and support participation, be aware of signs of frustration and conflict.
Facility, Materials, and Design Requirements

1. **Facility** – utilize a conference room that is large enough to comfortably accommodate the number of participants in a face-to-face setting (several round tables or one U-shaped layout). The organization may also use its alternate facility to provide a more realistic operations location if desired. This location will also provide the COOP team members with the opportunity to observe the alternate facility and its infrastructure and logistical support first-hand. The design team should not focus too much on the facilities since this exercise does not attempt to re-create operational sites.

2. **Materials** – ensure availability of policies, plans, and procedures (Statutes and other authorities, emergency operations plan, building evacuation plan, COOP plan, site support procedures, alert and notification procedures). The Facilitator and Controllers should also be ready to accommodate requests for additional materials. The design team should anticipate which materials may be requested during the event according the events and actions of the exercise and the organization's COOP plan. However, all materials may not be required and it is not recommended that all materials be initially provided to the group. Since the Tabletop Exercise is not a simulation of real activities, elaborate communications and/or resources are not required.

3. **Design Requirements** – follow the eight exercise design steps (first four steps are the same, the last four steps can be simplified to a degree). The focus of the Tabletop Exercise is on training and familiarization with the roles, procedures, and responsibilities. It may be necessary to involve a smaller number of participants to resolve issues in the ideal, stress-free environment in the preliminary Tabletop Exercises. The participants should be selected based on the purpose and objectives of the exercise. Since the Tabletop Exercise is largely a discussion guided by the Facilitator, its effectiveness is determined by feedback from the participants and the incorporation of this information on the revisions of the organization’s COOP plan and procedures. One or two Evaluators should be selected, with at least one person from the design team, to observe the event and the progress towards the objectives.
Questions

Please complete the Course Evaluation completely so that we can better determine the applicability and quality of the content and instruction.

Please submit your Course Evaluation.

Thank you.