



Interoperable Communications Scorecard

DHS Measures Level of Maturity Across Nation

BACKGROUND

The Tactical Interoperable Communications Scorecard fulfilled a pledge by U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff to provide every urban area in the country with a scorecard that identifies gaps and improvements needed in communications interoperability. Developed by the DHS Office of Grants and Training (G&T), in consultation with SAFECOM and the Wireless Management Office (WMO), the scorecard assessed the maturity of tactical interoperable communications capabilities in 75 urban/metropolitan areas.

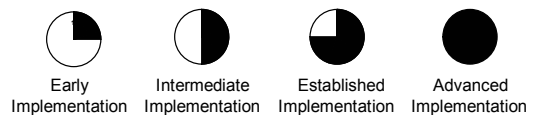
“By the end of this year, each urban area is going to get a scorecard... that will identify gaps and help us to determine the improvements we need to make in the near term.”

—Secretary Michael Chertoff

The goal of the scorecard effort was to provide an assessment of each area’s tactical interoperable communications and recommendations on how to best improve their capabilities in the immediate future using existing technologies. The evaluation is not a comparison among the areas, but an assessment of the progress each individual area has achieved using its available means of tactical interoperable communications.

Tactical interoperable communications is the rapid provision of on-scene, incident-based, mission-critical voice communications among all first responder agencies (i.e., emergency management services, fire, and law enforcement), as appropriate for the incident.

This scorecard was based on the SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum and the Interoperability Maturity Measurement Model. The Continuum has a total of five elements that affect a jurisdiction’s ability to achieve tactical interoperable communications—Governance, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Technology, Training and Exercises, and Usage. Based on the available data points collected during the tactical-based planning and exercise, three of these five Continuum elements were measured for this scorecard: Governance, SOPs, and Usage. These areas were measured using a capabilities maturation model with the four stages shown below.



METHODOLOGY

In Fiscal Year 2005, each urban area receiving Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) funds was required to develop a plan to achieve tactical interoperable

communications across all jurisdictions in the urban area and to test the plan through a full-scale exercise. States without a designated urban area were required to name a multi-jurisdictional metropolitan area or region to meet the requirements.

During the scorecard evaluation period, each urban/metropolitan area was analyzed by five subject matter experts, including representatives from G&T, SAFE-COM, and the WMO, all of whom have a background in communications interoperability and public safety operations. The overall scores, findings, and recommendations for each area were determined as the SMEs aggregated their responses and arrived at a consensus for each section.

In order to determine the area's maturity level, several documents were reviewed.

TICP: The Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan required by all urban/metropolitan areas under the FY 2005 DHS grant guidance.

TICP Peer Review: The comments of State and local peers assigned to review each TICP.

Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG): Comprehensive data from evaluation teams assigned to each TICP Validation Exercise.

After Action Report (AAR): Major findings from each TICP Validation Exercise.

Improvement Plan (IP): The recommendations to areas on addressing gaps identified during the TICP Validation Exercise.

