Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning (SCIP) Methodology v2.0

A Collaborative Approach to Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning

Homeland Security

SAFECOM

Dear Members of the Emergency Response Community:

As you are well aware, inadequate and unreliable communications continue to compromise the ability of emergency responders to perform their mission-critical duties. To successfully respond to day-to-day incidents and large-scale emergencies, our Nation's emergency responders need interoperable communications—the ability to exchange voice and data information across disciplines and jurisdictions on demand, in real time, and when authorized.

Through its SAFECOM and Disaster Management (DM) programs, the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) is working with practitioners and Federal partners to strengthen interoperability in order to improve local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response and preparedness. Together, SAFECOM and DM are providing emergency responders with the resources—tools, templates, best practices, methodologies—they need to address voice and data interoperability respectively.

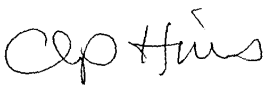
With support from the SAFECOM program, in 2004 the Commonwealth of Virginia developed a strategic plan to improve statewide interoperable communications. In keeping with SAFECOM's practitioner-driven philosophy, Virginia developed its statewide plan using a locally-driven approach. This approach ensured that the plan met end-user needs and included perspectives of emergency responders at all levels of government. Based on the success of Virginia's strategic planning process, SAFECOM developed the Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning (SCIP) Methodology, a step-by-step planning guide all states can use to develop a locally-driven statewide strategic plan. We encourage states to use this methodology in their statewide planning efforts.

The SCIP Methodology has since been implemented in The Commonwealth of Kentucky and the State of Nevada. As such, it has been updated to include the lessons learned and additional insights from those two statewide planning processes. Version 2 of the SCIP also includes an explanation of the Interoperability Continuum, which was created to assist in the development of a comprehensive communications interoperability solution.

For more information about SAFECOM and statewide interoperability planning, visit www.safecomprogram.gov, or call 1-866-969-7233 (SAFE). For more information about the DM program, please visit www.DisasterHelp.gov. Please join SAFECOM and DM in working to ensure a safer America through effective emergency response communications.

Sincerely,

David Boyd
Director, Command, Control and Interoperability
Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security



Chip Hines
Program Manager, Disaster Management Program
Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security

WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT THE SCIP METHODOLOGY

"The process SAFECOM utilized when assisting Virginia with the development of a Statewide Interoperable Communications Plan was outstanding. The focus placed on ensuring that local first responders drive the process when creating interoperable communications plans has been long overdue. Who better to identify what works and what does not work than the very same public safety responders that use radios on a daily basis to save lives? Virginia now has a Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability that was developed by local public safety responders for local public safety responders."

~Chris Essid~
Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator,
Governor's Office of Commonwealth Preparedness

"I found it to be extremely informative and beneficial. I left the [statewide planning] meeting with a very optimistic outlook. I have been working in fire and law enforcement my entire career and have experienced interoperability problems first hand. This is the first time I have seen light at the end of the tunnel on this critical problem."

~Steven Counts~
Virginia Department of Forestry

"The method that the sessions used made the people think about the real issues that affected their own agency. Having these issues put on paper helps all others realize that they share in the same problems."

~Jim Wilson~
Southern Nevada Area Communications Council

"Outstanding, [the SCIP process] is a great experience and I hope it continues so we can keep the communications going between all the EMS and law enforcement entities to make this communications aspect a reality for the entire state of Nevada."

~Brian Jonas~
Undersheriff of Humboldt County Nevada

"I wanted to send a quick note to say that I found real value in meeting at Newport News. So many times I attend meetings and walk away feeling like nothing was accomplished, but that was not the case here."

~Ray Haring~
Virginia Department of Emergency Management

"Thank you for inviting the Virginia Department of Health to be part of the Strategic Planning Focus Group discussion held on April 27th in Richmond. Your program was very effective in creating the awareness for comprehensive planning at all levels within the Commonwealth."

~Kenton Towner~
Emergency Preparedness & Response Planner City of Richmond,
Department of Public Health

Table of Contents

WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT THE SCIP METHODOLOGY I

1 BACKGROUND 1

2 OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE 2

3 INTEROPERABILITY CONTINUUM 4

4 COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY PLANNING PROCESS GRAPHIC ... 8

5 KEY ELEMENTS 12

6 RECOMMENDED PRE-CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL GOVERNANCE 13

7 PHASE I- ESTABLISH KEY RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNDING 15

Task: Establish Key Relationships 16
Resources 18

8 PHASE II- GATHER INFORMATION 20

Task: Determine Scope of Research and Leverage Existing Resources 21
Task: Create a State Profile 22
Task: Determine the Ideal Number and Location of Focus Group Interviews Based on State Profile 24
Task: Introduce Governance 24
Resources 25

9 PHASE III- CREATE PROJECT PLAN AND ROADMAP 27

Task: Develop Detailed Project Plan and Roadmap 29
Task: Vet with Key Stakeholders 30
Resources 30

10 PHASE IV- IDENTIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - PROJECT TEAM ... 32

Task: Propose Individuals/Agencies to Fill a Core Project Team, Clarify Roles and Responsibilities 33
Task: Conduct Project Team Kick-off Meeting 33
Task: Design and Document a Communications Strategy for Progress Reporting and Updates Throughout the Statewide Effort 35
Resources 37

11 PHASE V- RECRUIT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND MEETING PREPARATION 39

Task: Define Criteria for the Focus Group Interviewee 40
Task: Leverage State and National Emergency Response Associations to Identify Possible Focus Group Participants 41
Task: Communicate about Focus Group Interviews: Invite and Confirm Attendance 42

Task: Enlist State Leadership to Invite Local Practitioners and Leaders Into the Strategic Planning Process 43
Task: Secure Meeting Facility Logistics 43
Task: Confirm Attendance and Determine the Need for Last Minute Recruiting 44
Resources 44

12 PHASE VI- CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS 47

Task: Research Potential Hot Issues for Each Regional Focus Group 48
Task: Enlist an Unbiased Team of Facilitators to Conduct the Focus Group 48
Interviews 48
Task: Reference Best Practices in Conducting Focus Group Interviews 48
Task: Clarify the Purpose and Outcomes of the Focus Group Interview 49
Task: Create Graphics and Visual Displays to Facilitate the Interview Process 49
Task: Visually Capture the Insights and Perspectives of the Participants 51
Task: Listen for Patterns and Trends across Regions 52
Task: Scan Focus Group for Key Practitioners Who Can Represent Each Region at the Final Strategic Planning Session 52
Task: Anticipate the Consequences of Your Public Relations Efforts and the Growing Awareness of the Strategic Planning Effort 53
Task: Thank Participants 53
Resources 54

13 PHASE VII- ANALYZE DATA AND PREPARE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION 56

Task: Organize and Edit Focus Group Interview Comments 57
Task: Match Interview Comments with Themes 57
Task: Create a Master Document for Each Interview Question 57
Task: Identify Patterns and Core Issues within Each Subject Area 57
Task: Define the Top 10 Comments for all Themes 58
Task: Review the Findings and Confirm the Results of Analysis 60
Task: Predict the Top Initiatives to be Discussed at the Strategic Planning Session 60
Resources 60

