



NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT Tabletop Exercise Toolkit

**Facilitator Guide
Winter Storm, Response Phase**

Version 1.0





WINTER STORM RESPONSE SCENARIO

Congratulations, you have been identified as the facilitator for the upcoming tabletop exercise. Whether this is your first time as a facilitator or you have experience, please use this document to help guide you through this process. Thank you for taking on this important role on behalf of the organization.

Before you continue, make sure you are familiar with the scope and objectives set by the organizers and planning team for the tabletop exercise. If those have not yet been identified, please refer to the organizer's guide for assistance. It can be found under Tools and Resources on the Private Sector Partner Portal (www.privatesector.nyc).

This scenario, based on a fictional winter storm impacting New York City that affects your primary facility and employees, is designed to test your initial response to an advanced notice incident. At the start of the incident, participants must deal with initial reactions, as well as incomplete information and uncertainty about safety conditions. As the scenario continues, the focus shifts to business continuity concerns.

This Facilitator Guide contains the text that will appear on the PowerPoint. Certain slides also include questions that you may use to encourage discussion. The questions are categorized based on the business continuity function to which they pertain as a way to help you steer discussion to areas relevant to your participants and exercise objectives. Not all of these questions will be relevant to your organization or to the particular participants. Additionally, in some cases, you may want to re-word the questions to prompt the participants to identify the problems that the questions address.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Introduction

This facilitator manual contains some background about tabletop exercises, suggestions for how to run a successful tabletop exercise, as well as the current exercise scenario with possible questions to encourage discussion, and notes detailing the purpose of certain slides.

Background

What is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise is a facilitated discussion of a plan in an informal, low stress environment. It is like a problem-solving or brainstorming session where participants share capabilities and solve problems as a group based on their organization's existing plans and the determined objectives of the exercise.

The success of a tabletop exercise is determined by feedback from participants and the impact the feedback has on the evaluation and revision of policies, plans, and procedures.

What a Tabletop Exercise is Not

A tabletop exercise is neither the tool through which you make a plan nor the place for training and discussion about a plan. A prior step to holding a tabletop exercise is often a workshop to train and discuss a plan. This toolkit is meant to be used once your organization has a plan in place and is ready to evaluate it.

Why Run a Tabletop Exercise?

Tabletop exercises build organizational capacity, help organizations evaluate their business continuity plans and identify strengths and areas for improvement. These exercises provide training and awareness to staff who have an opportunity to rehearse their roles and responsibilities during an incident. Plus, they are low-cost and low-stakes.

How Long is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise usually lasts from one to four hours, but it can vary depending on the incident. Discussion times are open-ended, and participants are encouraged to take their time in arriving at in-depth decisions without time pressure. When the time is up, the activity is concluded.

There is never a perfect moment to run a tabletop exercise for everyone, but try to do so at a time that doesn't compete for everyone's attention.

Facilitating a Tabletop Exercise

The facilitator has a number of responsibilities, including:

- Introducing the narrative
- Encouraging problem solving
- Controlling the pace and flow of the exercise
- Stimulating discussion and drawing answers and solutions from the group (rather than supplying them)

Setting the Stage

The opening remarks and activities influence the whole exercise experience. Participants need to know what to expect, and to feel comfortable about being participants. Consider including the following elements at the start of your exercise:

- Begin by sincerely welcoming participants and putting them at ease.
- Brief the participants about what will happen. This should include a clear explanation of the exercise's purpose and objectives, agenda, ground rules, and procedures.
- Start the exercise by reading (or having someone read) the first two slides of background information.
- Try breaking the ice by beginning with a general question directed at one or two high-ranking individuals or to the group as a whole. Later, other questions can be addressed to other individuals.

Ways to Involve All Participants

It is important that everyone participates and that no one person dominates the discussion. Tips for involving all of the participants are summarized below:

- Give extra encouragement to those who are a little tentative.
- Recognize that junior staff might be hesitant to comment in front of senior management.
- Avoid the temptation to jump in with the right solutions when participants are struggling. This can hamper discussion. Instead, try to draw out answers from participants. They will be more likely to participate if they feel people are listening intently and sympathetically.
- Model and encourage the behaviors you want from participants.
- Make eye contact with participants.
- Acknowledge comments in a positive manner.

Controlling and Sustaining the Action

To maintain a high level of interest and to keep everyone involved, the facilitator needs to control and sustain the action. There are several ways to do this.

