

CHECKLIST OF EXERCISE TYPES

This guide helps airport leaders decide what type of exercises are optimal at various stages of contingency planning. It is designed to answer the question “*How often should we conduct exercises and for what purposes?*” Exercises are an excellent way for airports to improve integration of contingency plans by inviting the participation of planners and responders from city, county and other stakeholder organizations.

FEMA’s Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) provides a set of guiding principles and an approach for planning, conducting, and evaluating exercises. This guide provides information to help airports select the best exercise for their purposes.

There are two categories of exercises:

- **Discussion-based Exercises** include seminars, workshops, tabletop exercises, and games. These types of exercises familiarize players with or develop new plans, policies, procedures, and agreements.
- **Operations-based Exercises** include drills, functional exercises, and full-scale exercises. These exercises validate plans, policies, procedures, and agreements; clarify roles and responsibilities; and identify resource gaps. Operations-based exercises include a real-time response such as initiating communications or mobilizing personnel and resources.

NOTE: Of the seven types of exercises, the two most useful for integrating contingency plans are tabletop exercises (TTX) and drills. The descriptions of these two types are highlighted in yellow below. In general, the most productive approach is to develop a TTX then select pieces (core capabilities, objectives, injects, or other specific things you wish to test) and turn them into a drill.

Instructions:

1. Review each of the four types of exercises.
2. Consider both the benefits and considerations of each.
3. Select the optimal exercise for each use case at the airport.
4. Download HSEEP templates and instructions at <https://preptoolkit.fema.gov/web/hseep-resources> to help you design and facilitate the exercises you select.

Seminar

- A discussion-based exercise that orients participants to or provides an overview of plans, policies, procedures, protocols, and resources.
- Lecture-based, usually led by a seminar facilitator/presenter with limited feedback or participation from attendees.
- A good starting point for developing or making major changes to existing plans.

Benefits: Minimal time constraints; effective for small or large groups.

Considerations: Less engaging for participants.

Workshop

- A discussion-based exercise often employed to develop policies, plans or procedures.
- A group based discussion, often facilitated by subject matter expert who guides discussion.
- Clearly defined objectives and goals, focusing on a specific issue, such as the development or revision of a specific plan.

Benefits: Effective for small or large groups; more participant engagement.

Considerations: Specific objectives need to be identified in advance.

Tabletop

- A discussion-based exercise in response to a scenario, intended to generate a dialogue of various issues to identify strengths and areas for improvement, and/or achieve changes in perceptions about plans, policies, or procedures.
- Scenario is presented to describe an event at a simulated time.
- Players apply their knowledge and skills to a list of problems presented by the facilitator.
- Problems are discussed as a group, and resolution may be reached and documented for later analysis.

Benefits: Enhance understanding of roles and responsibilities during a defined incident; validate plans and procedures.

Considerations: Requires more advanced planning and an experienced facilitator; need to create a problem-solving environment.

Game

- A discussion-based exercise that is a structured form of play guided by clear rules, data, and procedures for its execution.
- Games are designed to depict an actual or hypothetical situation to ensure that the participants make decisions and take actions that would be plausible.
- Games can be used to reinforce training, stimulate team building, or enhance operational and tactical capabilities.

Benefits: Open, decision-based format of a game can incorporate “what if” questions; no actual resources are used.

Considerations: Requires extensive planning and pre-scripted activities.

Drill

- An operations-based exercise often employed to validate a specific function or capability in a single agency/organization.
- Used to practice and maintain skills, evaluate new procedures or policies, and determine if plans can be executed as designed.
- Results are measured against established standards.

Benefits: Participants receive immediate feedback. The narrow focus requires minimal pre-planning.

Considerations: Clearly defined plans, procedures, and protocols need to be in place

Functional Exercise

- An operations-based exercise designed to test and evaluate capabilities and functions while in a realistic, real-time environment; however, movement of resources is usually simulated.
- Events are projected through a realistic exercise scenario with event updates that drive activity typically at the management level.
- Controllers typically use a Master Scenario Events List (MSEL) to ensure participant activity remains within predefined boundaries.
- Evaluators observe behaviors and compare them against established plans, policies, procedures, and standard practices.

Benefits: Inter-department and inter-agency roles and responsibilities are validated and real-world relationships are strengthened; EOC and Command Post are evaluated; engaging for participants.

Considerations: Deployment of resources and personnel usually simulated but demands on exercise personnel is high. This exercise requires much pre-planning and coordination amongst planners.

Full-Scale Exercise

- An operations-based exercise that is typically the most complex and resource-intensive of the exercise types and often involves multiple agencies, jurisdictions/organizations, and real-time movement of resources.
- Events are projected through an exercise scenario with event updates that drive activity at the operational level.
- Involves multiple agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions and use of MSEL drives player actions.
- Often includes many players operating under cooperative systems such as the Incident Command System (ICS) Unified Command.

Benefits: Conducted in a realistic environment to mirror a real incident by presenting complex problems requiring multi-agency, multi-department response.

Considerations: Exercise site is usually large with many activities occurring simultaneously; mobilization of personnel and resources is required. Extensive planning and coordination among parties is required.

Other ACRP resources that may be helpful to an airport's efforts to integrate its contingency plans are:

- *ACRP Synthesis 72 Tabletop and Full-Scale Emergency Exercises for General Aviation, Non-Hub, and Small Hub Airports.*