14 PHASE VIII- PREPARE AND CONDUCT STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION .. 62

Task: Select Participants 63
Task: Meet with Policymakers and Elected Officials who Will Not Attend the Strategic Planning Session 63
Task: Confirm the Logistics for Preparation and Delivery of the Strategic Planning Session 64
Task: Validate and Confirm Results from the Statewide Focus Group Interviews .. 64
Task: Confirm and Prioritize Strategic Initiatives 65
Resources 65

15 PHASE IX- DEVELOP STATEWIDE COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN 67

Task: Determine the Plan Structure and Function 68
Task: Establish Roles and Responsibilities for Writing and Document Management 68

Task: Design the Strategic Plan Key Components *68*
Task: Identify "Official" Reviewers *69*
Task: Publish the Strategic Plan *69*
Task: Create a Project Plan for Implementing the Initiatives in the Strategic Plan *69*
Task: Refine Governance *69*
Resources 70

16 PHASE X- GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST 90 DAYS OF IMPLEMENTATION ... 72

Task: Prioritize Initiatives *72*
Task: Develop a Comprehensive Project Plan for Implementation *72*
Task: Funding. *72*
Task: Leverage Governing Bodies *73*

APPENDIX 74

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Interoperability Continuum 4
Figure 2: Roadmap I 28
Figure 3: Roadmap II 28
Figure 4: Project Planning Process 30
Figure 5: Talking About Interoperability 50
Figure 6: Strategic Plan Gameboard 51
Figure 7: Current State Compendium Map 57
Figure 8: Current State Pattern Compendium Map 58
Figure 9: Case for Change Compendium Map 59

1 BACKGROUND

Commonwealth of Virginia
Initiative to Develop a Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability

Emergency responders—police officers, firefighters, emergency medical services (EMS)—need to share vital voice and data information across disciplines and jurisdictions to successfully respond to day-to-day incidents and large-scale emergencies. For decades, inadequate and unreliable communications have compromised their ability to perform mission-critical duties. Responders often have difficulty communicating when adjacent agencies are assigned to different radio bands, use incompatible proprietary systems and infrastructure, and lack adequate standard operating procedures and effective multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary governance structures.

To address these interoperability challenges, in December 2003, the Commonwealth of Virginia created a Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator (CIC) position within the Governor's Office of Commonwealth Preparedness. The CIC partnered with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) SAFECOM program and the emergency response community to develop a locally-driven statewide interoperability plan intended to guide Virginia's interoperability efforts.

Recognizing that interoperability issues cannot be improved by any one entity alone, SAFECOM and Virginia involved local and state emergency response organizations in the development of the state's interoperability plan. This practitioner-driven approach ensured that Virginia's interoperability strategy included input from all stakeholders and met end-user needs.

Virginia's locally-driven strategic planning process included six regional focus group sessions and a final strategic planning session. The regional focus group sessions captured perspectives from local emergency responders throughout the Commonwealth. The outcomes from these focus groups laid the foundation for a strategic planning session intended to define recommendations for the Commonwealth's key initiatives.

The planning process resulted in The Commonwealth of Virginia's strategic plan for communications interoperability, which included key strategic goals, supporting initiatives, and performance measures to assess progress. Virginia has annually reviewed and modified the plan's key goals and initiatives with input from the emergency response community.

Based on the success of Virginia's approach, SAFECOM developed a planning methodology that all states can use. This resource, the Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning (SCIP) Methodology, provides a step-by-step guide for developing an actionable, locally-driven statewide communications interoperability plan.

For more information on the Virginia project and associated resources, visit the Virginia Public Safety Web site at www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov.

2 OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

Local and regional level practitioner input is the foundation of the SCIP Methodology. It provides a step-by-step guide for developing a locally-driven statewide strategic plan. The Commonwealth of Kentucky and State of Nevada have used this methodology to develop their statewide interoperability plans. The approach detailed in the SCIP Methodology version 2.0 captures lessons learned from these statewide planning processes, and may be modified and applied at all levels (local, tribal, state, and Federal) Nationwide to develop a practitioner-driven strategic plan.

Voice and Data Communications

To successfully respond to day-to-day incidents and large-scale emergencies, our Nation's emergency responders need the ability to exchange voice *and* data information. Therefore, the SAFECOM and DM programs believe the process of developing and implementing a collaborative statewide interoperability plan applies equally to both voice and data communications interoperability. Statewide planning should include a review of both voice and data communications. The need for a special committee or working group to address data interoperability is critical, especially during the statewide planning process. SAFECOM and DM recommend engaging a data communications subject matter expert to provide insight on data related issues and to help plan for data communications interoperability.[1]

Target Audience

The SCIP Methodology is designed to meet the needs of state interoperability coordinators and those responsible for managing a state's interoperability planning process. In addition, officials at all levels of government can apply this methodology to gain appropriate support for interoperability efforts. It is assumed that users of the SCIP Methodology have background knowledge on issues relating to interoperable voice and data communications.

Organization of the SCIP Methodology

The SCIP Methodology version 2.0 is organized in 10 phases:

- Phase I: Establish Key Relationships and Funding
- Phase II: Gather Information
- Phase III: Create Project Plan and Roadmap
- Phase IV: Identify Roles and Responsibilities - Project Team
- Phase V: Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation

[1] References to interoperability throughout this guide account for both voice and data communications.

- Phase VI: Conduct Focus Group Interviews
- Phase VII: Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning
- Phase VIII: Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
- Phase IX: Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
- Phase X: Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

These phases represent the recommended steps for developing and implementing a locally-driven statewide communications interoperability planning process. For each phase, the guide identifies related critical tasks, lessons learned from statewide planning processes, and resources including:

- Realistic timeframes within which the associated tasks can be completed
- Examples and resources for use throughout the process
- Samples of actual documents used in previous strategic planning efforts; although some samples are specific to state in which they were developed, they can be used as models and edited as needed
- Graphics and templates useful in the strategic planning process

The Implementation Guidelines section provides suggested tasks, outputs, and resources for the first 90 days of implementation following the completion of the planning project.

The Appendix presents graphics, templates, and samples of actual documents used in the Virginia project that can be modified to a locality's needs.

3 INTEROPERABILITY CONTINUUM

The Interoperability Continuum was developed out of RapidCom 1[2] to help the emergency response community and policy makers plan and implement interoperability solutions. The tool identifies five critical success factors that must be addressed to develop a sophisticated interoperability solution: governance, standard operating procedures (SOPs), technology, training and exercises, and usage of interoperable communications. Making progress in all aspects of interoperability is essential, since the elements are interdependent. Therefore, to gain a true picture of a region's interoperability, progress along all five elements of the Continuum must be considered together. Jurisdictions across the Nation are using the Continuum to track progress in strengthening interoperable communications.