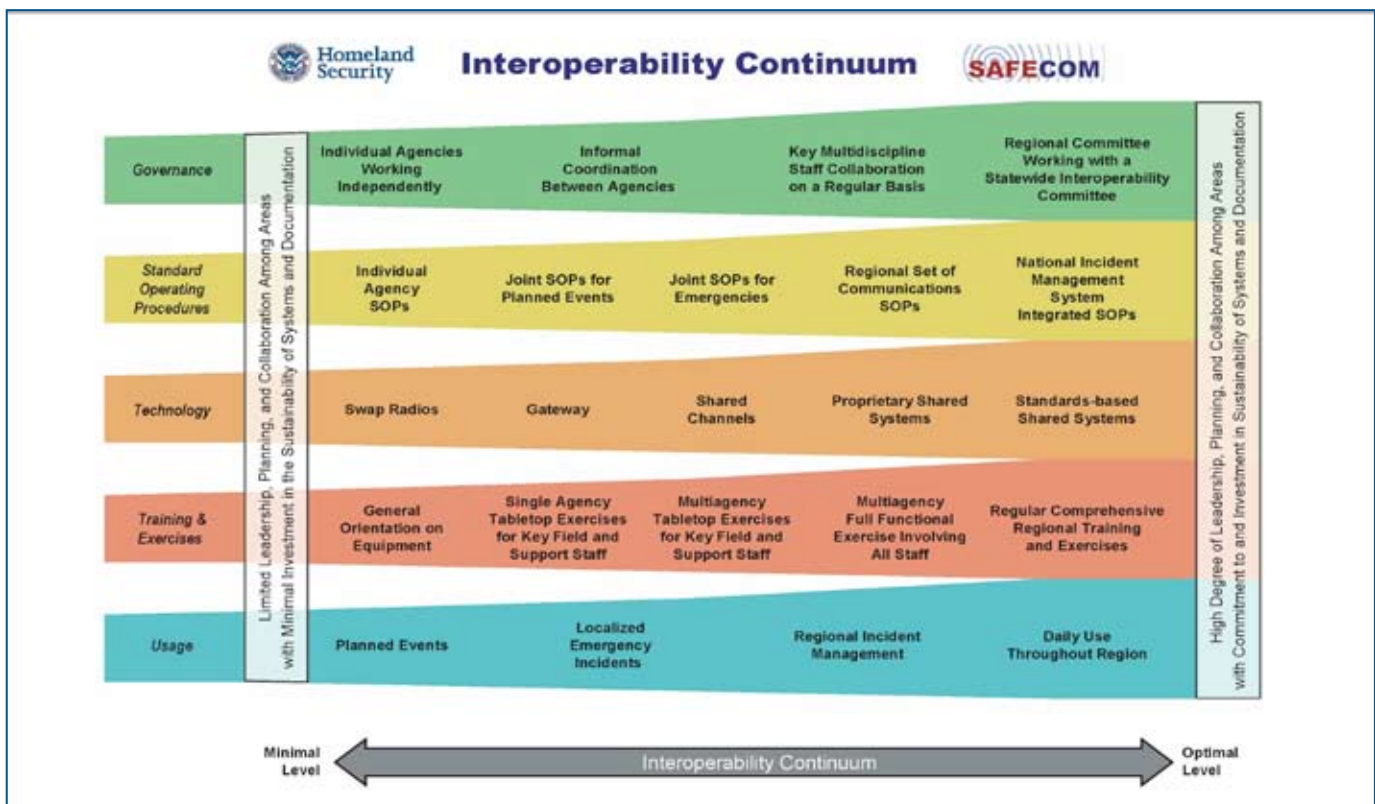
Self Assessment Discussion: Responses to questions addressing any tactical interoperability issues not covered by the TICP and/or exercise from the local interoperable communications point of contact.

GENERAL SCORECARD TRENDS

The scorecard results will assist DHS in making decisions regarding the assistance provided to State and local agencies. The results show two common trends across all areas: 1) areas developing and/or using shared systems tended to demonstrate more mature governance structures, SOPs, and Usage; and 2) areas that sought funding from sources other than Federal grants tended to also have stronger governance structures in place.

Other findings include:

- Policies for interoperable communications are now in place for all 75 urban/metropolitan areas.



Early Maturity indicates the need for...

Governance: Strategic plans to identify longer-term interoperability goals and decisions.

SOPs: Training on policies, procedures, and command and control.

Usage: More regular training and exercises on how to use interoperability equipment across the region.

Advanced Maturity indicates the need for...

Governance: Regionally based, longer-term strategies to coincide with statewide planning.

SOPs: Continued exercises for NIMS proficiency and increased involvement of Federal and State agencies.

Usage: Continued exercises on interoperability equipment with additional expanded participation.

- Regular testing and exercises are needed to effectively link disparate systems to allow communications among multi-jurisdictional responders (including Federal and State) during a crisis.
- The DHS Tactical Interoperable Communications Initiative has played a fundamental role in advancing interoperability in the urban/metropolitan areas.
- Cooperation among first responders in the field is strong, but formalized governance (leadership and planning) across regions has lagged. Governance will be critical in planning for larger-scale, multi-jurisdictional responses and implementation of next-generation technology.
- Areas that were part of the FY 2005 UASI grant program tended to demonstrate greater traction in strategic planning across the region.
- Areas that had a history of multi-jurisdictional cooperation because of prior incidents demonstrated stronger SOPs and Usage.
- Many of the exercises were more complicated in terms of the number and type of participating agencies. This provided more insight into the breadth of the SOPs and the depth of Usage. Areas with less complicated exercises and fewer participants scored higher in Usage because the events required less coordination.

- Areas that were empowered to develop a TICIP based on a “bottom-up” approach of a collaborative, regional nature scored higher in Governance than those areas in which a “top-down” State-centric approach was used.

BENEFITS AND RESULTS

In addition to providing a specific maturity assessment, the scorecard provides recommendations to help the urban/metropolitan area improve its overall communications capability. Technical assistance provided to each urban/metropolitan area can then be tailored to address the recommendations identified in its scorecard. Whether the area assessed received a lower or higher score, the provided recommendations and future assistance goals will serve as a foundation to ensure continued enhancements to all interoperable communications capabilities nationwide.