- Vary the pace. Give messages at different rates, perhaps even giving two at once to increase pace and interest.
- Maintain a balance between talking about a problem to death and moving along so fast that nothing gets settled. Don't hesitate to control the exercise tightly.
- Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Always remember that the tabletop is an opportunity to evaluate your plan in a no-fault environment, and gaps should be expected. People may be sensitive or inexperienced. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, stop the exercise. Reach into your experience as a discussion leader to help participants resolve conflicts and feel comfortable.
- Keep it low-key. Avoid a bad experience by keeping in mind the low-key nature of the tabletop.
- If you spend all of your time on one big problem, maintain interest among participants, and reach consensus, then the tabletop can be considered a success. Push the participants past superficial solutions. A few carefully chosen, open-ended questions can keep the discussion going to a logical conclusion.
- Remember that not everyone will be equally knowledgeable about the plan that is being evaluated.

Note: The point is not to debate or discuss the City's response; the key is to be aware of the response and see how they impact your organization's response.

Using the Possible Questions

The questions that accompany the following scenario slides cover a broad range of plan components that can be evaluated. It is recommended that only the questions relevant to the tabletop exercise's scope and purpose be discussed. Not every question needs to be asked, and each scenario can be used multiple times to test different components of your plan. For example, if the goal is to evaluate the organization's communications strategy, it may not be necessary to ask participants about operating from a backup facility. Use your best judgement when deciding what questions to ask. Facilitator notes are also included on some of the slides to help you better understand the context.

Scenario Slides & Possible Questions



1 Tabletop Exercise

Disclaimer: These customizable exercise templates were created for the use of private sector organizations by New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). NYCEM is not responsible for any changes made to exercise materials by participating organizations. The scenarios presented are fictional and NYCEM cannot guarantee that the City agency actions depicted here will be the City's response for similar incidents. For more information about the resources NYC

Emergency Management have available, please visit us at [NYC.gov/emergencymanagement](https://www.nyc.gov/emergencymanagement) or email us at publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov.



2 Ground Rules

Don't fight the scenario! It is a tool to guide the discussion.

This exercise will be held in an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, are expected. Respond to the scenario using your knowledge of your organization's current plans and capabilities.

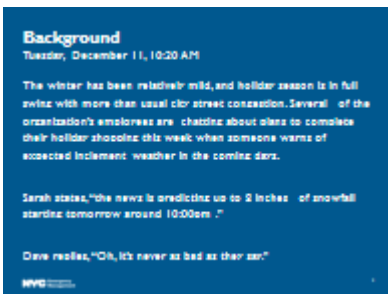
Decisions are not precedent-setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This exercise is an

opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions.

Issue identification is not as valuable as suggestions and recommended actions that could improve response efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus. The Parking Lot: A place to note ideas that can be discussed at a later time.

Facilitator Notes:

- Make sure to explain in basic terms what a tabletop exercise is and how it works.
- Gently explain why the parking lot exists and the importance of keeping the conversation on track.



3 Background, Tuesday Morning, 10:30 AM

The winter has been relatively mild, and holiday season is in full swing with more than usual city street congestion. Several of the organization's employees are chatting about plans to complete their holiday shopping this week when someone warns of some expected inclement weather in the coming days. Sarah states, "the news is predicting up to 2 inches of snowfall starting tomorrow around 10:00am." Dave replies, "Oh, it's never as bad as they say."

Possible Questions for ALL

- Realistically, how much weight should be given to this weather report? Do you believe it? Is somebody at your organization responsible for watching the weather and maintaining situational awareness?
- Where does the organization get information from?
- Do you have a plan in place for how to deal with emergency events for which you have advance warning?
- What actions, if any, will you take at this point in preparation for the storm?
- Does your organization take any general preparedness measures during the winter season even when a storm is not threatening New York?
- Who at your organization is responsible for triggering a response to a winter storm? If that person is on vacation or unavailable, who else can start the response?



4 Reality Check, Tuesday Evening, 6:00 PM

Local meteorologists are reporting that a nor'easter has formed off the East coast with the potential to affect the entire Northeast region over the next few days. The storm could bring more than 12 inches of snow to New York City.

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What is the organization concerned about at this point?
- Is there a designated process for coordinating the organization's preparation?
- Does the organization have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?
- Can you physically prepare your facility for a major storm with little warning? Do you know which equipment needs to be protected and how it can be protected?
- What critical operations do you need to get back up and running as soon as the storm passes?
- Do you have an alternate work site? How quickly can you make it functional for your organization's needs?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Who will conduct the final sweep of the facility? Does this person know what to check for?
- Should you send a message to all of your employees? What should this message say?

Possible Questions for FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Will you call your insurance agent before the event to discuss how the recovery process will work?

Facilitator Notes:

- Managers have to simultaneously consider their own concerns and fears as well as how to direct and lead their employees during emergencies.
- Participants should consider where they are getting information from. Some expected sources include notification systems, news outlets, social media, and upper management. Are these sources vetted and how does information get passed along in your organization?