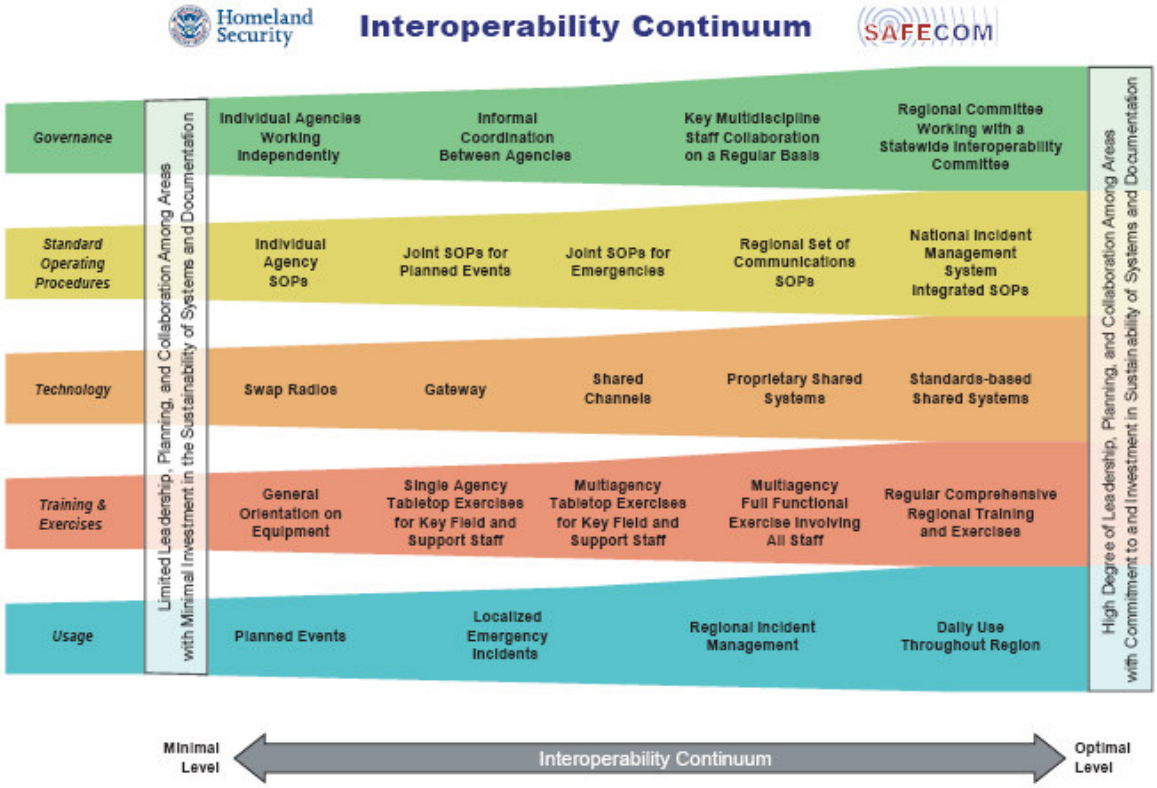


Figure 1: Interoperability Continuum

[2] RapidCom 1 was led by SAFECOM, with support from DHS' Office of Grants and Training, the Department of Justice's High-Risk Metropolitan Area Interoperability Assistance Project (25 Cities), and DHS' Wireless Management Office. RapidCom 1 ensured that a minimum level of emergency response interoperability was in place in the top ten high-risk urban areas by helping incident commanders in each of these urban areas better communicate with each other and their respective command centers within one hour of a major incident.

Interoperability Continuum Elements

Governance

A common governing structure for solving interoperability issues will improve the policies, processes, and procedures of any major project by: enhancing communication, coordination, and cooperation; establishing guidelines and principles; and reducing any internal jurisdictional conflicts. A governing body should include local, tribal, state, and Federal entities as well as representatives from all pertinent emergency response disciplines within the identified region. A formal governance structure is critical to the success of interoperability planning. The following is a description of each governance phase on the Continuum.

- ***Individual Agencies Working Independently*** – A lack of coordination among responding organizations
- ***Informal Coordination Between Agencies*** – Loose line level or agency agreements that provide minimal incident interoperability
- ***Key Multidiscipline Staff Collaboration on a Regular Basis*** – A number of agencies and disciplines working together in a local area to promote interoperability
- ***Regional Committee Working with a Statewide Interoperability Committee*** – Multidisciplinary agencies working together across a region pursuant to formal written agreements as defined within the larger scope of a state plan. Such an arrangement promotes optimal interoperability.

SOPs

SOPs are formal written guidelines or instructions for incident response. SOPs typically have both operational and technical components. The following is a description of each SOP phase on the Continuum.

- ***Individual Agency SOPs*** – Uncoordinated procedures across agencies that can hinder effective multidiscipline/multiagency response.
- ***Joint SOPs for Planned Events*** – The development of SOPs for planned events. This typically represents the first phase as agencies begin to work together to develop interoperability.
- ***Joint SOPs for Emergencies*** – SOPs for emergency level response that are developed as agencies continue to promote interoperability.
- ***Regional Set of Communications SOPs*** – Region-wide communications SOPs for multiagency/mulitdiscipline/multihazard responses; an integral step towards optimal interoperability.
- ***National Incident Management System Integrated SOPs*** – Regional SOPs molded to conform to the elements of the National Incident Management System.

Technology

Although technology is a critical tool for improving interoperability, it is not the sole driver of an optimal solution. Success in each of the other elements is essential to its proper use and implementation, and should drive technology procurement.

Technology is highly dependent upon existing infrastructure within a region. Multiple technology solutions may be required to support large events. The following is a description of each technology phase on the Continuum.

- ***Swap Radios*** – Swapping radios, or maintaining a cache of standby radios, is an age-old solution that is time-consuming, management-intensive, and may only provide limited results due to channel availability.
- ***Gateway*** – Gateways retransmit across multiple frequency bands providing an interim interoperability solution as agencies move toward shared systems. However, gateways are inefficient in that they require twice as much spectrum because each participating agency must use at least one channel in each band per common talk path, and because they are tailored for communications within the geographic coverage area common to all participating systems.
- ***Shared Channels*** – Interoperability is promoted when agencies share a common frequency band, air interface (analog or digital), and are able to agree on common channels. However, the general frequency congestion that exists across the United States can place severe restrictions on the number of independent interoperability talk paths available in some bands.
- ***Proprietary Shared Systems and Standards-based Shared Systems*** – Regional shared systems are the optimal solution to interoperability. While proprietary systems limit the user's choice of product with regard to manufacturer and competitive procurement, standards-based shared systems promote competitive procurement and a wide selection of products to meet specific user needs. With proper planning of the talk group architecture, interoperability is provided as a byproduct of system design, creating an optimal technology solution.

Training and Exercises

Proper training and regular exercises are critical to the implementation and maintenance of a successful interoperability solution. The following is a description of each training and exercises phase on the Continuum.

- ***General Orientation on Equipment*** – Agencies provide initial to their users with regard to their particular equipment. Multijurisdiction/multiagency operations are often an afterthought to this training, if provided at all.
- ***Single Agency Tabletop for Key Field and Support Staff*** – Structured tabletop exercises promote planning and identify response gaps. However, single agency activities do not promote interoperability across

disciplines and jurisdictions. Additionally, management and supervisory training is critical to promoting routine use of interoperability mechanisms.

- ***Multiagency Tabletop for Key Field and Support Staff*** – As agencies and disciplines begin working together to develop exercises and provide field training, workable interoperability solutions emerge.
- ***Multiagency Full Functional Exercises Involving All Staff*** – Once multiagency/multidiscipline plans are developed and practiced at the management and supervisory level, it is then critical that all staff who would eventually be involved in actual implementation receive training and participate in exercises.
- ***Regular Comprehensive Regional Training and Exercises*** – Optimal interoperability involves equipment familiarization and an introduction to regional/state interoperability at time of hire (or in an academy setting). Success will be assured by regular, comprehensive, and realistic exercises that address potential problems in the region and involve the participation of all personnel.

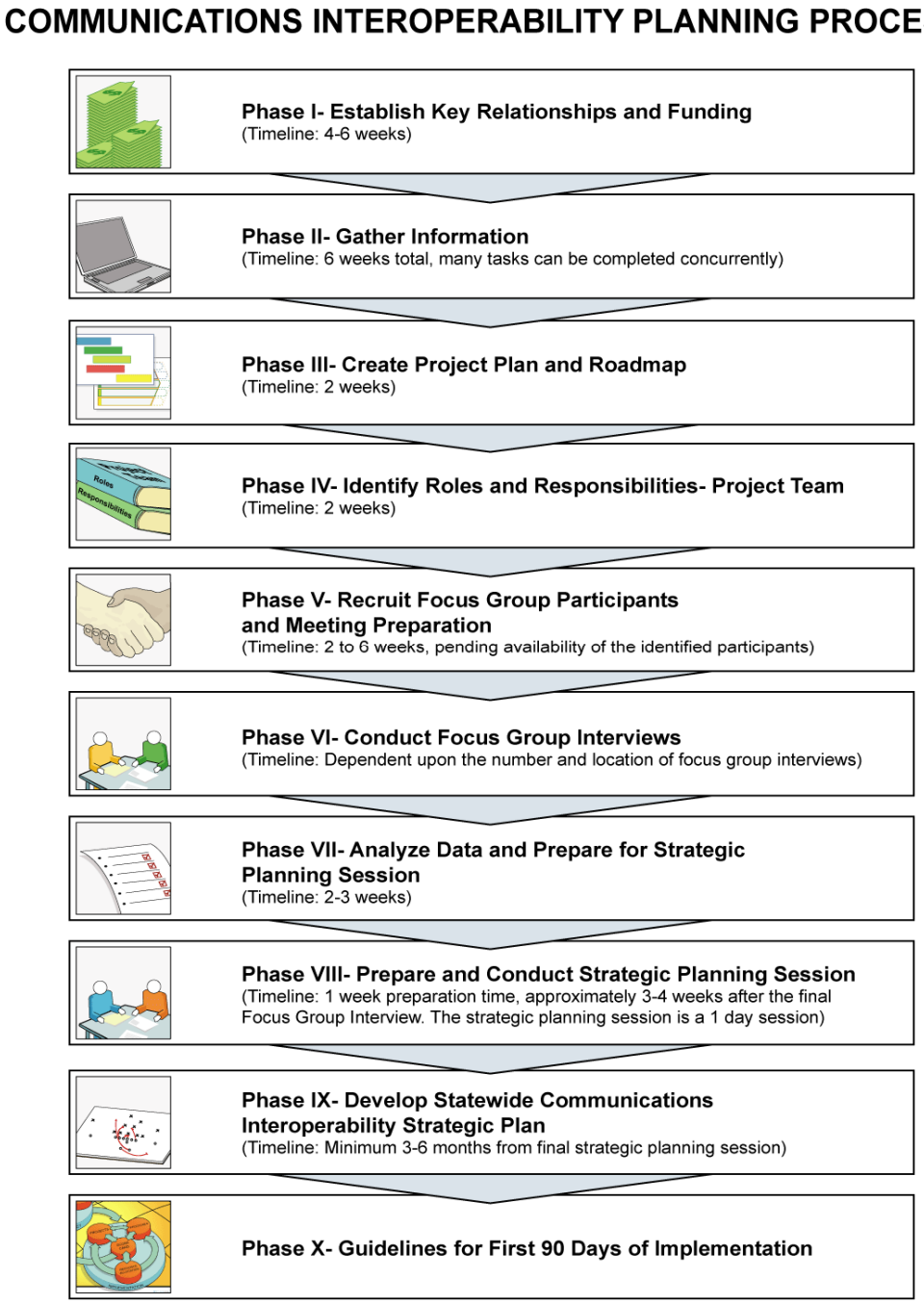
Usage

Usage refers to how often interoperable communications technologies are used. Success in this element is contingent upon progress and interplay among the other four elements on the Interoperability Continuum. The following is a description of each usage phase on the Continuum.

- ***Planned Events*** – Events for which the date and time are known. Examples include athletic events and large conferences/conventions that involve multiple responding agencies.
- ***Localized Emergency Incidents*** – Emergency events that involve multiple intra-jurisdictional responding agencies. A vehicle collision on an interstate highway is an example of this type of incident.
- ***Regional Incident Management*** – Routine coordination of responses across a region that include automatic aid fire response as well as response to natural and man-made disasters.
- ***Daily Use Throughout Region*** – Interoperability systems that are used every day for managing routine as well as emergency incidents. In this optimal solution, users are familiar with the operation of the system and routinely work in concert with one another.

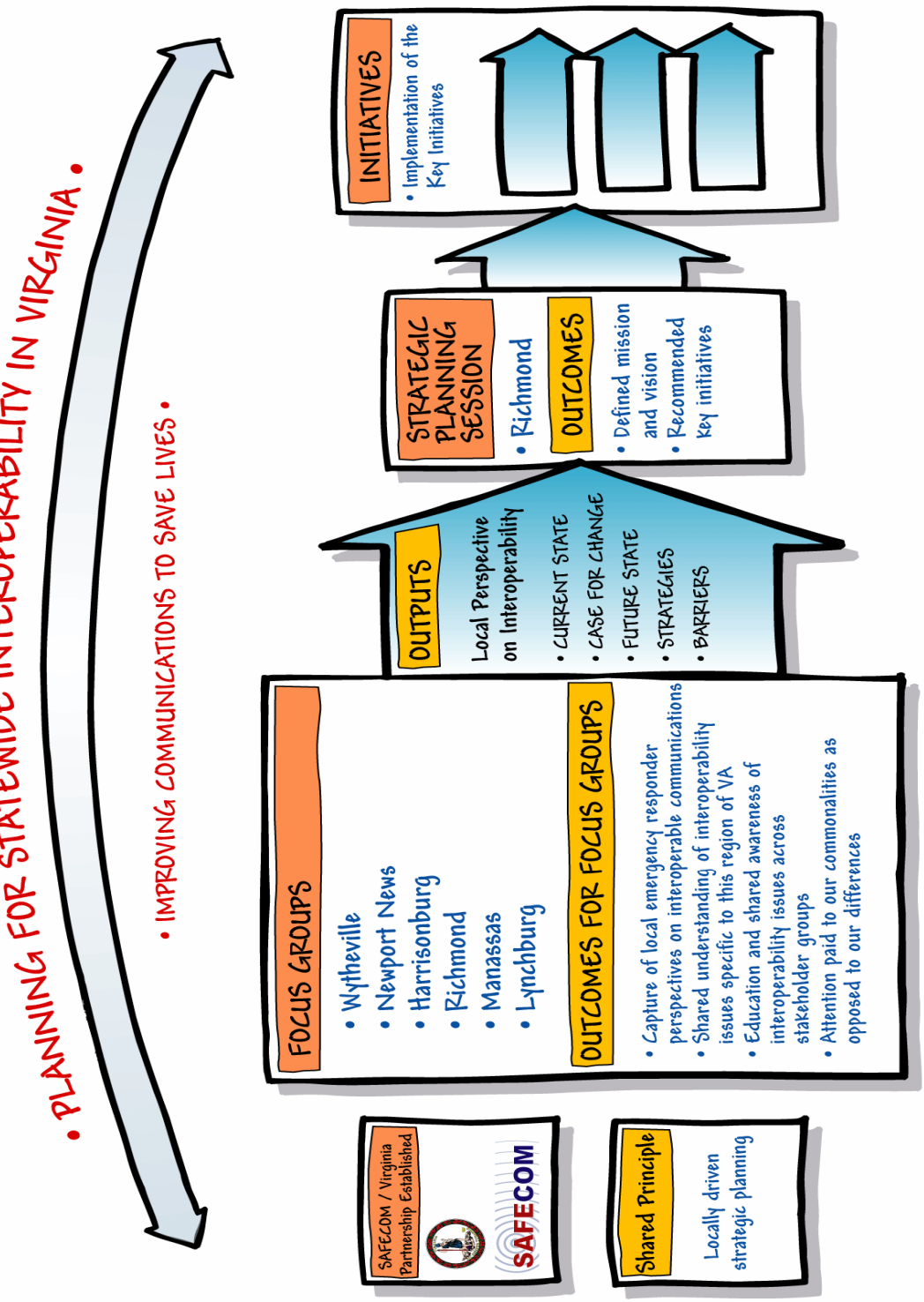
4 COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY PLANNING PROCESS GRAPHIC

