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National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners

Conducting an Energy Emergency Tabletop Exercise in Your State:

A Step By Step Guide

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Introduction: Why run a tabletop?

The old expression goes "Practice Makes Perfect." Today's State energy and utility commission officials are charged with near-perfect preparation and responses to situations that affect the reliable functioning of key utility systems: electricity, natural gas, petroleum, telecommunications, and water. These emergencies are so complex that being prepared for them may seem overwhelming. How do you practice for something that has not, and may never, occur? How do you prioritize response for events that will happen, without being able to see into the future? When confronted with preparing for, responding to, minimizing the consequences of, and facilitating system restoration after an emergency, State officials may deal with many unpredictable variables, but many are already known: infrastructure, tools, resources, partners, and networks. Running tabletop exercises may provide your organization with several advantages in a crisis, so that your organization can think through impacts to infrastructure, understand who you may need to work with in a crisis, what their roles, capabilities, and responsibilities are, and what gaps may exist that need further effort.

What is a tabletop exercise? It is an opportunity to gather officials and present them with a hypothetical emergency scenario, preferably described as a series of unfolding events, to allow them to coordinate, think through and discuss their response. Like watching a good play, "suspending disbelief" in this situation should inspire new perspectives and solutions. Emergency response does not just involve infrastructure, even more important are the people who must respond and restore. A network of trust between government and the private sector helps effective coordination and the sharing of information during emergencies that may be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful response. A tabletop exercise is flexible to address your specific infrastructure, emergency situation, and needs, and scalable to accommodate more or less people: it can include a few officials from the same agency in a conference room, or can be a large scale longer event facilitating interaction with a wide range of stakeholders who may even be at multipal locations.

This guide is intended to help State energy and public utility commission officials in running a tabletop energy emergency exercise in running one in their State or region. It may also be useful for other officials trying to build tabletop exercises in their own contexts and meeting their own needs. It builds off of a project undertaken by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), funded by the US Department of Energy's Infrastructure Security and Energy Restoration (ISER) division of the Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability. In 2009 and 2010, NARUC helped facilitate and run six tabletops, one nationally, one regionally, and four serving specific states. The intent was to develop and offer tools and resources that are easy to put together, "low-fi" in terms of technology requirements, inexpensive, and high-value. Together these have been assembled into this "Tabletop In A Box" toolkit. More information, props, checklists, Federal support, and links to other tabletop development resources are included elsewhere in this toolkit.

This toolkit takes a step-by-step approach to putting on a tabletop scenario exercise in your State, either at the State Public Utility Commission, or in partnership with an agency like the State Energy Office or State Emergency Management Agency (among others). These steps include:

Step 1 – Start with your champions

Step 2 – Set a broad objective

Step 3 – Establish a planning team

Step 4 – Get to work on logistics

Step 5 – Set the scope: sector, industry, agency, geography

Step 6 – Choose your participants

Step 7 – Develop the scenario

Step 8 – Design the exercise

Step 9 – Pre-exercise "homework" and final preparations

Step 10 – Conduct the exercise

Step 11 – Post exercise evaluation and evaluation

Each step is described in this document. Many of them overlap and some can be initiated before an activity described in an earlier step, but each is aimed to help organize thinking to help you successfully design, organize, and run a tabletop in your own State.

This guide is intended to be flexible and adaptable to meet the States needs. The scales of the exercise (number of player and the time duration of the exercise) should also be kept at a manageable level with in budgetary limitations, but be of sufficient scope that it allows a broad range of energy emergency response plans to be tested. Some states may elect to do a single larger scale exercise; others may want to do small internal table top exercise run over a few hours first before running a large scale exercise, with private sector participants. Alternatively, if an existing in-state exercise is being run by another agency, like the the State Emergency Management Agency, incorporating your goals into that effort may be another option to consider.

Step 1: Start with a Champion, and if you can, a facilitator

Not included in this toolkit are the key people to plan, facilitate, and run the exercise. Without people to accomplish this work, the tabletop cannot happen.

The first is a champion, who will serve as the exercise manager, chief planner and convener of those organizing the tabletop, who will help establish objectives and help guide a planning group towards developing scenarios that allow the objectives to be tested and met. If you are reading this guide, there is a good chance this champion is you.

Another element that is absolutely essential is someone to facilitate the scenario itself. The success of the scenario often depends on the ability of a facilitator to provide participants in the tabletop exercise itself with the narrative and structure to explore the scenario in a way that is productive and helpful. It is helpful if the lead facilitator or facilitators are designated early, though they can be identified later as well.

