

# Tabletop Exercise Guide

For Community Based and Faith Based  
Organizations



### What is a Tabletop Exercise (TTX)?

- A discussion based exercise
- A low-stress event to stimulate discussion of a simulated situation
- Participants discuss issues in depth and make decisions using slow-paced problem-solving methods in contrast to the fast-paced, spontaneous decision making typical of actual or simulated emergency conditions

### TTX Format

- The TTX begins with a briefing by the facilitator to orient participants and simulators to the TTX objectives, ground rules, and communication and simulation procedures
- The scenario narrative is then presented and describes an event or emergency incident
- The selected event should be one that is realistic for the agency
- The TTX can be modified based on the participants; simply “hide” slides that are not relevant, italicize or delete questions that are not relevant
- A debrief, also called a hotwash, is conducted at the end of the TTX to identify any areas of improvement and note any strengths from the event
- Length of the exercise can vary and is flexible; one module could be completed in 30 minutes or all 3 modules could take 4 hours or more. The time will depend on how much depth you want to discuss the questions.

### Materials Checklist

- PowerPoint presentation of the TTX (Severe Weather, Earthquake or Pandemic Flu)
- Computer
- Projector
- Projection screen or blank wall
- Copies of the appropriate emergency plan, maps or reference material
- Improvement Plan Matrix
- *Optional:* Whiteboard or paper and markers to take notes
- *Optional:* Additional handouts or worksheets based on the TTX scenario
- *Optional:* Sign in sheet for records
- *Optional:* Name tags

### Room Set Up and Logistics

- Any conference facility or office space that will comfortably accommodate the expected number of participants in a face-to-face setting
- Typically the layout is in a “U” shaped formation facing the projector screen
- Recommended group size of 5-20 participants

### Best Practices and Suggestions

- It is important that everyone participates and that no one person dominates the discussion. Give extra encouragement to those who are a little reticent.

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- Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Tabletop exercises are basically training, not testing. People may come with fragile egos and little exercise experience. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, stop the exercise.
- If your organization has never done a Tabletop exercise, you can start simple and build on the event over time. This is considered a progressive exercise cycle where each quarter or year you progressively make the exercise more challenging.