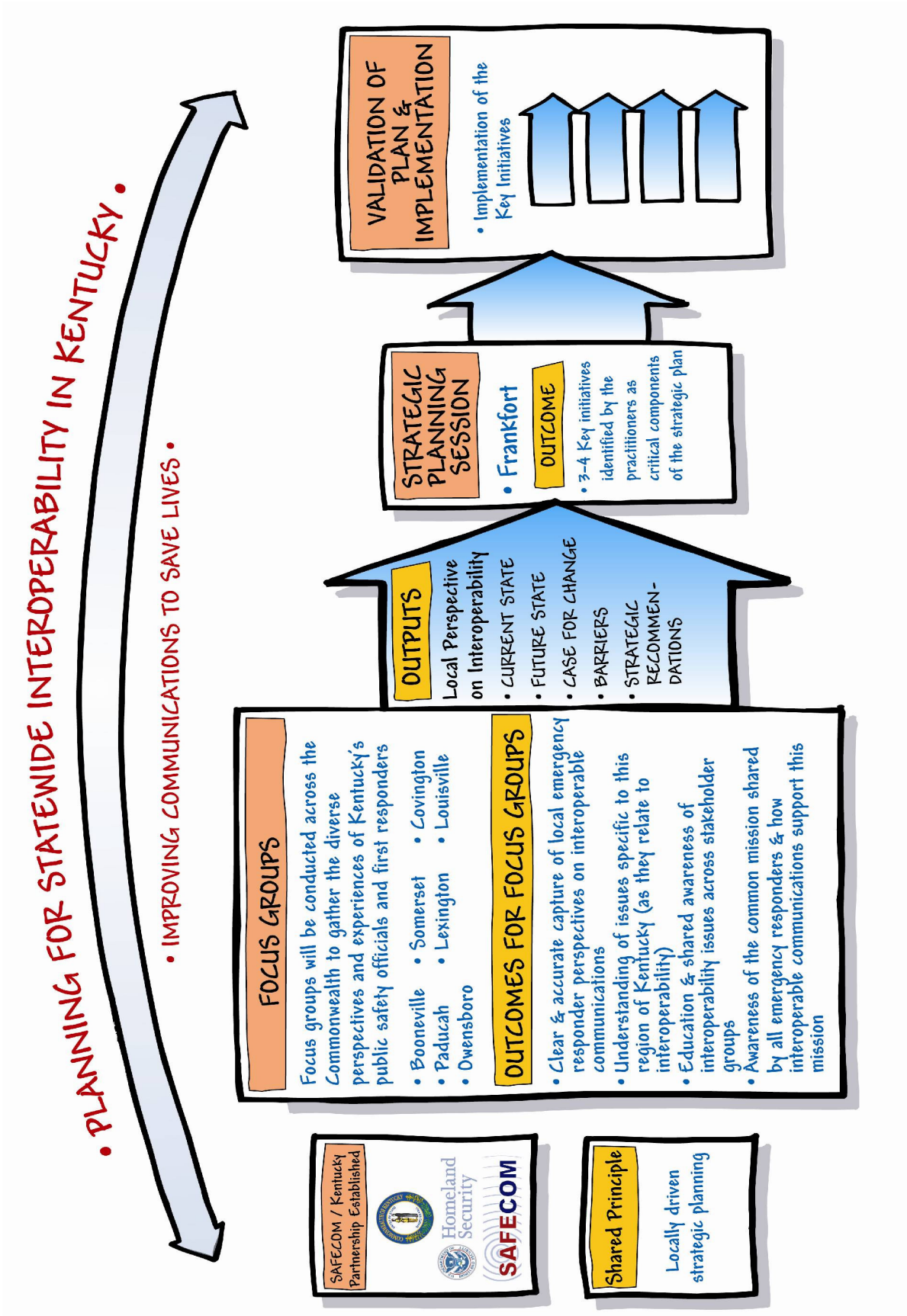
The following graphic illustrates the communications interoperability planning process.

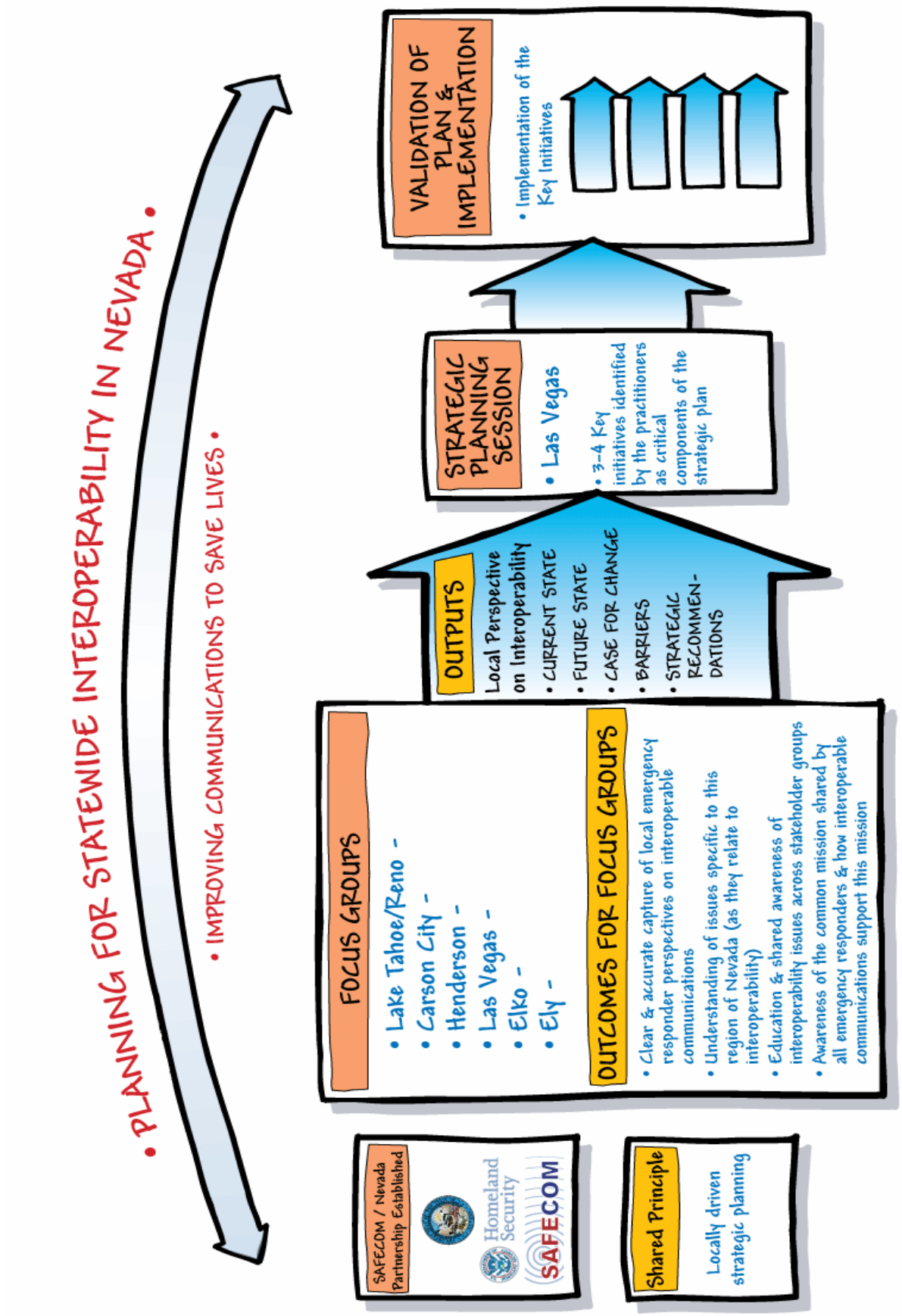


Each phase in the process is explained in detail in the remainder of this document.

The following graphics are sample process maps used in planning efforts in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and the State of Nevada.




• PLANNING FOR STATEWIDE INTEROPERABILITY IN KENTUCKY •
• IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS TO SAVE LIVES •
SAFECOM / Kentucky Partnership Established
Homeland Security
SAFECOM
Shared Principle
Locally driven strategic planning
FOCUS GROUPS
Focus groups will be conducted across the Commonwealth to gather the diverse perspectives and experiences of Kentucky's public safety officials and first responders
• Booneville • Somerset • Covington
• Paducah • Lexington • Louisville
• Owensboro
OUTCOMES FOR FOCUS GROUPS
• Clear & accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
• Understanding of issues specific to this region of Kentucky (as they relate to interoperability)
• Education & shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
• Awareness of the common mission shared by all emergency responders & how interoperable communications support this mission
OUTPUTS
Local Perspective on Interoperability
• CURRENT STATE
• FUTURE STATE
• CASE FOR CHANGE
• BARRIERS
• STRATEGIC RECOMMEN-DATIONS
STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
• Frankfort
OUTCOME
• 3-4 Key initiatives identified by the practitioners as critical components of the strategic plan
VALIDATION OF PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION
• Implementation of the Key Initiatives


• PLANNING FOR STATEWIDE INTEROPERABILITY IN NEVADA •
• IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS TO SAVE LIVES •
SAFECOM / Nevada Partnership Established
Homeland Security
SAFECOM
Shared Principle
Locally driven strategic planning
FOCUS GROUPS
• Lake Tahoe/Reno -
• Carson City -
• Henderson -
• Las Vegas -
• Elko -
• Ely -
OUTCOMES FOR FOCUS GROUPS
• Clear & accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
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OUTPUTS
Local Perspective on Interoperability
• CURRENT STATE
• FUTURE STATE
• CASE FOR CHANGE
• BARRIERS
• STRATEGIC RECOMMEN-DATIONS
STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION
• Las Vegas
• 3-4 Key initiatives identified by the practitioners as critical components of the strategic plan
VALIDATION OF PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION
• Implementation of the Key Initiatives

5 KEY ELEMENTS

The SCIP Methodology is intended to be a template that states can tailor to local needs. States should, however, ensure that their approaches include the seven key elements below.

- Establish key relationships and agreements. This critical first step can help provide both the funding and support needed to successfully implement a statewide communications solution.
- Communicate the strategic planning process graphically. Using a roadmap supports collaboration across diverse stakeholders and builds a shared understanding of the project's resources, activities, and deliverables.
- Keep all participants informed throughout the process. Throughout the entire planning process, state leaders should be committed to providing local participants and key stakeholders with official and unofficial communication.
- Include local emergency response responders in the focus group interviews. A statewide interoperability planning process will not be successful without buy-in from local emergency response responders and their affiliated partners.
- Use a consistent and methodical approach to the planning and delivery of focus group interviews—including preparatory work, guiding questions to structure the interviews, and capturing focus group results on a shared display. A shared display is a screen, white board, flip chart, or some other surface which can be used to display data and is visible to all participants in the meeting. It enables "real time" data validity, and is an effective means for managing complex discussions associated with interoperability.
- Bring key state-level decision- and policymakers together for a final strategic planning session. Successful adoption and implementation of the recommendations gathered during focus group interviews hinges on a final strategic planning session. This session should include a review of the data collected across the state, an understanding and validation of the local perspectives, and a determination of the best route forward to increase statewide communications interoperability. Involving decision- and policymakers in the process completes the "bottom up" approach to strategic planning by engaging state level resources to finalize a plan based on local level input.
- Build momentum for a strategic plan that is actionable, realistic, and manageable by establishing a collective agreement on critical first steps. Lack of a collective agreement during the implementation phase will negate the efforts of those executing the plan.

6 RECOMMENDED PRE-CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS: ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL GOVERNANCE

The following is a list of preferred preconditions that should exist prior to beginning the SCIP Methodology in your area. While these preconditions are not required, they will enable the process of statewide planning and prevent potential issues later in the process.

- **Existing Governance Structure**

  A state governance structure for communications interoperability should be in place prior to beginning the SCIP Methodology, rather than establishing governance as part of the process. Formal governance, such as a State Executive Interoperability Committee (SEIC), will make each step and task in the SCIP Methodology easier to accomplish. The governance structure should have adequate cross discipline and local representation. Adequate cross discipline and local representation will help ensure all new and existing systems and solutions are considered when developing a state plan.

- **Governance Charter and Rules**

  A governance charter describes the reason the governance structure was created and establishes the ground rules of operation. It should define the purpose, authority, decision-making process, and deliverables for the group. A clearly defined charter documents the authority and purpose of the governance structure and serves as the foundation by which the group operates.