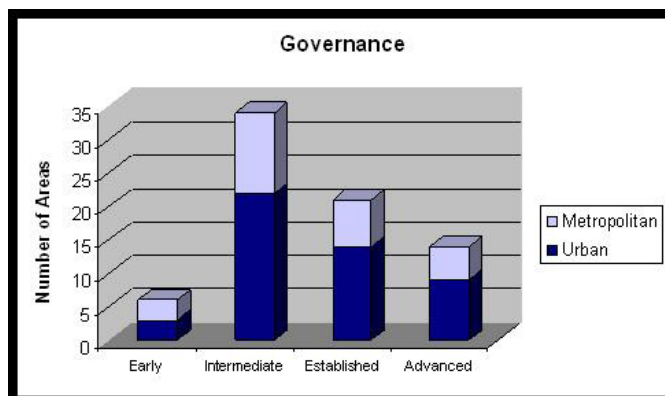
The quickest way to achieve a meaningful improvement in interoperable communications capabilities is to focus on a strong governance structure, establish and maintain SOPs, and ensure that solutions are applied regularly and effectively.

KEY FINDINGS

Governance

Governance measures the maturity of five basic elements critical to a successful and established governance structure: 1) Decision Making Groups, 2) Agreements, 3) Strategic Planning, 4) Interoperability Funding, and 5) Leadership.

- Informal cooperation among multi-agency first responders often precedes a formalized and established regional governance structure.
- Areas with pre-existing DHS Urban Area Working Groups were more likely to have a Regional Communications Committee.

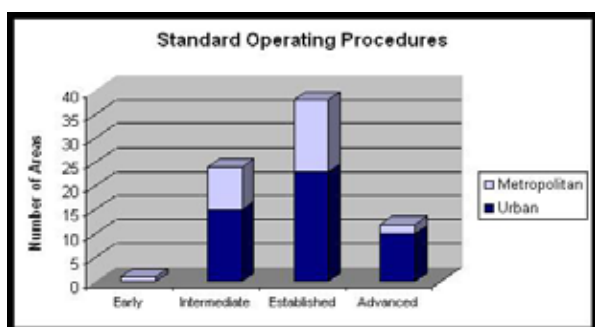


- Governance is a good indicator of the existence of advanced technology, more mature SOPs, and more proficient usage because it provides the foundation for communications interoperability.
- Few urban/metropolitan areas have completed a strategic plan for regional interoperable communications.

Standard Operating Procedures

Evaluating the level of maturity across SOPs required attention to policies, practices, and procedures, as well as the communications elements of command and control.

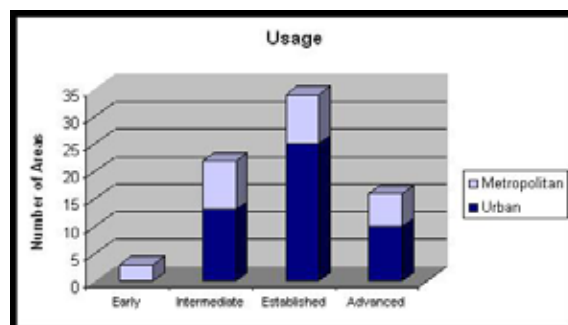
- The TICP provided the first region-wide equipment SOPs for many areas.
- The majority of areas have taken steps to disseminate their equipment SOPs throughout the region.
- Ninety-seven percent of urban/metropolitan areas report that they are in the process of implementing National Incident Management System (NIMS) policies and procedures; however less than half of these agencies have had these command and control policies instituted for more than one year.
- A NIMS Certified Communications Unit Leader Course is needed to improve proficiency in fulfilling the responsibilities of the communications unit during incident response.



Usage

Usage was measured by examining the familiarity with and frequency that interoperable communications equipment was used during the TICP validation exercise.

- Sixty-eight percent of the urban/metropolitan areas effectively established regional interoperability.
- More than 80 percent of urban/metropolitan areas use shared systems and/or shared channels daily to provide communications interoperability.
- The most common equipment usage problems during the TICP validation exercises related to mobile gateways.



CONCLUSION

The scorecard results show that urban/metropolitan areas have come a long way in developing their tactical interoperable communications capabilities. Technology exists to permit such communications, but solutions are often not available regionally and are far from seamless in many areas. Therefore, continued training and use of available technical solutions and their SOPs are critical to operational success. In areas that have demonstrated success, there is still work to be done. Multi-agency communications has been addressed within many of these jurisdictions, but regionalizing the existing communications strategies to identify longer term interoperability goals across multiple jurisdictions and levels of government still needs to be addressed.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

For more information about the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program or other initiatives of the Office of Grants and Training (G&T), contact the Centralized Scheduling and Information Desk (CSID) at 1-800-368-6498 or askcsid@dhs.gov.

For technical assistance, contact ICTAP Program Manager Keith Young at keith.young@dhs.gov.