We highly recommend that you engage an experienced facilitator (lead trainer/teacher) to run the exercise – for NARUC's tabletops, either a NARUC staffer with facilitation training, or a full-time facilitator from an emergency management agency was used. A professional facilitator is another possibility, or someone who has been involved in a number of previous tabletops and has experience with what works and what doesn't. You may engage a number of individuals instead of one, but a good facilitator can make a good exercise stellar. He or she can bond with the participants, get to know them, and lead the exercise where it needs to go.

The champion or what might be called the exercise manager should identify a group of planners to help set objectives and plan the event. The two steps that follow describe establishing a planning team and setting objectives; it is possible to first convene a planning team and then work within that group to set the objective, or to recruit a planning team to help design an event that meets a known (and potentially evolving) objective; as such these steps may be reversed in order.

Step 2 – Set a broad objective for the exercise

The first question to ask is, what problem am I trying to solve? While the exercise itself will be the result of extensive planning, most agencies have some idea of why they want to conduct an exercise, what they want to accomplish, and what elements of the plan they want to exercise. And while the planning process is designed to help you decide what to do in each step, you are likely to have some idea beforehand. Some examples may include:

- Improving interstate or interagency coordination;
- Exploring a specific emergency scenario or potential vulnerability involving one sector;
- Understanding interdependencies between sectors;
- Testing communication protocols and the information to be developed and shared
- Improving interaction with specific stakeholders;
- Evaluating the capability to work with and effectively inform the public/media
- Testing existing plans for a single incident or multiple contingencies; or
- Developing lessons learned from an actual event.

Multiple objectives may emerge. For example in a Summer 2010 exercise, the State of Ohio and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania used a tabletop exercise to explore electric and gas sector interdependencies and to bring together public and private sector decision-makers from both Ohio and Pennsylvania to improve cross-border coordination and interpersonal networks. Engage the leadership and key personnel in your agency, discuss your basic goals for the exercise, and try to envision the kind of exercise you would like to have. Understand that larger and more complex exercises will require more extensive resources. A smaller exercise done well may be more important than a large exercise done poorly.

Once you have a general sense of what you would like to accomplish, and a general idea of the kind of exercise you would like to have, then your planning group can beginits work.

Step 3 – Establish a planning Team

State officials that are conducting the exercise should first determine what goals and objectives they have for their own programs and plans. Participants should then be invited who best can help the state meet its goals. A number of participants should be invited to help plan the exercise, particularly to develop the scenario. The goals and objectives of the participants should be an early discussion in exercise planning, and the final goals and objectives should be developed in the planning process. Planning requirements for a tabletop exercise naturally break down into two areas: logistics and exercise/scenario design. These responsibilities can be split, delegated, or shared. Logistical considerations are discussed later in the guide.

Those involved with the planning team will not typically participate in the exercise. This means care needs to be taken that it will include key knowledgable people, but may potentially exclude key decision makers or staff with responsibilities in an actual response.

It is the responsibility of the planning team to develop the scenario or scenarios and then to design the exercise around it. A diverse group that is knowledgeable should be approached to help identify the scenario and how the exercise will enable that scenario to help meet the objectives. These should include:

- Key State officials (such as Public Utility Commissions, State Energy Offices, law enforcement, Governor's advisors, Transportation, Emergency Management agencies and or Homeland Security agencies, or others
- Private sector owners and operators (such as natural gas, petroleum, electricity, communications, or water utilities);
- Federal partners (such as the US Department of Energy's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability or US Department of Homeland Security)
- Key local government representatives
- Other relevant and interdependent stakeholders, such as transportation regulators or public health officials. This may be dependent on the scenario.
- The facilitator, preferably with experience running emergency tabletop scenarios or with experience with training in a relevant capacity. .

The kind of tasks that are the responsibility of the exercise and scenario design team include:

- Agreeing on the goals and objectives for the exercise (both broad program goals and specific exercise objectives. As mentioned above, this may best be done prior to establishment of the team itself, or will be the team's first task.
- Establishing the geographic scope, industry scope, and nature of the contingencies for the exercise.
- Developing the pre-exercise scenario and exercise scenario itself.

- Designing the exercise to address the scenario.
- Developing all the presentations, maps and supporting documents to support conduct of the exercise.

Generally, the planning group should have regular calls or meetings (no less frequently than every two weeks) to share work assignments, deadlines, and communicate progress.

Step 4 – Get to work on logistics

Planning and conducting an energy emergency tabletop exercise will probably take time and resources. As discussed above, a planning team led by a champion and including an exercise facilitator is essential; additional people to help plan and implement logistics will also be helpful. In addition, travel, food, tabletop materials, handout, conference room(s), and equipment (such as screens and projectors) will be required, and that will probably require money. This activity is one of the Energy Assurance Planning grant requirements and as part of the Management Plan for this Grant funds should have been bugted to support the In-State Exercises. If the Management Plan needs to be revised based on the requirements identified by the Team this should be explored with the Energy Assurance Grant manager to see if budget revisions can be accomidated.

In addition to the planning group members, the champion leading that group, and the facilitiator, you may need additional support staff for the event itself. Support staff options may include:

- Registration Table Staff
- General Runners, Copiers, etc.
- Note Takers
- Table Discussion Facilitators
- Microphone Carriers/Holders

You will want to start by understanding your resources and budget. A proposed itemized budget should be developed making it very clear what the costs will be by category, followed by a funding source analysis. This will also help you understand how large of a scale an event you can have, if it is limited by budget. If the hosting agency has conference facilities available at no cost that will meet your needs, this will be an obvious choice for a location,

Once you know the people and funding resources, it is important to begin working back from the event date to ensure that logistics are taken care of. Here is a checklist of logistics for the event. When creating your own checklist, it may be useful to add dates. Working back from the expected excerise date, develop a timeframe for each event and a deadline for each element.

- Develop a budget and budget tracking;
- Identify a date and location for the event;
- Identify key speakers and essential participants;
  Invite any key speakers and essential participants;
- Develop a broader invitee list;
- Send out a “Save This Date” notice to potential participants;
- Arrange for conference rooms, facilities, and equipment;

- Refreshments, coffee, etc.
- Arrange for meals and receptions (Optional);
- Arrange for lodging if necessary;
- Develop a Conference Invitation and sending it out;
- Track all participant responses to the invitation or use a registration system;
- Handle the logistics needs of special participants (such as a facilitator);
    - Examples include index cards, flip charts, markers, etc.
- Identify any materials needed for participants, such as sign-in sheets, tent cards, name badges, feedback forms, and other materials.
- Develop, producing, and transporting all conference documents (including registration name tags and materials including a list of attendees and there contact information which is important to build relationship for the future.);
- Arrange for a registration table and staff, and for assistants to help put on the tabletop as necessary (carry microphones, write on flip charts, take notes on computer, etc.);
- Handle all logistics issues that arise during the conference (for example, making sure the right equipment has been provided, including computer and projectors as needed, that beverages are provided during breaks, that the air conditioning is at a comfortable level);
- Hand out and collect evaluation forms;
- Clean up after the exercise and ensuring documents and agency equipment is accounted for;
- Prepare an evaluation report; (Note the Energy Assurance Grant requires a "After-action report due 30 days following the exercise".)
- Send out any final summary and evaluation reports to attendees; and
- Prepare a final budget / expenditure report.

Step 5 – Set the scope: sector, industry, agency, and geographic area

How big of an exercise do you want to have? What geographic area do you want to address? What sectors and infrastructure should be included? Within the resource limits that you have, it is advantageous to think early about what to include in your exercise to help imagine what it will look like, and scale it to meet your needs within budgetary limitations.

The tabletop scenario needs to address realistically the disruption, the consequences of the disruption, and any consequences on interdependent infrastructures. While these areas of disruption and impacts must be addressed, they do not necessarily need to be addressed with the same level of detail. Keep in mind your objective and ask at each turn, does this element of the scenario, the impacts and consequences, and the players that would be implicated for involvement, align with meeting the goals and objectives of the project and text or excises the key elements of your energy emergency response plans?

If a key goal is to test your ability to coordinate with other states, then other states need to be involved, and your geographic scope will be a region of the country. If you want to address only a supply shortage you may want to include the whole state, because everyone in the state would be affected similarly.

In order to believably disrupt the system, the scenario may need to have multiple contingencies. For example, a petroleum products pipeline ruptures causing a fuel shortage; then a windstorm occurs damaging transmission and distribution lines leaving customers in the dark and cold. Both the fuel shortage and the power outage would be addressed simultaneously. The geographic scope of the tabletop would include the areas of pipeline damage, windstorm damage, and wherever the loss of fuel supply and power outage occurs. In most cases the geographic area addressed by the tabletop exercise will be your state, a region including your state, or a region within your state.

In summary, start by relying on your objectives and explore scenarios by determining the kind of energy/utility disruptions that will occur, appropriately looking at issues where the disruptions occur and at supply chain issues, identifying a specific geographic area where impacts will be addressed, and then focusing the tabletop exercise on those geographic area, industry sectors, and communities (such as State agencies, industry, and others) who will be involved in, or affected by, the response.

Some events that could trigger a system disruption that you might consider:

- Hurricanes
- Earthquakes
- Flooding/ mudslides

- Forest Fires
- Severe storms, such as a widespread tornado outbreak
- Snow or Ice Storms
- Pandemic with high absenteeism and mortality rates
- Infrastructure failure, especially interdependent infrastructure such as communications or transportation failures that disrupt another sector
- A deliberate human attack - terrorist, criminal, or otherwise
- Cyber attacks
- Electromagnetic Storm or electromagnetic pulse (EMP)

Step 6 – Choosing your participants

Determining who you want to have participate in the tabletop is as important as any other aspect of the conference, including the scenario. In fact, getting the right participants will make the difference between an exercise that did not meet it objectives and a successful one. Usually, a key goal of the tabletop is the network-building itself, so having the right participants is paramount; you want participants who will work together during a real emergency. Beyond that, you want your tabletop discussions to be based on sufficient information and accurate information, in order to understand what the problems really are and to develop the right solutions, so you may wish to identify the most essential participants early and contact them as soon as possible to secure their participation.

A good way to determine who the participants should be is to consider your scenario. Early in the planning process you will not have a completed scenario, but you will likely have determined whether you want to deal with single or multiple contingencies, shortages or outages (disasters), and upstream or downstream supply issues (for example, does the scenario implicate oil refineries, or gas stations? Or both?)

Industry
Depending on your objectives, inviting representatives who reflect the activities, views and needs of the owners and operators from industry is critical. Not every company needs to attend, or to send a whole range of experts, if the industry representatives from various companies have the right expertise. Participants need to be sufficiently senior in their positions so they can speak to issues of company policy, knowing what information they can and cannot provide (say for proprietary reasons). While you may not be able to control who comes, you can help this effort by making it very clear to invitees the range of expertise that would be desirable. And, if you have close contacts with energy companies you can request specific individuals or specific expertise. Generally, you will send an invitation to a list of energy companies and they will decide who should attend.

Government
As with industry participants, who you invite to participate as government representatives depends greatly on the scenario. If the scenario involves a supply problem only, you need not necessarily invite emergency responders such as FEMA, your state emergency management agency, or local responders such as county and city emergency managers and law enforcement. If your scenario includes a disaster they may be critical. Again, you may want a range of expertise: communicators, policy advisors, operations managers, and response coordinators. If regulated utilities are involved you may want to invite representatives of their regulatory agency.

Some government representatives you may wish to consider as you build a participants list include:

Federal

- US Department of Energy (including Power Administrations)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency,
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Defense (e.g. Coast Guard, Regional Commands)
- Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service
- National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (and other fire services)

State

- State Energy Office
- Office of the Governor
- Office of the Attorney General
- State Emergency Management Agency
- State Patrol, Police
- State Transportation Agency
- State Environmental Protection Agency, Public Lands Agency
- State Agricultural Agency
- State Commence Agency
- State Health Agency
- State National Guard
- State & Regional Associations (NASEO, NARUC, NGA)

Local Government

- City & County Public Utilities
- City & County Public Works (Water)
- City & County Public Health
- City & County Law Enforcement
- City and County Emergency Management
- City & County Fire Response
- City & County Transit & Transportation Agencies
- City & County Associations

Interdependent systems and stakeholders
Following are some key private sector players you may wish to consider as participants.

- Electric Utilities
- Natural Gas Utilities
- Petroleum Companies (major oil companies and smaller jobber and distributors)
- Natural Gas and Petroleum pipelines
- Ethanol and Biodiesel producers

- Rail roads
- Telecommunications Companies
- Hospitals & Emergency Medical Services
- Private Transit & Transportation Companies
- Private Senior & Health Care Companies
- Agriculture, Fishing, Food Processing, Grocers
- Private Water Companies
- Military Bases
- Industrial & Manufacturing Companies
- Banks and Financial Institutions
- Associations of Businesses
- Associations of Customers
- Other stakeholders like service groups, non-profits, and others

Foreigners
States that border on Canada and Mexico may want to invite participation from the same kind of energy industry, government, and customer representatives that are invited from the United States.

Observers, Evaluators, and Media
Invitees need not all participate in the tabletop itself, some can come as observers. Elected officials are often invited to exercises of this sort. Some “observers” may have a formal role as evaluators or report-out facilitators within the structure of the exercise. In the NARUC tabletops we have not invited media, so that participants will feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues. However there may be benefits to involving media players such as Public Information Officers (PIO) – perhaps as participants given their role in any emergency. Following the exercise you may want to issue a Press Release or have a press briefing.

Step 7 – Develop your scenario

As mentioned above, certain decisions about the scenario may be made early in the process. These may relate to constraints you place on yourself (for example the desire to keep the exercise simple), or to achieve specific goals you have set for your agenncies (for example the desire to test State Energy Office coordination with the state emergency management agency might lead you to choose a disaster scenario).

Eventually the scenario will need to be written down in significant detail. At the least, you will need to develop scenario injects to share with participants. While your injects may be bullet points of a more detailed scenario, you should begin early in the process drafting scenario concepts on a scenario time frame. This will look like a script for a play or a Remember, however, that it is just a starting point. Your discussion with your planning teams about goals and objectives, and the input you receive from energy industry experts, might lead you to completely revise your original concepts.

You may wish to construct your draft scenario by using the Facilitator's Guide Template in the template appendix.

Creating Contingencies

Your task, in scenario development, is to produce a plausible event that severely interrupts energy supplies and/or utility services to a specific area. This may require positing multiple contingencies. Over exercise and scenario time, additional contingencies may be added, to create more complex or serious consequences to test response plans more strongly. You must balance the benefits and costs of more thoroughly addressing a simple contingency, with addressing multiple or more complex contingencies in less detail.

Contingencies should be realistic, and may be based on actual infrastructure, but may also be based on realistic, but invented infrastructure. The contingency does not have to be 100% realistic but must allow for realistic exploration of your objectives when generally applied. You may concoct rare events (like 100 year floods), coincident events (like a snow storm and an earthquake), human-caused events (such as physical attacks, cyber attacks, criminal events, accidents, or infrastructure failure), and low probability events (all major pipelines break in the earthquake, a solar flare disrupts the power grid, a sever pandemic reduces human resources to a point where energy supply is curtailed, or an international oil disruption.), to achieve a damage quotient sufficient to test response plans greatly. It is not necessary to do so, but it can be done.

What Are Realistic Scenarios for the Area?

Most areas have contingency trends. Lightning strikes happen a lot in some places, snow storms are common in others. While it is not necessary to follow the trends completely, the exercise will have more applicability if the scenario posits a sympathetic contingency.

Participants can benefit from exercises about contingencies they will never face, because most emergency response procedures address a range of contingencies. Still, it is better to create a scenario that is more likely for participants.

Weather and infrastructure use timing are important. Winter contingencies in northern climates are usually more life threatening (if the scenario is a disaster), and electricity use peaks in summer. Select a season that helps you posit the damage and impacts you want, to test response plans the way you want, to meet the goals and objective of the exercise.

Following are some situations you might want to discuss in an evolving contingency. Remember that each participant would discuss these issues from the perspective of their organization and their plan.

- What is the pre-contingency context (weather, etc.) and what might you anticipate because of that?
- What authorities and plans do you have should the issues you anticipate occur, and how do they differ among participants?
- Might you have warning (e.g. National Weather Service notices), and if so what do you do to prepare?
- What is the actual cause of the contingency, and are there things that could have been done to avoid it?
- If the contingency is disaster related (e.g. and ice storm), what are you doing during the event itself?
- What is the value of monitoring and what monitoring will you do?
- Early on you must assess damage, and consequences and estimate the significance of the contingency and its likely duration. What information do you use, and in what way?
- What are the significant impacts of the contingency?
- Based on actual and potential impacts you will turn to your plan for response options. You have an array of options of various cost, difficulty, and severity (e.g. increasing government intervention into markets). What options do you have, which ones will you implement, and why?
- Do you have immediate authorities for all your options, or must you seek authorization (e.g. through executive order)?
- Your resources will likely be limited, you must prioritize. How is that done?
- You must work with others. Who must you work with and how do you coordinate your efforts?
- You must communicate with others. Who do you need to communicate with, how do you do that, and what do you say?
- How will you inform the public/media, and what will you say?
- You decide what to do. You do it. However, even when supply and services are restored, you may have long term "recovery" issues to address. For example, flood victims may not have the financial capability to pay for utility hookups at temporary rentals. What will the utility do? Can the state assist?

The list of questions above is not exhaustive, it is meant to give you a sense of the kind of questions you can ask about different points in a scenario, from context through restoration to recovery. You may want to ask the same key questions at different points in the scenario. For example, what communications are you involved in on day 1 of the scenario versus days 4 and 8?

Testing Plans

Because a tabletop represents a group testing of emergency response plans, the most important thing you can do when developing a scenario is do determine what plans, and what aspects of those plans, you want to test. Ask yourself the following questions about testing plans.