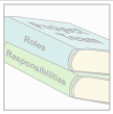
- **Current Capabilities Assessment**

  Prior to defining plans for the future of communications interoperability, it is helpful to have a common understanding of the current environment. This can be accomplished by performing a communications interoperability capabilities assessment. While a completed capabilities assessment is not required to begin the SCIP Methodology, its importance becomes more relevant later in the methodology as you prepare for the strategic planning session. The importance of the current capabilities assessment lies in its assistance in defining and prioritizing the long-term and short-term strategic initiatives for the plan.

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



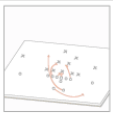
Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

7 PHASE I- ESTABLISH KEY RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNDING

The establishment of strategic relationships is a critical first step in the SCIP Methodology. Enhancing relationships among key stakeholders provides and opportunity for the cross discipline support necessary to implement a statewide voice and data communications solution. By establishing partnerships early in the process, states can more easily identify and secure the funding needed for the planning process.

Timeline
Three to four weeks

Outputs

- Contract or written agreement between state sponsor and the project team responsible for carrying out the planning process. This contract or written agreement, often in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), could touch on such things as:
  - Funding and participation the state will provide
  - Funding and participation any localities or public safety organizations will provide

Key Considerations

- Consider the costs involved and secure funding for the entire process.
- Begin explicit conversations surrounding funding mechanisms, processes, and protocols at the beginning of the project.
- Become aware of political and financial opportunities and barriers.

Tasks

- Establish Key Relationships.
- Develop a Comprehensive Funding Strategy for the Planning Process.

Task: Establish Key Relationships

The first task in the planning process is to establish key relationships and determine who will be the champions for the communications interoperability planning process. This may be accomplished through informal conversations or interviews with key players in your state's interoperability efforts. Include representatives from various local, tribal, state, and Federal agencies and associations who have expressed an interest in communications interoperability.

These conversations will provide lessons learned from current and past efforts and an introduction to individuals with a passion for and expertise in the field of communications interoperability.

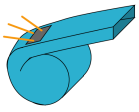
Questions to ask include:

- Who has influence in the emergency response communities you serve? (This includes emergency response practitioners as well as political officials).
- Who has undertaken or is currently carrying out efforts to improve communications interoperability in your state and surrounding region?
- How are these efforts funded?
- Which local, tribal, state, and Federal leaders are currently addressing the issue of communications interoperability?
- How much involvement do these efforts have from the local and/or state emergency response community? Are the efforts they are backing successful? Why or why not?

This research will provide information about what others have done before and indicate how you might partner with initiatives currently underway.

Key areas of attention:

- Contact associations affiliated with the emergency response community.
- Investigate press coverage on this issue at the state and local levels.
- Review other on-going state/local interoperability projects.
- Conduct informational interviews across state and local leadership.



Lesson Learned: It is helpful to establish a solid relationship with your state's grant administrators for smoother movement of monies as your planning process progresses and the communications interoperability planning process takes off.

Task: Develop a Comprehensive Funding Strategy For the Planning Process

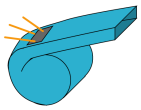
The objective of this task is to identify funding that can be used for the planning process. Begin by investigating funding options that may be available through appropriation or existing grants at the local and state level. These opportunities may have been revealed through the conversations held during Phase I.

Next, contact your state's Office of Grants and Training (G&T) representative[3] to explore Federal grant funding opportunities. The G&T grant program offers funding assistance to enhance the capacity of state and local jurisdictions to prevent, respond to, and recover from incidents of terrorism. Contacting your state G&T representative can lead to more information on what is available across the Federal government as it relates to grants and other forms of Federal assistance. *Be aware that funding may be restricted to certain aspects of improving interoperable communications. For example, some Federal grants are offered solely to support the purchase of technology equipment while others target training.*

Potential costs to consider:

- Car rental and travel
- Hotels
- Meals and incidental expenses
- Conference room rental
- Conference material expenses (tables, markers, paper, pens, etc.)
- Audiovisual requirements
- Catering needs
- Participant information packets and session materials
- Web page/Web design (purpose: status updates and information throughout the planning phases)
- Consultant and/or facilitation support

Note that the majority of these costs are associated with conducting focus group interviews and holding a strategic planning session. These are discussed in detail under Phases VI and VIII.



Lesson Learned: As funding is secured for the planning process, it is also good practice to begin to identify resources for implementing the final communications interoperability plan. Identifying resources early will build confidence among the planning participants by

[3] Visit the DHS G&T Web site at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/contact_state.htm to identify your state's G&T representative.

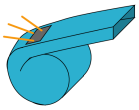
demonstrating the financial commitment of state and local leadership.

Consider the amount of funding that may be needed for the implementation of the initiatives that arise from the planning process. Ideally, the funding of initiatives should be a combination of Federal and state grants with support from the state budget as available.

Questions that can guide your thinking on the future state of your budget include:

- What are the initiatives that might result from the planning process?
- How are similar initiatives being funded in other states?
- What are the Federal funding options for similar initiatives?
- When and how does the state budget process work?

Please see *Appendix A* for a Web link to information on SAFECOM grant guidance and access to the FY2007 SAFECOM Grant Guidance document.



Lesson Learned: The planning process may identify initiatives that lack funding for execution. Therefore, begin conversations early in the planning effort with individuals at the state level who are responsible for budgeting for and funding communications interoperability efforts.

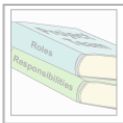
Resources

- Appendix A – Web link to SAFECOM Grant Guidance
- Web link to Office of Grants and Training to identify state representative - http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/contact_state.htm

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

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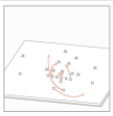


Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

8 PHASE II- GATHER INFORMATION

Once key relationships are established, the next phase in the process is gathering information regarding current and past efforts intended to improve voice and data interoperability. Throughout this gathering process, you will gain the perspectives of emergency response practitioners in order to create a statewide communications interoperability plan that meets the needs of the emergency response community. To identify best practices, lessons learned, and coordination opportunities, this research may extend beyond internal state efforts to include efforts undertaken in surrounding states and regions Nationwide.

Timeline
Six weeks, although many tasks can be completed concurrently

Outputs
- Results of national research on current statewide interoperability efforts
- State profile
- Map of state with intended focus group interview locations
- Drafted governance model

Key Considerations
- Use the information gleaned during the Phase I conversations/interviews to gain further understanding of the interoperability capabilities and initiatives specific to the state.
- This phase reinforces the locally-driven philosophy by stressing the importance of:
  - Reaching out to the practitioners
  - Building awareness around the need for communication interoperability

Tasks
- Determine Scope of Research and Leverage Existing Resources.
- Create a State Profile that includes level of risk, number of emergency response agencies, typical threats and incidents, etc.
- Determine the Ideal Number and Location of Focus Group Interviews Based on State Profile.
- Introduce Governance: Determine which Organizations and Structures are Currently in Place to Support Communications Interoperability through a Proposed Governance Model.

Task: Determine Scope of Research and Leverage Existing Resources

The complexity of the issues involved with communications interoperability present challenges in initiating the statewide planning process. Additionally, the wide array of information sources available can lead to indecision about where to start and how to do what is best for your state.