5 Winter Storm Watch, Tuesday Evening, 8:00 PM

New York City Emergency Management messaging includes the following CorpNet notification:

Precipitation is expected to begin Wednesday night between 10-11 PM. Heaviest snow Thursday between 4 AM and 2 PM. Snow totals – 10.0 - 12.0 inches (worst case 14.0 – 16.0 inches). Northern Manhattan and the Bronx could see higher amounts. 1.5 - 2.5 inches of snow per hour is possible during the heaviest period.

Snow starts to wind down Thursday evening between 6-7 PM and taper off at approximately 8 PM. Total liquid equivalent: 1.25 inches. Current temperature: 38 degrees. Temps drop to the low-30s when the snow starts. Temps will hover just below 31F throughout the snowstorm.

Facilitator Notes:

- The CorpNet program is managed by NYC Emergency Management and provides business partners with current, accurate information about emergencies to enhance awareness and aid decision making, should their businesses be affected. Businesses can enroll at PrivateSector.NYC.

Possible Questions for SECURITY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

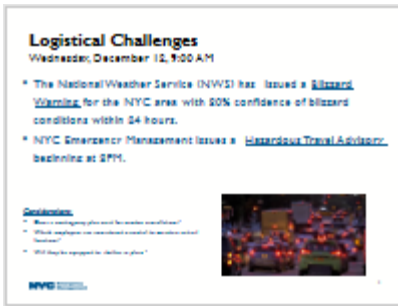
- Are any employees signed up for CorpNet?

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT and IT

- Will any of your operations be affected by significant snowfall or icy conditions?
- Would you be able to contact your vendors from outside of your facility?
- What operations might you need to cancel or postpone?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES

- Do you want to get a message out to your employees at this point? What will the message say?



6 Logistical Challenges, Wednesday Morning, 9:00 AM

The National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a Blizzard Warning for the NYC area with 80% confidence of blizzard conditions within 24 hours.

NYC Emergency Management issues a Hazardous Travel Advisory beginning at 8PM.

Facilitator Notes:

- Blizzard Warning: Issued when winds of 35 mph or greater are combined with blowing and drifting snow with visibilities of ¼ mile or less. Seek indoor shelter immediately and stay indoors until the severe conditions end.

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- How does the NWS forecast change your posture in regard to the storm?
- What operations might you need to cancel or postpone?
- Who is on your crisis management or response team? Do you have such a team? Would these people be able to come to the office during the storm? If not, could they fulfill their obligations from a remote location?
- If members of your response team are entirely unable to work, who will fill in for them?

Possible Questions for SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Does a contingency plan exist for vendor cancellations?
- Which employees are considered essential to maintain critical functions?
- Will they be equipped to shelter-in-place?
- What are your organization's dependencies? What or who do you rely on to complete your critical operations? What are they doing to prepare for the approaching storm?

Possible Questions for IT, SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Do you know if your suppliers and vendors (including telephone service, internet provider, teleconferencing provider, and other technological support providers) are prepared for emergency situations? Will they be there when you need them? Do you have alternates in the event that one of your providers fails?
- Do you have a vendor/supplier contact list that you can access remotely if you need to use it?
- Are you able to contact these providers in the event of an emergency? At any time of day?

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Do you and your employees have access to business email from off-site?
- Will you have any other responsibilities to your business during the storm or on Wednesday (the day after the storm)?

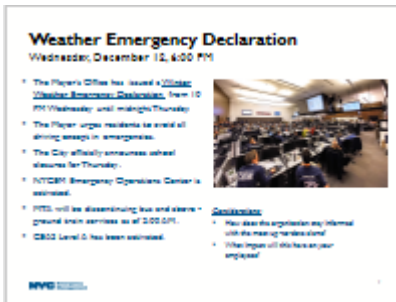


7 ARE YOU READY?

Freeze out cold weather by adding items to your emergency supplies that can help you keep warm. Winterize your Go Bag by adding a blanket, warm socks, and gloves. All New Yorkers should sign up for NotifyNYC to receive up-to-date emergency alerts directly from NYC's 24/7 Watch Command.

Facilitator Notes:

- Notify NYC is the City of New York's official source for information about emergency events and important City services. Alerts from Notify NYC comes directly from NYC Emergency Management's 24/7 Watch Command, which monitors emergency activity in NYC and the metropolitan area. Participants can sign up at NYC.gov/notifynyc.



8 Weather Emergency Declaration, Wednesday Evening, 6:00 PM

The Mayor's Office has issued a Winter Weather Emergency Declaration from 10 PM Wednesday until midnight Thursday. The Mayor urges residents to avoid all driving except in emergencies. The City officially announces school closures for Thursday. NYC's Emergency Operations Center is activated. MTA will be discontinuing bus and above-ground train services as of 2:00 AM. CEAS Level A has been activated.

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Is there an employee responsible for following the Mayor's press conference and other City Hall correspondences related to the storm?
- How does the organization stay informed with the most up-to-date alerts?
- What impact will this have on your employees?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- If you have not contacted all of your employees yet, do you want to do so now? What will you tell them?
- Who is responsible for sending out this type of message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all of your employees from outside of your facility?
- Who around the table would honestly be able to work on securing the business while ensuring their own households are safe?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT and LEGAL

- Should your employees come to work this week?