- What aspects of my plan do I want to test (e.g. monitoring, coordination, etc.)?
- With whom do I want to coordinate (therefore who do I invite), and what aspects of their plans will they want to test?
- What scenario will allow us to test our plans to satisfy all our needs?

You should have an explicit discussion about these items with your team members. For larger exercises, you will test plans in more general ways. For smaller exercises, every energy participant may have a planning team member that can articulate specific elements they would like to test.

Scenario Injects

Scenario injects are presentations to participants during the exercise that place the participants at certain points in the scenario, facing a given situation. New injects change the scenario and provide participants with new problems to solve or data for an ongoing situation. Participants are then asked to respond to the inject.

Generally, participant should think about three impacts of the inject:

1. What role do I have in responding to the impacts of the contingency?
2. Has my ability to fulfill my role affected by the contingency?
3. Do I have a role in restoring services?

Each participant should think about their organization from these perspectives, figure out what they would do (according to their response plans), and discuss these issues with the other tabletop participants.

After each session, move on to the next inject (or other agenda item).

You can also prepare a specific set of discussion questions associated with each inject which typically show how the situation is getting worse. The questions can formthe structure for discussion or breakout session, and serve as the basis for assignments for the breakout. These questions should help guide the discussion to explore issues associated with the objective you have identified up front, and address specific actions and responses as driven by the planning element being examined. These could include:

- Legal authorities
- How decisions are made
- Interfaces between the States actions and the actions taken by the private sector
- The ability to understand the energy infrastructure so as to assess consequences and potential impacts and the time required for recovery.
- Interfaces between the energy emergency response actions and the State Disaster Response Plan

Step 8 – Design the exercise

Once you have developed a scenario, you need to determine how you will engage participants in exercise play. This involves establishing an exercise schedule and determining what activities you will employ to address the issues at each point in the scenario. Will you present the scenario with a PowerPoint presentation, then ask participants to answer a list of questions? While most activities likely will involve a media based scenario inject followed by a discussion of issues, you may wish to engage participants in more interesting activities, such as asking them to work together to write a memo to the governor or to prepare a press release for the public. Besides breaking up the conference and making it more interesting, these kinds of activities are valuable because they are the kind of things that participants will actually be engaged in or supporting during a real emergency. The more tabletop activities actually reflect the work that is done during an emergency, the more valuable the exercise will be.

A word of caution about filling up the time with too much to do. Because of the need for introductions, meals, breaks, evaluations, and the like, you will only have a few hours in the morning and afternoon to work the meat of the tabletop. If you are fortunate, you may have a second day (or part of a second day). It is better to do fewer activities well than to address all possible issues poorly.

A good place to start is to write up a realistic schedule for the tabletop. The facilitator's guide that is included in this toolkit may be a useful template for determining whether you can accomplish your objectives using your scenario given the amount of time available.

The following are ideas for presentations and activities that could be components of play.

Scenario Presentation
- PowerPoint, other overhead presentations
- Videos
- Maps - hardcopy and electronic
- Handouts

Organization
- Plenary Session - Address as individuals
- Training workshop on select topics to aquaint participant with plansand procedures or to provide background on topics related to the sceenairo
- Group by Tables - Address by groups, report out to whole
- Group by Tables Differently Arranged (sit by state, by type of organization, by industry, etc.) The two basic options are to either group individual by:
    - like organizations (government, electric utilities, natural gas utilities , local governments, etc.) or
    - mix the groups together so each group has a number of different organizations involved. There are pros and cons to each approach.

- Round Robin – Move from table to table, discuss/share issues
- Breakout into other rooms, report back to plenary

Participant Activities

- Come up with issues
- Address list of issues
- Answer list of questions
- Voting - show of hands or electronic, includes progressive voting (e.g. voting before and after discussion)
- Write a memo
- Assess consequence and determine what additional data or information is needed and where might it be obtained
- Write a letter (e.g. from a citizen to the governor)
- Write a press release
- Write a procedure for a contingency plan
- Role Play – Exercise leaders play roles (e.g. governor), participants respond
- Role Play – Participants play various roles

Finally, you will need to balance what is practical for your exercise with what is interesting. Having only PowerPoint presentations and having participants answer lists of questions is relatively easy and workable, but is less interesting for participants. On the other hand, requiring participants to write a memo, and a letter, and a press release, and a procedure and to jump around from group to group will frustrate participants. Find a balance between what is practical and what is interesting.

Step 9 – Pre-Exercise "homework" and final preparations

Providing your participants with elements of the scenario, and with some of the objectives, may help prepare them for the game and give them greater opportunities to interact realistically. The benefits of a pre-exercise engagement include:

- Reminds participants of the tabletop;
- Reduces stress for participants giving them some sense of the problems they will address and allowing them to prepare ahead should they need to;
- Requires an investment of effort by participants, who may then take the exercise more seriously; and
- Allows for quick initiation of the tabletop by reducing the amount of introduction required at the exercise itself.

Send this a week or so before the event.

Final Preparations

Final preparations refers to actions taken the night before or morning of the exercise. A good Logistics Plan will reduce the need for extensive final preparations and for last minute "fixes." Fundamentally, you need to ensure that the rooms, equipment and planned for services (like lunch) are ready and available, and that the personnel you are relying on are available and prepared.

Room and equipment set up is critical. Stage seating and tables in a way that enables your participants to interact in ways envisioned by the exercise: if breakout groups are involved, set up your facilities accordingly. <u>Test all equipment completely</u>. For example, if you are showing a video, make sure the entire video runs cleanly, that size on the screen is large enough, that the audio is sufficient (a mistake made fairly often), and that seating and lighting will be appropriate.

Personnel also must be prepared. It is important to do a run through the exercise more than once. This can (and should) be done by conference call, but is better if an in-person run-through can also be arranged. Can you get a room and run through the exercise (conceptually) the night before?

Your Logistics Plan should allow you to address these issues.

Step 10 – Conduct the Exercise

While we have emphasized the importance of key activities (such as the scenario and exercise design) the conduct itself is where the rubber meets the road. The months of planning, and expenditure of resources, come together at this one point in time. And while you can go back and rewrite your scenario over and over, and redesign your exercise any number of ways, you only have one shot at conducting the exercise, and you will want it to be useful, productive and allow you to improve your response plans.

Facilities and Equipment

It is critical that you arrange for appropriate facilities for the conference. Tabletop exercises involve both plenary (whole group) activities and breakout discussions. Participants must be able to see presentations and hear discussions well. Participants should not have to move around unnecessarily. There must be ways to darken the room sufficiently for presentations, lighten it sufficiently for discussions, and have walls (not windows) for posting maps, and flip chart notes.

While many types of meetings can be held in a variety of types of rooms, not just any room will facilitate the activities required of a tabletop exercise. Think about the design of the exercise and the activities you plan to hold, and ask what kind of facility would work best given the number of participants. For example, the need to hold contemporaneous discussions at from five to ten different tables requires a room large enough to provide some distance between the tables, and tables that can be grouped appropriately. Consider also the kind of equipment and materials you will need for the exercise.

Agenda and welcome

Examples of agendas for tabletops and for facilitator's activities are included in the facilitators manuals for some of the exercises we have run, and are included elsewhere in this toolkit.

Generally, you will want to accomplish a number of things when you welcome participants, but thanking any funders, hosts, and acknowledging inputs from supporting organizations is appropriately done at the beginning of the exercise.

Any facilitators, assistants, and game-managers should be identified early. Allow participants to introduce themselves, including titles and where they work. Since one of the key intended outcomes of any tabletop exercise is to build institutional networks, giving everyone a chance to be indentified to all the other participants in the room is a critical component of the exercise. It will also help the group to know who is in the room, and "break the ice" to help participants feel comfortable talking.

Once the participants are introduced, facilitator should establish the ground rules for the exercise, and also offer a mixture of practical information (like the location of bathrooms) and positive anticipation about the exercise ahead. Remember, because you are holding an emergency exercise share safety information (like the location of fire extinguishers and emergency exits).

Presentations
There are a number of presentations that you may want to include in the exercise.

- Scenario Injects: Generally a facilitator will do the injects, but they can be done by support staff, leaving the facilitator to oversee participant activities.

- Infrastructure Descriptions: A facilitator can do these descriptions, but a subject matter expert may be advisable. Infrastructure descriptions provide participants with the background information they need to estimate the impacts of specified contingencies. However, this should activity be limited to the minimum time necessary, and as much as possible should be covered on a pre-scenario basis. It has been our experience that explaining the infrastructure of the game is a much less valuable use of time than playing the game – in most cases, participants will already be familiar with the general infrastructure types and interactions and can ask questions for further clarification as the game proceeds.

Agenda Flexibility

If you have tested and run through your exercise beforehand, you should know that it can play out more than one way. While you should attempt as much as possible to stick to the agenda you have developed, if you find you need to work an item more rigorously, determine how you can do that and keep to the agenda. You may need to get participants to agree to a shorter break, or shift a break time or shorten the time spent on a future agenda item. For example you may decide to discuss one part of the scenario at the tables but not report out to the whole group, saving time. Collect each table's notes and include the information in the Key Lessons Learned report sent out after the conference.

The need for flexibility is another reason to rely on a good facilitator. These kinds of decisions need to be made all the time in tabletop exercises. You can even build flexibility into an agenda by how you structure the timing of events. Include the facilitator in the development of the agenda if possible.

Focus on Large Issues, Keep Details to a Minimum

Individual participants will provide plenty of complexities, details, and little known facts along with analogies and occasional inaccuracies. These all enrich the discussion, and occasionally lead to the proverbial "eye opener." The focus of the discussion, however, need to be kept on the big issues at hand. How bad is the emergency? How long will it last? What are the most significant impacts? What options do you have? Do you have the authorities you need, or can you get them? With whom do you need to coordinate?

What do you need to communicate? Be sure you have assigned note takers to capture key points and actions taken or recommended.

This can best be accomplished by keeping injects simple, asking a few clear questions (not the same question dressed six different ways), and relying on the facilitator to bring the discussion back to where it needs to be.

Be Specific About Problems

For estimating the significance of impacts, a certain lack of specificity is OK. For example, it makes no real difference if your state relies on a certain pipeline for 60 percent or 80 percent of its supply – loss of the pipeline will have serious transportation impacts. However, if you want a utility to estimate service restoration, you have to tell them how badly you (through the scenario) damaged their system, e.g. "half your transmission poles are damaged" or "the utility estimates that 250,000 customers are without power (scale the number to your states population) and it will take X days to fully restore power". If you want them to tell you what they would do if they are cut off from their suppliers you have to tell them where they are cut off, e.g. "highways 87 and 90 are closed at the pass." That way participants cannot say "we'll take care of it somehow," they have to understand the specific problem and be asked for a specific solution. Your scenario needs to be build to cause those specific problems.

Step 11 – Post exercise activities, evaluation and report

The role of observer evaluators has been previously discussed. There are two other types of evaluations that you want to address.

Participant's evaluations

Participants are your primary clients in a tabletop exercise, and their comments are critical, both for the content of the exercise (lessons learned) and the conduct of the exercise (was it well conducted?). Unfortunately, evaluation forms are often poorly constructed, and participants (and exercise officials) often do not take them seriously. Evaluations are often handed out at the last minute and ignored by participants.

You should take time to make sure you ask the right questions, and that you write them in clear, concise language. Ask questions that allow you to determine whether the goals and objectives were met, or not. Don't forget to ask participants about the most important lessons they learned. You can use these (plus information gathered during the exercise) to construct your post exercise reports.

Finally, make sure you give participants plenty of time to fill out the evaluation forms, and emphasize how important they are for you

When the tabletop exercise concludes, you will want (and deserve) to stop thinking about it. But your job is not quite done yet. There will be lessons learned, issues raised, perhaps even proposals (or agreements) to take certain actions going forward. This should be captured in writing as soon as possible following the excerise while the details are still fresh in mind. A post-excerise meeting of the planning team may be very useful. It is very important that you pull these all together and share them with participants and others with whom it might be appropriate. Participants will be relieved that the exercise is over too, and may put it on the back burner. A contact from you a week or two later, with key concepts, is a great way to cement the lessons of the exercise into participants minds.

Key Items to Share in a Post Exercise Contact

- List of Attendees
- Copies of Presentations (including the scenario injects)
- Key Lessons Learned
- Key Issues Raised
- Actions Going Forward
- Comments of Evaluators
- Evaluation Comments from Participants

Finally, you should set up an exercise review session with key staff. How well did the facilitator do? Who were your planning team leaders? These individuals, among others, can provide you with a professional perspective on how the entire conference went. These evaluations need not be shared with others, but are for your internal review, to help you do an even better job when you conduct your next tabletop exercise.

Lastly, under the State Energy Assurance Grant DOE has provided the following Guidance[1]:

> Subtask 5.2 "Participate in and/or conduct at least one inter-State/regional exercise that includes players from neighboring States, local governments, industry and Federal agencies, as appropriate. The recipient shall prepare an exercise After-Action Report, which will result in actionable items and any necessary revision/modifications to the Energy Assurance Plan.
>
> Deliverable 5.2 - The inter-State/regional training/exercise(s) must be completed within 30 months after the award, with an after-action report delivered 30 days following the exercise.

Please see the full guidance for additional details and requirement.

[1] Guidance for State Energy Assurance Planning Deliverables 3.0 and 5.0 December 2, 2010 which can be found at: http://naseo.org/energyassurance/SEAP_Upcoming_Deliverables_Guidance_12-2-10.pdf