

WRITING CAPABILITY-BASED EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

A Short Guide for Exercise Planners



Arkansas Department of Health

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HSEEP, Volume V

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Introduction

In today's world of emergency preparedness, Public Health, Healthcare, Emergency Management and Homeland Security organizations are faced with developing and refining defined capabilities. These are primarily defined by:

- U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) – Target Capability List (TCL),
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Public Health Preparedness Capabilities,
- Other state and federal requirements and regulations, and
- Specific agency/executive identified/developed capabilities.

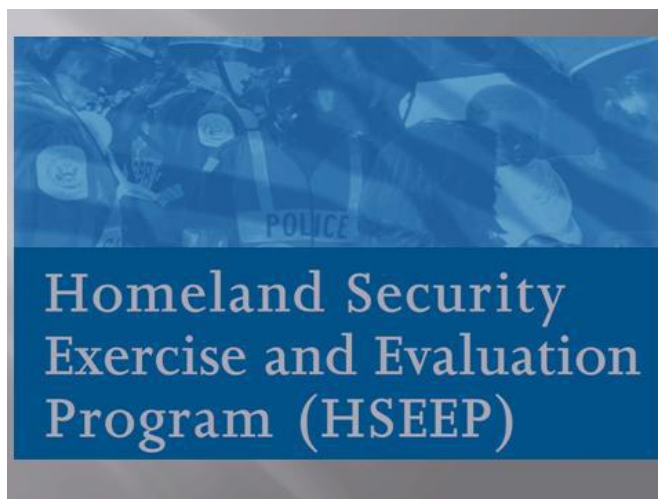
Preparedness exercises conducted to develop and improve the readiness to implement the proper capabilities in times of emergencies and disasters are driven by the capabilities to be tested and the objectives developed to provide clarity in what is being tested.

Preparedness and Response Capabilities & Exercises

A capability-based exercise objective is a description of the capability and related actions to be tested, validated or demonstrated and a clearly defined set of activities and the related tasks required for success. The assessment of the objective by which the ability to carry through on a capability is based on the exercise players performance of the activities and tasks required for each as defined by the objective.

Capability-based exercise objective are the cornerstone of exercise design and development. Exercise objectives:

1. Define the specific areas within a capability to be tested during the exercise,
2. Provide the framework for scenario development and the development of the Master Scenario Events List (MSEL),
3. Guide the development of individual organizational exercise efforts, and
4. Supply the basis for exercise evaluation.



Since the creation of the DHS Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), there have been extensive efforts made to identify and standardize the capabilities for emergency preparedness and response. DHS created the Target Capabilities List (TCL), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defined ten essential capabilities for public health and, in 2011, the CDC developed a listing of fifteen Public

Health Preparedness Capabilities as the basis for public health preparedness. These fit in with the HHS Essential Public Health Services and the DHS National Preparedness Guidelines and Target Capability List. There are elements of all of these capabilities that should be incorporated into exercises whenever appropriate.

None of these lists are all-inclusive and while there are ongoing debates as to whether some areas should be a stand-alone capability or an activity within another, state and local entities should not hesitate to develop their own or refine those from an afore mentioned list to meet their needs when the recommended capability lists do not address these needs.



Capability-Based Exercise Objectives

Why care about capability-based objectives for exercises? When the capabilities to be included in an exercise are not identified and the objectives defined for what specifically is to be accomplished in the exercise are lacking, there is no sound basis for evaluation of the actual ability of a given individual or entity to successfully implement and carry out that capability. If an evaluator does not know what the identified processes and standards are, it is extremely difficult to gain insight into any areas that may not perform as desired or, those that may exceed expectations.

Without well written and clearly defined objectives the exercise participants to include the players, controllers and evaluators have no way to determine if a capability has been successfully demonstrated. Clearly defined objectives provide the emergency preparedness and response community the means to structure their own efforts towards the accomplishment of the objective and acceptable achievement of the desired capabilities. When the objectives for an exercise are clearly stated, participants at all levels are better able to demonstrate, and document that demonstration, the capabilities being validated or tested during the exercise. This potentially allows for:

- Pre-exercise review of the plan, Standard Operating Procedures or Guidelines and/or Response Operations Guides included in the exercise by the exercise participants (players, controllers and evaluators),
- Training in the operations, decisions and activities that are required by the objectives, and
- Assessment of the facilities, equipment and coordination required to carry out the execution of the capability.

EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

Clearly defined objectives assist in:

Design and Development of the Exercise

Conducting the Exercise

Evaluating the Exercise

And

Implementing Identified
Corrective Actions



Once the hazard vulnerability assessment and current plans have been reviewed, exercise needs and capability assessments completed, the scope of the exercise defined and the exercise type and hazard identified, the objectives and related tasks to be validated defined, the objectives provide the overall roadmap for the exercise. The objectives are critical in assisting in:

1. Design and Development of the Exercise: The objectives guide the development of the exercise scenario to ensure that the selected events and injects focus on testing the capabilities through the requirements stated in the objectives. In this way the objectives provide the exercise planning team a structure on which to build the overall Master Scenario Events List (MSEL).

2. Conducting the Exercise: Once the exercise is underway, all activities required of the players should be focused on addressing the activities, decisions and tasks required to successfully demonstrate the exercise objectives. The exercise controllers and evaluators constantly track whether or not the requirements of the objectives have been fulfilled through the play of the exercise via the MSEL and Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs) developed for the exercise.

The evaluation is further facilitated as well written capability-based objectives will clearly divide the exercise into the specific functions. This allows the evaluators for focus their attention, ensure effective testing of the capabilities being exercised and providing a quality assessment and corrective action recommendations where appropriate.

3. Evaluation of the Exercise: The EEGs used by the evaluators break the objectives, activities and tasks into observable pieces. This provides the evaluator a quick reference to identify if the specific activities and tasks required to fulfill each objective have occurred. If not, then the exercise controllers can push key activities through the injects, or messages that are provided to the player relaying events happening on the ground.

EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

Objectives divide the exercise into specific functions based on the capabilities being tested.



4. Development of accurate corrective actions to be implemented to improve specific and overall organizational capability to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters.

The **SMART** concept will help organizations participating in the exercise and their exercise planning team representative ensures they develop effective objectives. This is:

Specific

To the capability and areas within the capability that will be assessed.

Measurable

The wording provides a basis for the evaluator that can be observed and documented during the exercise. The measurement is based on the plans, policies and procedures/guides that give direction to the players as to the decisions, activities and tasks to be performed.

Attainable

The desired decisions, activities and tasks required take place in the exercise environment given the exercise type. Don't ask for an assessment of what is required to set up a mobile medical facility during a functional exercise. Save that for a full-scale.

Realistic

The objective related to an actual existing capability that requires the players to execute the activities and tasks that will actually be undertaken during an actual response?

Task-Oriented

The evaluator will clearly understand and be guided to look for the activities and tasks undertaken by the players to satisfy the objective?

Characteristics of Objectives

There are four characteristics that, when considered in the creation of an exercise objective will clarify the intent. These can be stated as:

1. **Who** – The objective will state who (EMS, Emergency Management, Local Health Department, POD Staff, etc.) will be the subject of the assessment.
2. **What** (Activity or Function) - An objective will always state what performance will be examined. The objective may also describe the desired outcome(s) of the doing.
3. **Conditions** – An objective will describe the critical conditions under which the performance is to occur. (In response to a hurricane, pandemic, hazardous materials incident, etc.)

4. **To What Standard** – The objective will identify the standards for the performance being assessed during the exercise. The standards for performance are, as the objectives themselves, from the existing (or new draft) policies, procedures and protocols as contained in the organizational planning documents.

Discussion-Based vs. Operations-Based Exercise Objectives



Objectives for discussion-based exercises such as a tabletop reflect the environment of the exercise being conducted. Discussion-Based exercises are dependent on a facilitated discussion occurring among the players. Key words that may be used in developing a tabletop exercise may include:

- Analyze
- Examine
- Identify
- Validate

Example:

Capability 3: Emergency Operations Coordination

The Central City Public Health Department’s ICS Command Staff will validate the department’s protocols for activation of the operations center to coordinate the response to a biological attack.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Who? | - | CCPHD ICS Command Staff. |
| Activity/
Function? | - | Validate the department’s protocols for activation of the operations center. |
| Conditions? | - | Biological attack. |
| Standards? | - | Existing Protocols. |