- If not, should they use vacation time? Sick time?
- Will they be compensated if your office is closed?
- If you do not specifically close your office and your employees come to work voluntarily, are you liable if they get injured?



9 NOR'EASTER BEARS DOWN, Thursday Morning, 9:00 AM

The city is currently experiencing heavy snow with blizzard conditions. Snow began overnight, with 6 inches having fallen by 7 AM. Currently 9 inches of snow have been reported in Central Park. There is a high confidence of expected snowfall up to 1.5 feet. There is currently a snowfall rate of 1 to 2 inches per hour, and snow is expected to continue until 8:00 PM tonight. Significant travel impacts are already being seen around the city. Bus terminals and airports have cancelled

arrivals and departures until further notice.

Possible Questions for EMPLOYEE SAFETY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Is there a place in your facility where people could safely and comfortably shelter-in-place? If so, is it stocked with all of the necessary supplies?
- Do your employees have Go Bags?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Are employees required to come to work at this point?
- If not, will they be using vacation time? Sick time?
- What will your policy be regarding employees who must take off from work for personal reasons? Will they be compensated? If so, how? How long will they be able to stay on leave?
- Who is responsible for sending out this type of message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all of your employees from outside of your facility? Are you worried about the missing employees? How can you try to get in touch with them?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What will you tell your employees about working for the rest of the day? For tomorrow?
- Can you get in touch with all employees? When you do get in touch with them, what will you tell them?



10 Arctic Impact, Thursday Afternoon, 2:00 PM

The facilities manager calls with news that the accumulating ice and freezing temperatures caused a pipe to burst in the facility leaving only minor water damage but requires a shutdown of all utilities. The building will now be without heat and hot water for at least two days.

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Can your organization withstand a utility shutdown? For how long?
- Does your organization have generators? Fuel?
- Is there a plan for ensuring critical services stay up and running during the storm? Are your employees cross-trained to maintain critical operations?
- Do you have lines of succession and back-ups designated for important positions?
- What critical operations will need to get back up and running as soon as the storm passes?
- What operations can be postponed or canceled for a time?
- Does your organization have the capability to communicate with staff at this point?

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Will you attempt to get in touch with employees at all after the storm?
- Do you have policies in place permitting employees to work from home? If so, will your employees actually be able to work from home? Have you tested the technology?
- Have employees ever practiced working from home in non-emergency situations to ensure that everything functions properly? Can your network withstand the increased traffic from multiple employees working from home?



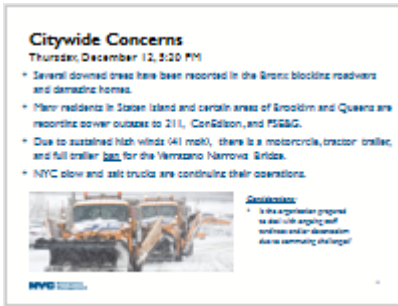
11 WINTER SAFETY TIPS

Install and check batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Keep a fire extinguisher on hand. Have safe emergency heating equipment available. Be sure to use only portable heating equipment that is approved for indoor use. Space heaters are temporary heating devices and should only be used for a limited time each day. NOTE: Improper use of portable heating equipment can lead to fire or dangerous levels of carbon monoxide. Take precautions to ensure you

are heating your home safely. Stay safe when shoveling snow, stretch beforehand, and avoid overexertion.

Facilitator Notes:

- Participants should consider the preparedness level of their own household. Do they have an emergency plan for family members and pets? Do they have a stay-at-home kit?

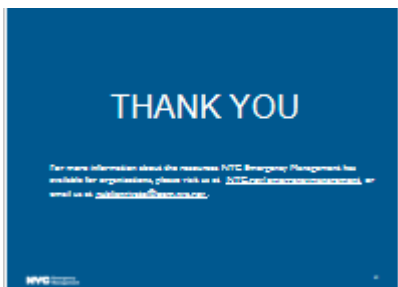


12 Citywide Concerns, Thursday Afternoon, 5:30 PM

Several downed trees have been reported in the Bronx, blocking roadways and damaging homes. Many residents in Staten Island and certain areas of Brooklyn and Queens are reporting power outages to 311, ConEdison, and PSE&G. Due to sustained high winds (41 mph), there is a motorcycle, tractor trailer, and full trailer ban for the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. NYC plow and salt trucks are continuing their operations.

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Is the organization prepared to deal with ongoing staff tardiness and/or absenteeism due to commuting challenges?



13 THANK YOU

For more information about the resources that NYC Emergency Management has available for organizations, please visit us at NYC.gov/emergencymanagement or email us at publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov.