



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Tactical Interoperable Communications Exercise Requirement**

**Updated: April 25, 2006**

**Q.** How will the Office of Grants and Training (G&T) help the UASI-designated or State-designated metropolitan sites conduct their exercises within the accelerated time frame?

**A.** Several key factors will assist in the successful completion of the full-scale exercises (FSEs) under the abridged planning timeline, including:

- Developing FSEs with a limited scope to reduce costs, planning time, and the elemental requirements common to most FSEs. In short, there will be a focus on specific elements of the *Communications Target Capability* only.
- Hosting the May conference will assist the sites by reducing cost, time, and resources commonly needed to plan a FSE.
- Providing vendor assistance through G&T direct exercise support.
- Providing the sites with appropriate documentation in order to streamline the planning process. A TICP exercise planning packet will be provided at the conference. The packet will provide guidance on how to meet the TICP and Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program (HSEEP) requirements, and will include sample materials and checklists.

**Q.** Why is an FSE required, as opposed to a drill or functional?

**A.** According to HSEEP, a drill only involves a single jurisdiction and/or agency, which does not lend itself to validating interoperability amongst multiple jurisdictions/agencies. A functional exercise typically only involves command personnel and emergency operation center (EOC) activity. Field play (i.e., response apparatus and personnel) is not typically a component of a functional exercise, yet is necessary to validate the tactical communications between response personnel in the field (e.g., fire, law enforcement, EMS). Since a FSE involves multiple jurisdictions/agencies and field play, it is the only way to fully validate interoperability.

**Q.** Is this exercise requirement following HSEEP-suggested timelines for planning a FSE?

**A.** HSEEP recommends six months to plan a FSE. Because of the urgency to validate interoperability throughout the country, these recommended timelines have been compressed. Due to this compressed timeline, the FSEs should be limited in scope and size, which means:

- The FSE does not have to involve actor/victims which can add a considerable amount of logistical planning time.
- The FSE should focus on validating the TICP (i.e., relevant elements of the *Communications Target Capability*), and does not have to involve other activities that do not necessarily test interoperability (e.g., decontamination, site remediation, etc.) which add to the exercise planning timelines.

**Q.** What if my site already has a FSE planned to meet the TICP requirement?

**A.** If that exercise is scheduled to be conducted prior to the accelerated deadline (September 30, 2006), and the TICP has already been submitted to, and approved by, G&T/ Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP), that exercise may qualify as satisfying the TICP requirement. However, if the site is planning and conducting the exercise on their own, they must notify their respective G&T Preparedness Officer of the exercise conduct date so that G&T can provide an assessment team to independently validate the site's TICP.

**Q.** What is an independent assessment team?

**A.** An independent assessment team is comprised of experienced and/or trained evaluators, with knowledge and expertise in the field in which they are evaluating – in this case tactical interoperable communications. The team has no vested interest in the community, agency, or department they are evaluating. The assessment teams will be using Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs) to evaluate the tasks and capabilities (from the Universal Task List [UTL]/Target Capabilities List [TCL]) performed by each site during the exercise. The teams will be comprised of subject matter experts and peers from other State and local representatives, as well as members of the ICTAP and SAFECOMM (both from the government and contractor sectors).

**Q.** How do I schedule an independent assessment team for my exercise?

**A.** Sites that currently have an exercise scheduled must contact their respective G&T Preparedness Officer so that G&T can arrange for the teams to be present on the day of exercise conduct.

**Q.** What if my TICP is not approved prior to exercise conduct?

**A.** G&T strongly encourages the site to work with their G&T Preparedness Officers to ensure that the TICP meets the established requirements. If your TICP is not approved, immediately contact your Preparedness Officer for further assistance. Exercises conducted with a non-approved TICP may not satisfy the TICP exercise requirement.

**Q.** Will future funding be tied to completion of these exercises?

**A.** If sites do not successfully complete the FSE requirement, there is a possibility that FY '07 interoperable communications funding will be withheld. The definition of "success" in this context is that a jurisdiction was able to meet both TICP approval and exercise conduct deadlines set by DHS. Moreover, each jurisdiction was able to adequately test the TICP during the exercise and develop an After Action Report and Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) articulating strengths in the plan, as well as areas needing future resources (starting with FY07 grant funds) to improve capabilities.

**Q.** How quickly will DHS approve the TICP?

**A.** 45 days after submission of the Plan.

**Q.** Does DHS expect us to follow the HSEEP building block approach of seminars, workshops, tabletops, drills, and functionals leading up to the FSE?

**A.** Given the accelerated timeline for the FSEs, sites may find it difficult to use the building block approach prior to the FSE. However, this does not preclude sites from conducting seminars, workshops, or tabletops prior to the FSE. Seminars to review the site's respective TICP and educate personnel on its procedures and protocols can be planned and conducted in a relatively short period of time.

**Q.** What are the specific required exercise objectives?

**A.** The FSEs will focus primarily on specific elements within the *Communications* Target Capability from the TCL and associated tasks from the UTL. This capability and associated tasks will be distributed during the May Conference. Due to the accelerated timeline, sites may want to consider limiting objectives to just focus on validating tactical interoperability during the exercise. This does not preclude sites from conducting an FSE involving multiple capabilities/tasks/objectives.

**Q.** What are the jurisdictional and discipline participation requirements?

**A.** The FSEs must involve participation from multiple agencies and jurisdictions. This is the only way to truly test interoperability. A jurisdiction and/or agency should provide at least one player per jurisdiction/agency. For example, if a UASI includes 1 city and 1 county, participation should, at a minimum, include:

- 1 City Fire unit and respective personnel
- 1 City Law Enforcement unit and respective personnel
- 1 City and/or Private Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Provider
- 1 County Fire unit
- 1 County Law Enforcement unit
- 1 County and/or EMS
- Incident Command Post

This is under the assumption that one unit within an agency or jurisdiction can adequately represent that agency/jurisdiction when validating interoperability (i.e., individual jurisdiction/agencies should have the same radio system). In the instances where a venue has too many agencies involved in the TICP community to have one unit per agency participate in the exercise, the jurisdiction should coordinate with its G&T Preparedness Officer to identify the optimum level of participation required to validate the Plan.

**Q.** What does tactical interoperability entail, and how will the exercise validate tactical interoperability?

**A.** For the purposes of this requirement, tactical interoperable communications is defined as the rapid provision of on-scene, incident-based mission critical voice communications among all emergency responder (i.e., EMS, fire and law enforcement) agencies, as appropriate for the incident, and in support of Incident Command and Operations Section personnel as defined in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) model.

Sites will be required to validate the components of the TICP, which is focused on the interoperability between fire, EMS, and law enforcement at the tactical level. Sites can use the exercise to validate interoperability amongst other entities (i.e., emergency operation centers, hospitals, etc.). However, the focus of the TICP FSEs will be on validating tactical interoperability between fire, EMS, and law enforcement.

**Q.** What guidance, beyond HSEEP, will there be for planning, conducting, and evaluating the exercises (the IB seems to infer additional guidance)?

**A.** Aside from the compressed timeline, all exercises will follow HSEEP policy and guidance for planning, conducting, and evaluating exercises. Sample exercise materials, which have been tailored to validate the TICPs, will be distributed at the May Conference, including:

- TICP Exercise Checklist – listing all the activities associated with planning a TICP FSE
- Exercise Plan (ExPlan)
- Controller/Evaluator Handbook (C/E Handbook)
- Master Scenario Events List (MSEL)
- TICP-specific EEG – which will be mapped to the Communications capability and tasks
- Controller, Evaluator, and Player briefings

**Q.** Does the site need to schedule this FSE with/via G&T or can they decide when it will be?

**A.** If a site is not using G&T direct support for their exercise, the site can determine when the exercise will be conducted. However, the site must notify G&T when the exercise is scheduled so that G&T can arrange for a representative to be involved in the planning process, and a validation team to be present during the day of exercise conduct. If a site is not receiving G&T direct support, the site must notify G&T at least four weeks before exercise conduct, so that arrangements can be made to provide a validation team during the exercise.

**Q.** What is the contingency plan if the FSE is interrupted by a storm or other event?

**A.** Sites will be able to reschedule their exercises if interrupted by real world events. However, sites should schedule their exercise far enough in advance of the September 30 deadline, so that if the exercise is postponed, it can be rescheduled before the deadline.

**Q.** What are the requirements and/or limitations in order to receive G&T direct exercise support?

**A.** Direct support will be granted automatically as long as the site has not started, or is in the beginning stages (i.e., the site has not conducted an exercise planning conference) of planning the exercise. Due to time constraints, all direct support exercises will involve an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) scenario.

**Q.** Will sites' plans be approved early enough before the exercise in order to train prior to exercising, as promoted in the Multi-year Training and Exercise Plan?

**A.** Training should occur immediately after the plan is submitted to G&T. Sites should not wait until final plan approval to begin training and educating personnel on the TICP's content, including procedures and protocols. However, the plan must be approved by G&T prior to exercise conduct.

**Q.** How do I apply for direct support for the exercise?

**A.** Direct support may be requested through the site's SAA. Guidance for requesting direct support and the direct support application can be located on the HSEEP website at <http://hseep.dhs.gov/> by clicking on "Application" located under "Direct Support" of the home page. The sites must submit the application through the SAA to G&T through the email address: [hseep@dhs.gov](mailto:hseep@dhs.gov). They should also copy their G&T Preparedness Officer on the request. The Exercise Division will expedite approvals on all TICP exercise requests. All applications to meet this TICP exercise requirement will be approved.

**Q.** Are there any special requirements in filling out the direct support application for the TICP exercise?

**A.** Please make sure to select 'IED' for the scenario. Also, when selecting a conduct date, please remember that the dates must be flexible based on the availability of the G&T Exercise Support Teams.

**Q.** What exactly will direct support include?

**A.** Through the Direct Support Program, G&T utilizes multiple Exercise Support Teams that have significant experience in designing, developing, and conducting exercises. Direct support is available for those sites that have not started the planning process for their respective exercise. Direct exercise support may be requested to assist with exercise related activities such as:

- Developing exercise documentation;
- Designing exercise scenarios;

- Coordinating logistics;
- Facilitating planning meetings;
- Providing controllers during exercise conduct; and
- Developing AAR/IPs.

**Q.** What is not included in direct support?

**A.** Sites will be responsible for the following:

- Paying for and providing food and/or refreshments
- Arranging, and paying for planning conference facilities
- Arranging, and paying for exercise venue used during exercise conduct
- Serving as a Public Information Officer for the exercise
- Providing evaluators to serve alongside with the validation teams
- Paying for direct personnel costs (i.e., overtime)
- Providing backfill personnel
- Providing video documentation

**Q.** What scenario should be used during the TICP FSEs?

**A.** Due to the accelerated timeline, it is recommended that sites chose an IED scenario to validate the *Communications* capability. Other scenarios, such as those involving chemical or biological agents, involve activities that are not necessarily focused on interoperability (i.e., HazMat, decontamination, site remediation, etc.). This does not preclude sites from using other scenarios. All direct support exercises will involve an IED scenario.

**Q.** Can a site use a natural disaster scenario during the exercise?

**A.** Per G&T Information Bulletin #192 “Urban Areas may build an exercise around any of the National Planning Scenarios to test the TICP requirement.” As a result, G&T is making an exception to the FY05 HSGP guidance and will allow jurisdictions to support a natural disaster scenario. This exception only applies to the TICP exercises and must focus on validating the capabilities and tasks (derived from the National Planning Scenarios) associated with interoperable communications. The exercise must still meet the HSEEP requirements.

**Q.** Can a real world event (e.g., All-Star baseball game) be used to satisfy the TICP FSE requirement?

**A.** If a site would like to use a real world event to satisfy the TICP FSE requirement, it must receive approval from the G&T Preparedness Officer, in consultation with the respective Exercise Manager. Approval for a real-world event to meet the requirement will be based on the following criteria, at a minimum:

- Is the event large enough in scope and size to involve multiple jurisdictions, agencies and disciplines (i.e., fire, law enforcement, EMS)?
- Will the event warrant an on-site incident command post?
- A validation team must be present to validate interoperability before or during the event.

**Q.** Can multiple UASIs within a State combine to conduct one joint FSE?

**A.** Yes, as long as each respective UASI’s jurisdictions/agencies are able to participate.

**If you have further questions, or need additional clarification for the answers above, please email [HSEEP@dhs.gov](mailto:HSEEP@dhs.gov).**