Objectives for an operations-based exercise, such as a functional, reflect the desire to examine the capabilities that exist within an operations/coordination center such as an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC), Medical Operations Center (MOC), Regional Operations Center (ROC) or Command Post (CP). These reflect the operational nature of the exercise requiring players to actually implement the plans, procedures and tasks involved in the operations of the coordination and control facility. These will require the actual implementation of the procedures and internal coordination, staff operations and responsibilities and tasks required to operate the facility and support the field response or on-site (CP) elements. All actual execution of the filed response is simulated. This means the wording of the objectives must fit in the confines of the activities and tasks that can be observed with the operations center environment. Key words that may be used in developing a functional exercise may include:

- Analyze
- Demonstrate
- Validate
- Coordinate
- Implement

Example:

Demonstrate the ability of the Central City Health Department to effectively coordinate integrated emergency operations in accordance with NIMS and local procedures or guideline in response to a biological attack.

Who?	-	CCPHD.
Activity/	-	Effectively coordinate integrated emergency operations.
Function?		
Conditions?	-	Biological attack.
Standards?	-	In accordance with NIMS and local procedures or guidelines.

The full-scale exercise then crosses over into objective wording that reflects the actual conduct of response operations. This type of exercise then can reflect objective wording such as:

- Demonstrate the ability to conduct decontamination activities.
- Demonstrate the capability to establish and operate a POD.
- Verify the ability to set up and operate a mobile medical center.

Activities and Tasks

Once the wording of the objective is accomplished there are still critical components of the exercise objective that are missing, particularly with operations-based exercise

objectives. The objective development work is not yet complete. What is missing? The activities required to satisfy the objective have yet to be identified as have the tasks required to accomplish the activities. These are critical elements of the objective in the design, conduct and evaluation of the exercise.

Activity Example (taken from the CDC Public Health Preparedness Capabilities – March 2011):

Demonstrate the ability of the Central City Health Department to effectively coordinate integrated emergency operations in accordance with NIMS and local procedures or guideline in response to a biological attack.

Activity 1: Activate public health emergency operations.

Activity 2: Develop an incident response strategy.

Activity 3: Manage and sustain public health response.

Task Example (taken from the CDC Public Health Preparedness Capabilities – March 2011):

Demonstrate the ability of the Central City Health Department to effectively coordinate integrated emergency operations in accordance with NIMS and local procedures or guideline in response to a biological attack.

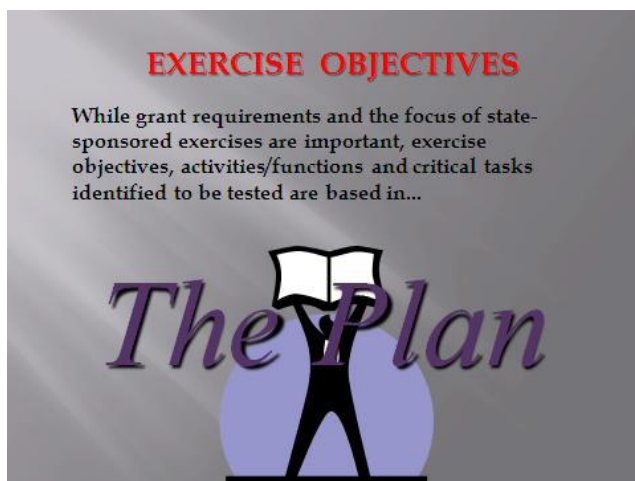
Activity 2: Develop an incident response strategy.

Task 1: Produce an Incident Action Plan (IAP).

Task 2: Disseminate the IAP to public health response staff.

Task 3: Revise and brief staff on the IAP at the start of each operational period.

A key to solid organizational exercise objectives is to remember that, while grant requirements and the overall focus of state or federally-sponsored exercises are important, exercise objectives, activities and tasks identified to be tested are based in the organizational plan.



For exercise objective purposes, the plan may include, but not be limited to:

- The Basic Plan
- Annexes to the plan
- Attachments to the annexes
- Relevant organizational policies

Extent of Play and References

In the development of capability-based exercise objectives and the related activities and tasks, there are two additional pieces of the process that are worthy of consideration. These are

- Extent of Play, and
- References

The Extent of Play defines how an organization will demonstrate the activities and tasks that will be a part of the exercise. The defined Extent of Play can, and will provide critical information to the exercise planning team and, most importantly, the evaluators.

Many times a grant or other preparedness program will provide the desired Extent of Play as are the cases in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program or the CDC's Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) programs performance measures and metrics. In some cases, organizations may redefine the Extent of Play to more effectively meet their needs. The example below provides a programmatic Extent of Play and an example of how this may be modified.

