

Community Agency Disaster Communications Tabletop Exercise After Action Review October 29, 2013 and October 30, 2013

Exercise Overview

On October 29, 2013 the Office of Emergency Management in partnership with the Human Services Department's (HSD) Emergency Management group conducted a tabletop disaster exercise to enable Seattle area community based organizations (CBO) to practice and develop their communication plans and protocols for responding to a disaster event. The American Red Cross, Public Health – Seattle & King County, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Commission for People with disAbilities and Seattle Public Utilities also provided partnership and support prior to and during the execution of this exercise.

The exercise was conducted at the American Red Cross and used a discussion based format. Between 40-50 individuals participated in this exercise. Additionally, five agencies participated in the online version of the exercise using an online chatroom via the Chatzy.com interface. About eight agencies requested digital copies of the exercise to use on their own. In total, Thirty-seven agencies participated from in and around the Seattle area representing the following:

- Community based organizations
- Faith based organizations
- Government entities providing direct services to the community

The exercise was developed from a universal design perspective. This means, the exercise was designed to not only be accessible to anyone of any ability to participate; it was also developed to be of value to any participant at any level of disaster related knowledge. The components of the exercise included the following:

- Visuals, sound and captioning to improve accessibility for individuals with sensory disAbilities.
- An online option available for those who may be unable to attend in person
- The online Chatzy interface to make the exercise accessible and capture information

- A digital version of the exercise that enable agencies who did not attend to exercise on their own
- The Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) Toolkit to ensure a culturally competent exercise event
- A disaster communications plan template that was available to fill in during the exercise as well as online following the exercise so that agencies who did not have plans could draft a basic plan

Exercise Scenario

The exercise scenario was an active shooter incident that starts within two miles of the participant's agency and began with the following information:

Two armed individuals entered Welks Largo bank on Main Street. This is less than two miles away from your facility. The suspects took a combined amount of \$120,000, shot and injured two tellers and one security officer. The individuals fled via automobile after shooting a bank customer in the parking lot and taking their vehicle. The police have not released a description but these individuals are believed to be extremely dangerous and may be carrying explosives. They are on the run in the area.

Exercise injects included initiating notification of staff and clients, the suspects being reported within two blocks of the participant's agency, initiating a lockdown, contacting clients in route to the agency about the incident, and visitors approaching the agency during lockdown.

Exercise Objectives

The exercise was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

- To allow agencies who have plans to practice the communication portion of their plans
- To allow agencies who do NOT have plans to develop a simple communications plan
- To promote partnerships with other community based organizations throughout the region
- To promote social and cultural competency

Review Methodology

Information for this review was contributed by exercise participants and facilitator. It was submitted in the following manner:

1. From evaluation results submitted by all participants immediately following the exercise debrief.

2. By facilitators and partners who provided their observations and suggested improvements.
3. From observations and recommendations provided during the online exercise session which were captured and logged in Chatzy.

This report is a summary of the major findings which support an action plan to facilitate the recommended improvements. This draft will be circulated for review and comment.

Summary of Exercise Evaluation

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

	Response
1. The scenario was realistic and credible.	4.4
2. Participating in the exercise increased my agency's ability to communicate during a disaster.	4.1
3. Participating in the exercise helped my agency to develop a basic communications plan.	4.1
4. The ability to complete the plan online is a useful tool and my agency plans to use it.	4.3
5. The visuals were helpful and made the exercise more interesting.	3.8
6. The race and social justice part of the exercise made me more aware of racial and social issues that can arise during a disaster.	3.8
4. Participating in this workshop was worthwhile for my agency.	4.5

Summary of Exercise Successes

1. By surveying community based organizations, the interests and needs of the community were effectively incorporated into the exercise design.
2. The exercise development and execution process was a collaborative effort. The partnerships with participating jurisdictions, departments and agencies allowed more resources to be available for community participants.
3. The exercise participants represented a diverse group of agencies and organizations serving vulnerable populations.

4. The facilitators represented a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. Each of them did a great job facilitating.
5. The just-in-time facilitator training was effective and appreciated by first time facilitators.
6. The exercise was executed in a very timely manner.
7. Participants with hearing and visual disabilities reported that the exercise tools enabled them to participate on a level playing field.
8. The universal design concept was worth the additional effort. Incorporating an accessible design enabled more participation and a broader reach.
9. Approximately 25% of participating agencies utilized the plan template and were able to complete basic disaster communications plans.
10. The online and digital versions of the exercise allowed agencies with limited staffing capacity to participate in the exercise. A combined number of 13 agencies participated in via alternative exercise formats.
11. The disaster kits were a well-received incentive for exercise participation.
12. The majority of participants reported that the exercise was well worth their time.

Significant Issues Experienced During the Exercise:

1. Youtube did not work smoothly with the PowerPoint software and resulted in some technical difficulties during the exercise.
2. A larger screen was needed to accommodate the room size and number of participants.
3. A few participants were not prepared for the exercise scenario (active shooter) and the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) despite this information being sent out prior to the exercise.
4. Some participants who had more emergency management experience and/or training negatively impacted the exercise discussions when they provided too much input.
5. The online Chatzy format needed both a facilitator and a moderator.
6. The visuals, sound and captioning was a distraction for some participants.
7. Participants provided evaluation feedback which suggested more information was needed prior to the exercise on the role of emergency management as well as what to expect during a tabletop exercise.

Suggested Actions for Improvement:

1. Look into other options for video and visual tools beyond PowerPoint. Testing in advance is also recommended.
2. Choose equipment and accommodations that plan for larger audiences.

3. Although materials were sent out weeks in advance of the exercise and detailed information was provided on the eventbrite website, some participants did not read the information. An email highlighting key facts about the exercise could be sent out a day or two in advance so that all participants are well informed.
4. Provide participants with exercise do's and don'ts so that an environment of non-judgmental communication will be created. Specific examples should be used on what not to do.
5. Incorporate a facilitator when using the online exercise.
6. The benefit for participants with hearing and sight disAbilities outweighed the feedback about the visual and sound distractions. Providing information to participants on how to turn off the sound and captioning seemed effective during the online session. Investigating other tools to use during the exercise is another way to improve accessibility and the experience for all. Research will continue to be conducted in this area.
7. Provide exercise participants with key facts about emergency management and the exercise format a day or two prior to the exercise. Allow additional time for participants to ask questions prior the exercise start. Provide information on local responder contact information as well as FEMA individual training resources.