

# Tabletop Exercise-in-a Box Situation Manual

August 2024

## Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Tabletop Exercise-in-a-Box Documents

This document is part of a Tabletop Exercise-in-a-Box. Below is a list of all the documents included in the Tabletop Exercise-in-a-Box.

1. **Situation Manual:** This document provides general information to exercise participants, including exercise objectives, scope, and the exercise scenario.
2. **Facilitator Guide:** The Facilitator Guide describes the roles and responsibilities of the exercise facilitator and the exercise planning team. Because this handbook contains information regarding exercise administration, it is only to be distributed to those designing, facilitating, or evaluating the exercise.
3. **Facilitator PowerPoint Presentation:** A PowerPoint Presentation has been developed to help guide and facilitate the exercise. The PowerPoint presentation supplements the Situation Manual and provides participants with key information regarding the exercise.
4. **After-Action Report/ Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) Template:** The AAR/IP is a document that includes an exercise overview, analysis of capabilities, and a list of corrective actions. The length, format, and development timeframe of the AAR/IP depend on the exercise type and scope. A template AAR/IP has been developed for this exercise.

### How to Use This Tabletop Exercise-in-a-Box

 Throughout each tool in the Exercise-in-a-Box, the user will find indicators and icons to help customize their exercise and to meet the needs of their organization.

|  |  |
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| A light bulb with rays of light indicating best practice | **Best Practice** icon identifies tips, tricks, planning considerations and recommendations for the tabletop exercise or for continuity planning. These icons and boxes should be deleted before the document is finalized. |

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|  A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instruction | **Instructions** icon identified instructions for completing and customizing the tabletop exercise. These icons and boxes should be deleted before the document is finalized. |

Throughout the document the user will also find highlighted text. This highlighted text can be customized with information specific to the facility conducting the exercise.

### How to Use This Situation Manual

This Situation Manual (SITMAN) has been designed as a tool to assist an organization in facilitating an exercise to test various elements of their Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan. Any items included in this SITMAN can be edited or removed by the exercise planning team.

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| A light bulb with rays of light indicating best practice | The format of the Exercise Plan is based upon the [**Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP)** (https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/exercises/hseep)](https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/exercises/hseep)**.** |

***Please remember to delete this page prior to finalizing this SITMAN for distribution.***

## Exercise Overview

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|  A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | Review the following chart to better understand the exercise and what is being evaluated. **Remember to complete the information that is highlighted in grey**.  |

Exercise Overview Table

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| --- | --- |
| **Exercise Name** | Continuity in Crisis: A Tabletop Exercise |
| **Exercise Dates** | [Indicate the date(s) of the exercise the start and end time] |
| **Scope** | This discussion-based exercise is planned for up to [Number] hours at [Host Location].  |
| **Focus Area(s)** | Response  |
| **Objectives** | * **Objective 1:** Assess the organization’s plans and process for identifying and staffing essential functions and operations during a disruptive incident.
* **Objective 2:** Evaluate the organization’s process identifying and prioritizing critical information, data, and systems that are necessary to maintain essential functions and operations during a disruptive incident.
* **Objective 3:** Discuss the organization’s strategies for identifying alternate care sites to continue services following a disruptive incident.
 |
| **Threat or Hazard** | **Module 1:** Staffing**Module 2:** Information Technology**Module 3:** Alternate Facilities  |
| **Scenarios** | **Module 1:** In the heart of a challenging season, a sudden surge in absenteeism has hit the organization hard. Whether due to illness, family emergencies, or other unforeseen circumstances, a significant portion of clinical and administrative staff are unexpectedly unavailable.**Module 2:** A long-term Information Technology (IT) outage has struck the health care facility, rendering crucial systems inaccessible.**Module 3:** A severe weather event, such as tornado, has struck the region where the health care facility is located. |
| **Sponsor** | [Insert the name of the host organization.] |
| **Participating Jurisdictions/ Organizations** | See Appendix B for a full list of participants.  |
| **Point of Contact** | **[First Name Last Name]** [Title][Agency][Street Address Line 1][Street Address Line 2][City, State, Zip Code][Phone Number][Email Address]  |

## General Information

### Exercise Objectives

The exercise objectives describe the expected outcomes for the exercise. The objectives are approved by the exercise planning team.

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The following are **sample exercise objectives** for this Exercise-in-a-Box. The listed objectives are the same for all the modules. An organization may add more objectives or edit the current objectives as they see fit. The organization may also wish to add objectives specific to their plans or policies. |

#### Exercise Objectives Table

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| **Objective 1:**  | Assess the organization’s plans and process for identifying and staffing essential functions and operations during a disruptive incident.  |
| **Objective 2:**  | Evaluate the organization’s process identifying and prioritizing critical information, data, and systems that are necessary to maintain essential functions and operations during a disruptive incident. |
| **Objective 3:**  | Discuss the organization’s strategies for identifying alternate care sites to continue services following a disruptive incident. |

### Exercise Structure

This exercise will be a discussion based exercise lead by a facilitator. Players will participate in the following three modules:

* **Module 1:** Staffing
* **Module 2:** Information Technology
* **Module 3:** Alternate Care Sites

Each module can act as a standalone discussion-based exercise examining a particular component of the organization’s Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan. A PowerPoint update will summarize the key events occurring within that module. Participants will review the situation and engage in functional group discussions of appropriate response issues. For this exercise, the functional groups will be multidisciplinary. After these functional group discussions, participants will engage in a moderated plenary discussion in which a spokesperson from each group will present a synopsis of the group’s actions, based on the scenario.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Exercise Participants

The term *participant* encompasses many groups of people, not just those playing in the exercise. Groups of participants involved in the exercise, and their respective roles and responsibilities, are as follows:

* **Players:** Personnel who have an active role in discussing or performing their regular roles and responsibilities during the exercise. Players discuss or initiate actions in response to the simulated emergency.
* **Evaluators:** Are assigned to observe and document certain objectives during the exercise. Their primary role is to document player discussions, including if and how those discussions conform to plans, policies, and procedures.
* **Observers:** Do not directly participate in the exercise. However, they may support the development of player responses to the situation during the discussion by asking relevant questions or providing subject matter expertise.

### Exercise Guidelines, Assumptions, and Artificialities

* Real-world emergencies take priority over exercise play. If an exercise participant needs to respond to a real-world emergency during the exercise, please do so. The exercise facilitator may also pause play or stop the exercise at any time due to a real-world emergency or safety concern.
* This exercise will be held in an open, no-fault environment wherein capabilities, plans, systems, and processes will be evaluated. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, may occur.
* Respond to the scenario using knowledge of current plans and capabilities (i.e., use only existing assets) and insights derived from training.
* Decisions are not precedent setting and may not reflect the 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 preparedness and response efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus as they lead to process improvements.
* The assumption is the exercise scenario is plausible, and events occur as they are presented. All players will receive information at the same time.
* [Add additional exercise guidelines as needed.]

### Exercise Evaluation

Evaluation of the exercise is based on the exercise objectives and associated discussions. After the exercise, players will be asked to complete Appendix E: Participant Feedback Form**.** This feedback, paired with facilitator observations and notes, will be used to evaluate the exercise, and compile the After-Action Report (AAR)/Improvement Plan (IP).

### Hot Wash

At the conclusion of exercise play, the Facilitator will conduct a Hot Wash to allow players to discuss strengths and areas for improvement and for Note Takers to seek clarification regarding player discussion and decision-making processes. All participants are encouraged to provide feedback and engage in this discussion.

### After-Action Report (AAR) and Improvement Plan (IP)

As a result of this exercise, an After-Action Report and Improvement Plan will be developed. Improvement planning is the process by which the observations recorded in the AAR are resolved through development of concrete corrective actions, which are prioritized and tracked as a part of a continuous corrective action program. The IP identifies specific corrective actions, assigns them to responsible parties, and establishes target dates for their completion.

## Module 1: Staffing

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|  A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The following scenario has been **designed to be used by any health care organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed.  |

### Scenario

In the heart of a challenging season, a sudden surge in absenteeism has hit the organization hard. Whether due to illness, family emergencies, or other unforeseen circumstances, a significant portion of clinical and administrative staff are unexpectedly unavailable, leaving critical roles unfilled and essential operations hanging in the balance.

With the workforce shortage escalating, the organization faces a daunting challenge in maintaining its usual level of productivity and service delivery. It's clear that action must be taken to address this staffing shortfall and ensure the continuity of operations.

In response to this urgent situation, the organization must activate its continuity plans to mitigate the impact of the staffing crisis. Swift and strategic measures are necessary to redistribute responsibilities, adjust schedules, and possibly bring in temporary assistance to fill the gaps left by absent employees.

### Continuity Topics

* Essential Functions
* Orders of Succession
* Delegation of Authority
* Human Resources/Staffing

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The questions below were **provided as a guide for the organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed. |

### Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided as suggested topics to address as the discussion progresses. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

#### Essential Functions

1. What are the organization’s essential functions?
2. How are essential functions defined within the organization, and how frequently are they reviewed for relevance and accuracy?
3. Have essential functions been prioritized based on their criticality to organizational operations?
4. How does the organization ensure essential functions can be performed even in the face of disruptions or resource constraints?
5. What redundant systems or backup plans are in place to support essential functions in the event of failures or disruptions?
6. How does the organization ensure communication and coordination between departments responsible for essential functions during a disruptive event?

#### Orders of Succession

1. Describe the orders of succession in the organization.
2. How often are orders of succession reviewed and updated to reflect changes in organizational structure or personnel?
3. How does the organization ensure individuals designated as successors are adequately trained and prepared to assume their roles?
4. How does the organization test and validate the effectiveness of orders of succession?
5. How are orders of succession communicated to relevant stakeholders within the organization?
6. In the event of a succession scenario, what support mechanisms are in place to assist successors in transitioning into their new roles seamlessly?

#### Delegation of Authority

1. How is authority delegated within the organization during emergency situations, and what criteria are used to determine appropriate delegation levels?
2. What are the established protocols for escalating decision-making authority as the severity of a situation increases?
3. How does the organization ensure clarity and consistency in the delegation of authority across different departments and levels of management?
4. How would the organization revoke or modify delegated authority based on changing circumstances or operational needs?
5. How does the organization ensure accountability and oversight in the exercise of delegated authority during emergency situations?

#### Human Resources / Staffing

1. How does the organization assess staffing needs during different phases of a disruptive event, and what mechanisms are in place to adjust staffing levels accordingly?
2. What contingency plans are in place for managing staffing shortages? Consider cross-training initiatives, temporary staffing arrangements, or alternative work schedules?
3. How does the organization communicate staffing expectations and responsibilities to employees during emergency situations?
4. What support mechanisms are available to employees who may require assistance or accommodation during emergency situations, such as childcare services or flexible leave policies?
5. How does the organization address potential challenges related to staff morale, motivation, and well-being during prolonged periods of disruption or uncertainty?

## Module 2: Information Technology

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The following scenario has been **designed to be used by any health care organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed. |

### Scenario

A long-term Information Technology (IT) outage has struck a health care facility, rendering crucial systems inaccessible. Electronic health records, communication platforms, and other vital IT infrastructure are offline, severely impacting the health care facility’s ability to deliver patient care efficiently. With no immediate resolution in sight, the organization faces significant challenges in maintaining essential operations, scheduling appointments, and coordinating medical procedures. The outage has also disrupted communication channels, hindering staff coordination and collaboration. As the outage persists, the organization must activate its COOP plan to mitigate the impact, ensure patient safety, and restore critical IT services as swiftly as possible.

### Continuity Topics

* Essential Functions
* Continuity of Communications
* Vital Records, Databases, and IT Systems

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The questions below were **provided as a guide for the organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed. |

### Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided as suggested topics to address as the discussion progresses. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

#### Essential Functions

1. What are the critical health care services and functions that rely heavily on IT systems and databases?
2. How will the organization prioritize essential functions during the IT outage to ensure patient safety and continuity of care?
3. Are there alternative methods or manual processes in place to perform essential functions if IT systems are unavailable?
4. How will staff be trained and informed about their roles and responsibilities in maintaining essential functions during the outage?
5. What strategies will be employed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of maintaining essential functions throughout the duration of the IT outage?
6. How will the organization coordinate with external partners or agencies to ensure the continuity of critical health care services during the IT outage?
7. What steps will be taken to assess and address any potential legal or regulatory implications resulting from the disruption of essential functions?

#### Continuity of Communications

1. How will the organization communicate with staff, patients, and external stakeholders regarding the IT outage and its impact on health care services?
2. What communication channels and protocols will be utilized to disseminate timely updates and instructions during the outage?
3. Who is responsible for coordinating communications efforts during the IT outage?
4. How will the organization address language and accessibility barriers in communication with patients and stakeholders during the outage?
5. What strategies will be employed to manage public perception and maintain trust in the organization's ability to handle the IT outage effectively?

#### Vital Records, Databases, and IT Systems

1. Which vital records, databases, and IT systems are critical to maintaining essential health care services, and what backup measures are in place to ensure their availability?
2. How frequently are vital records and databases backed up, and where are the backup copies stored?
3. What procedures will be followed to restore access to vital records and IT systems once the outage is resolved?
4. What are the redundant or alternative IT systems available to support essential functions if primary systems remain inaccessible?
5. How will the organization ensure the security and integrity of data stored in vital records and databases during the IT outage?
6. What measures will be taken to prevent data loss or corruption resulting from the IT outage?
7. What are the contingency plans in place for addressing IT system failures or cybersecurity incidents that may occur during the outage?
8. How will the organization coordinate with IT vendors or support services to expedite the resolution of the outage and minimize its impact on health care operations?

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## Module 3: Alternate Facilities

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The following scenario has been **designed to be used by any health care organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed. |

### Scenario

A severe weather event, such as a tornado, has struck the region where the health care facility is located. The facility has sustained catastrophic damage, making it uninhabitable and unsafe for patients, staff, and visitors.

### Continuity Topics

* Continuity Facilities / Alternate Locations
* Devolution
* Reconstitution
* Vital Records, Databases, and IT Systems

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The questions below were **provided as a guide for the organization**. Add information or edit information, as needed.  |

### Discussion Questions

The following questions are provided as suggested topics to address as the discussion progresses. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of concerns to be addressed, nor is there a requirement to address every question.

#### Continuity Facilities/Alternate Locations

1. What criteria are used to identify and select suitable alternate care sites in the event of a severe weather event?
2. How will the organization ensure the readiness and accessibility of alternate care sites, including infrastructure, equipment, and supplies?
3. What agreements or contracts are in place with alternate care sites to facilitate the seamless transition of health care operations?
4. How will patient transportation logistics be coordinated to ensure safe and efficient transfer to alternate care sites?
5. What measures will be taken to address infection control and safety protocols at alternate care sites to minimize risks to patients and staff?
6. How will the organization maintain communication and coordination between the primary facility and alternate care sites during the transition and ongoing operations?
7. What plans are in place to ensure the continuity of support services, such as pharmacy, laboratory, and imaging, at alternate care sites?
8. How will the organization address potential challenges or limitations of alternate care sites, such as capacity constraints or geographic distance from the primary facility?
9. What procedures will be followed to assess and monitor the quality of care provided at alternate care sites to ensure compliance with organizational standards and regulatory requirements?
10. How will the organization coordinate with local authorities, emergency management agencies, and health care partners to leverage available resources and support for alternate care sites?

#### Devolution

1. How are roles and responsibilities assigned and communicated to designated personnel in the devolution process?
2. What guidelines or standard operating procedures do devolved personnel follow in carrying out their assigned tasks and responsibilities?
3. How will the organization ensure continuity of command and control structures during the devolution process?
4. What mechanisms are in place to maintain situational awareness and facilitate information sharing among devolved personnel and with external stakeholders?
5. How will the organization address potential challenges or conflicts that may arise in the devolution of authority and decision-making?
6. What measures will be taken to ensure accountability and oversight of actions taken by devolved personnel?
7. How will the organization maintain communication and coordination between devolved personnel and centralized leadership during the recovery process?
8. What training and exercises are conducted to prepare personnel for their roles and responsibilities in the devolution process?
9. How will the organization ensure the continuity of essential functions and services during the transition to devolved operations?
10. What procedures are in place to facilitate the reintegration of devolved personnel and functions back into the centralized command structure once the situation stabilizes?

#### Reconstitution

1. What criteria will be used to determine when it is safe and appropriate to begin the reconstitution process?
2. How will the organization prioritize reconstitution efforts to ensure the timely recovery of critical health care services?
3. What measures will be taken to assess the integrity and safety of the primary facility before resuming operations?
4. How will the organization address any remaining infrastructure or environmental hazards that may pose risks to patients, staff, or visitors during reconstitution?
5. What steps will be taken to restore essential services, such as power, water, and HVAC systems, to the primary facility?
6. How will the organization ensure the readiness of medical equipment and technology systems for use upon reconstitution?
7. What procedures will be followed to verify the accuracy and integrity of vital records, databases, and IT systems before resuming normal operations?
8. How will the organization communicate with staff, patients, and external stakeholders regarding the reconstitution process and the resumption of health care services?
9. What measures will be taken to address any lingering operational or logistical challenges that may affect the quality and efficiency of health care services during reconstitution?
10. How will the organization conduct post-event evaluations and debriefings to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement in the reconstitution process?

#### Vital Records, Databases, and IT Systems

1. Which vital records, databases, and IT systems are essential for the continuity of health care operations, and how will they be protected and recovered?
2. What backup measures are in place to ensure the availability and integrity of patient records and medical data during and after severe weather incidents?
3. How will the organization address potential challenges in restoring access to vital records, databases, and IT systems following the severe weather event?

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## Appendix A: Exercise Schedule

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | Because this information is updated throughout the exercise planning process, **appendices may be developed as stand-alone documents** rather than part of this document. The times picked for each module can be approximate and not prescriptive. An organization may choose to spend more or less time on each module depending on the level of discussion. It is recommended for each module to last around 60-90 minutes.  |

### Exercise Schedule Table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date | [Insert Date] |
| [Time] | Welcome and Introductions |
| [Time] | Module One |
| [Time] | Module Two |
| [Time] | Break  |
| [Time] | Module Three |
| [Time] | Hotwash |
| [Time] | Closing Comments |

## Appendix B: Exercise Participants

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | The following chart is used to **document those who are participating in the exercise.** If this is a community-based exercise, an organization may choose to partition participants by their organization. If this exercise is for a single organization, they may choose to partition participants by their department. |

### Exercise Participants Table

| **Organization or Department** | **Name** | **Job Title** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [Organization or Department] | [Name] | [Title] |
| [Organization or Department] | [Name] | [Title] |
| [Organization or Department] | [Name] | [Title] |
| [Organization or Department] | [Name] | [Title] |
| [Organization or Department] | [Name] | [Title] |
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## Appendix C: Acronym List

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| A blue line drawing of a paper and a pencil indicating instructions | Please **review the completed Situation Manual** and ensure all acronyms have been included in the table below. |

### Acronym List Table

| **Acronym** | **Term** |
| --- | --- |
| AAR/IP | After-Action Report/Improvement Plan |
| COOP | Continuity of Operations  |
| HSEEP | Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program |
| IT | Information Technology |
| SITMAN | Situation Manual |
| [Acronym] | [Term] |
| [Acronym] | [Term] |
| [Acronym] | [Term] |

## Appendix E: Participant Feedback Form

Thank you for participating in this exercise. Your observations, comments, and input are greatly appreciated, and provide invaluable insight that will better prepare our organization against threats and hazards. Any comments provided will be treated in a sensitive manner and all personal information will remain confidential. Please keep comments concise, specific, and constructive.

### Part I: General Information

Please enter your responses in the form field.

#### General Information Table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name (optional):** |  |
| **Position Title:** |  |

### Part II: Exercise Design

Please rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, your overall assessment of the exercise relative to the statements provided, with 1 indicating strong disagreement, 2 indicating disagreement, 3 indicating neutral, 4 indicating agree, and 5 indicating strong agreement.

#### Assessment Factor Table

| Assessment Factor | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pre-exercise briefings were informative and provided the necessary information for my role in the exercise. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The exercise scenario was plausible and realistic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Exercise participants included the right people in terms of level and mix of disciplines. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Participants were actively involved in the exercise.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Exercise participation was appropriate for someone in my field with my level of experience/training. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The exercise increased my understanding about and familiarity with the capabilities and resources of other participating organizations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

### Part III: Participant Feedback

1. I observed the following strengths during this exercise:
2. I observed the following areas of improvement during this exercise:
3. Please provide any recommendations on how this exercise or future exercises could be improved or enhanced.
4. Other Comments (if needed):