Example:

Exercise Requirement/Objective:

Demonstrate the ability to conduct the recall of personnel to fulfill key ICS roles in the operations center for incidents occurring unannounced and outside of established work hours.

Program Extent of Play Definition:

All personnel assigned key ICS command and general staff positions will be notified to report. These personnel will report to the operations center and sign-in on a roster that will then be provided to the evaluator.

Participant Defined Extent of Play:

Staff personnel required to initiate the call down of personnel assigned key ICS command and general staff positions will be mobilized and make the notifications. Those key personnel that are directed to report to the operations center will respond to the notification via telephone and provide an estimated time of arrival at the operations center. This information will be documented and provided to the evaluator.

This allows the participating organization to determine the response times to the operations center by those assigned the key ICS command and general staff positions without requiring those individuals to leave their residences or offices and travel to the operations center.

References will provide the exercise planning and evaluation teams easy access to the key information in the planning documents and/or policies that detail the organizationally defined activities and tasks being validated or tested during the exercise. The References may include information such as:



The References may include information such as:

- Document title,
- Section or chapter identification,
- Page number,
- Paragraph identification,
- Bullet or item number, and
- Etc...

Final Format, Capability-Based Objectives

The final format for capability-based objectives should provide the viewer a concise, easily followed layout. This would include an identification system that links the capability, individual objective, and related activities. If the objective writers desire to include the individual tasks required to accomplish the activities, they may do so. Typically, the tasks* are found in the Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs) as opposed to the objectives as they may be listed in the Exercise Plan (ExPlan) or After Action Report/ Improvement Plan (AAR/IP).

(* For the example below, the tasks are included with the activity to demonstrate the relationship to the activity.)

The following is an example of a capability-based objective for a functional exercise that may be found in the ExPlan or AAR/IP.

Capability 3: Emergency Operations Coordination

Objective 3.1: Demonstrate the ability of the Central City Health Department to effectively coordinate integrated emergency operations in accordance with NIMS and local procedures or guidelines in response to a biological attack.

Activity 3.1.1: Activate public health emergency operations:

Task 3.1.1.1: Obtain executive authorization for activation of operations center and critical personnel.

Task 3.1.1.2: Initial recall of all key personnel with key ICS roles.

Task 3.1.1.3: Initiate set up area designated as the operations center.

Task 3.1.1.4: Prepare initial situational briefing materials for arriving personnel.

Task 3.1.1.5: Notify other response organizations and partners as to the activation of the operations center.

Task 3.1.1.5: Notify identified support personnel to report to for emergency operations.

Activity 3.1.2: Develop incident response strategy:

Task 3.1.2.1: Produce an initial Incident Action Plan (IAP).

Task 3.1.2.2: Disseminate the IAP to public health response staff.

Task 3.1.2.3: Revise and brief staff on the IAP at the start of each operational period.

Activity 3.1.3: Manage and sustain an integrated public health response:

Task 3.1.3.1: Establish communications with other organizations involved in response operations.

Task 3.1.3.2: Determine schedule for conference calls with other responding organizations to share information and coordinate operations.

Task 3.1.3.3: Coordinate resource requirements and deployments with other organizations involved in the response.

The number coding shown above provides a tracking system clearly linking the capability (3) to each related objective (1) and the individual activities (1, 2, and 3). This assists not only in the development of the ExPlan but, cross-referencing the corrective action recommendations in the Improvement Plan (IP) back to the analysis of the objectives in the After Action Report without having to include the detail information in the IP.

Summary

In today's world of preparedness, exercises are a key element of ensuring the desired capabilities for response are developed to the highest level for each and every organization that may be involved in an emergency or disaster response, regardless of the hazard. A critical factor in the success of the exercises conducted to verify the capabilities are developed to the level desired by the organization or, the identification of areas that still need improvement is the development of clear and concise capability-based exercise objectives. This allows for clearly defining how the objectives will be accomplished through the applicable activities for each and what critical tasks must be demonstrated for the activities to produce the desired outcomes.

Once the objectives, activities, tasks and, where necessary, the extent of play is defined, the exercise evaluators can provide effective assessments of the status of each capability and where improvements are required to enable response operations to accomplish the overall end result of protecting the lives and property of individual communities, states and the nation as a whole.

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