Research should be done up front to get a better understanding of the complexity of communications interoperability issues and to identify interoperability projects that have preceded the efforts in your state. Begin by clearly defining the scope of research that will be most beneficial to your state's goal, and learn from what others have done while still moving forward in your planning effort. The DHS' Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) publishes the "Interoperability Technology Today" newsletter as a resource for emergency responders to get the latest information and updates on interoperability across the country.

Please see *Appendix B* – for a Web link to the "Interoperability Technology Today" newsletter.

The scope of your research should include, but not be limited to, governance, operating procedures, technology, training and exercises, usage, management, policy, and funding.

You can narrow the scope of your research efforts by focusing on key characteristics of the planning process. For example, your research could be targeted towards initiatives that specifically focus on a high level of involvement from local practitioners and best exemplify the SAFECOM and DM philosophy.

Questions that can help define scope and identify effective planning include:

- How are other states' communications interoperability planning processes aligning with SAFECOM and DM's emphasis on a locally-driven process?
- How is the emergency response community involved? Who is included?
- What specific steps did other states take in the communications interoperability planning process and are they repeatable in your state?
- Which states were successful in their planning efforts? How was success defined?

Lesson Learned: A wide variety of documentation exists on communications interoperability efforts. Therefore, establish what you already know and then invest time in uncovering resources that address the toughest aspects of your planning process.

Please see *Appendix C* for a Web link to SAFECOM's Web site for more information on the program.
Please see *Appendix D* for a Web link to DM's DisasterHelp.gov Web site for more information about the program.

Task: Create a State Profile
After gathering research on other states' communications interoperability planning efforts, create a state profile to capture your state's unique characteristics, opportunities, and challenges. This research should include extensive details about the geographic breakdown of your state by county, or equivalent.

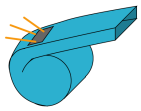
In addition, become familiar with the state governmental system, e.g., structure and function, and how local government systems interact with the state level government. This research will raise awareness of budgetary processes, key political players and allies, and how to logically separate the state into geographic regions when determining focus group locations.

The state profile will include information such as:

- Emergency response demographics
- Topography (i.e., description of the region's natural features)
- Geography (regional organization of emergency response communities)
- Metropolitan areas, counties, state, and local government breakdown
- Transportation systems
- Communication technology systems (statewide and regional)
- Standard operating procedures to facilitate voice and data exchange
- Current and past communications interoperability efforts and the leaders involved in those efforts
- Organization of state and local government

Please see *Appendix E* for a state profile template that was created during the Virginia planning process.

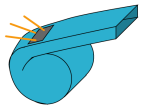
More detail may be added to the template; the categories suggested are a direct result of the information gathered throughout the communications interoperability planning process. Lessons learned from statewide planning efforts that led to the development of the state profile template.



Lesson Learned: Extensive knowledge of the state (i.e., geography, structure of government at the local level) allows for a more

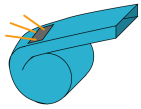
complete understanding of the challenges emergency response communities face during day-to-day and major disaster scenarios.

Early focus group interviews highlighted the importance of understanding the communications challenges faced by different regions in the state as well as progress made by other regions. Improving interoperable communications involves a focus on people, process, and technology. This said, expanding zones of interoperability from an urban region to a more rural one relies upon not only access to technology, but also willingness across groups to collaborate and work as part of a larger whole.



Lesson Learned: Dividing the state into regions similar to the emergency response agencies' geographic breakdown avoids confusion when determining how to recruit participants from each emergency response agency for focus group interviews.

During Virginia's planning process, it became apparent that almost every discipline viewed the geographic breakdown of Virginia differently. Following an existing regional structure that is familiar to all—one that is adopted or endorsed by the governor—benefits the collaborative process; participants can clearly understand the region in which they are assigned and respond accordingly. The Virginia Project Team discouraged attendees from participating in focus group interview sessions outside their region to preserve the validity of the data from each regional focus group. In Kentucky, focus groups were asked to define their region up front in order to determine what was in scope and what was out of scope for the interview session.



Lesson Learned: Determining current statewide and regional communication systems in place early in the planning process allows you to be familiar with systems capabilities and challenges that may arise during the focus group interviews.

Virginia placed a significant emphasis on understanding the current technology available in the Commonwealth. At the state level, discussions around solving the communications interoperability problem seemed to originate with the availability and use of technology. The interoperability coordinator should research and obtain information on existing technology initiatives and share this information with the emergency response community and key stakeholders involved in the process. This information can facilitate discussion around the process and resource factors that may contribute to the current ability or inability to communicate effectively and efficiently in real time.

Point of Interest: Virginia's unique geographic characteristics included: military stations (Navy, Coast Guard), coastal waterways, international airports, mountainous terrain, and close proximity to the Nation's capital.

Task: Determine the Ideal Number and Location of Focus Group Interviews Based on State Profile

Determining the number and location of focus group interviews will depend on:

- The designated regional breakdowns familiar to the state's emergency response communities
- Anticipated budget allocation for the planning process
- State size
- Conference facility availability

Thinking ahead: The final strategic planning session should be held in a location central to all focus groups and accessible to state-level leadership. State leadership attendance at this event will be an important part of communicating the message on the current state of communications interoperability and plan for migrating to a desired future state. For a detailed description of the strategic planning session see Phase VIII.

Task: Introduce Governance: Determine which Organizations and Structures are Currently in Place to Support Communications Interoperability through a Proposed Governance Model

Begin by identifying organizational structures currently in place that support communications interoperability planning processes. After identifying groups that organize themselves around improving communications interoperability across the state, you should begin to consider how or if they are locally-driven and practitioner-focused. The support of local and state level leadership is critical to the successful development and implementation of a statewide communications interoperability plan. As such, your state should support a governance approach that encourages transparency, accountability, and collaboration through:

- Leadership representative of a broad spectrum of local level emergency responders
- Participatory decision making
- Supporting legislation that enforces timely and cost-conscious implementation of statewide communications interoperability
- Relationship building at the local, tribal, state, and Federal levels
- Outcome-based strategic planning

An accurate assessment of structures currently in place and their alignment with a locally-driven philosophy will highlight those organizations and individuals that may serve as the foundation for a future governance model.

Please see *Appendix F* for more information on SAFECOM's approach to governance.

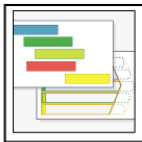
Please see *Additional Resources* for a Web link to the National Taskforce on Interoperability's (NTFI) "Why Can't We Talk" publication for additional governance-related information.

Resources

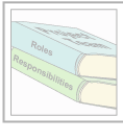
- "Creating a Charter for a Multi-Agency Communications Interoperability Committee" - SAFECOM and DM publication – https://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/library/interoperabilitybasics/1290_creatinga.htm
- Appendix B - Web link - "Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts across the Country"
- Appendix C - Web link to SAFECOM program Web site
- Appendix E - State Profile Template
- Appendix F - "A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles," developed by SAFECOM for the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Additional Resources - Web link to NTFI's "Why Can't We Talk" publication

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)



Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)

Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

9 PHASE III- CREATE PROJECT PLAN AND ROADMAP

It is important to determine in advance the direction and process of your state's voice and data communications interoperability strategic plan and to develop a clear roadmap. This will include the careful preparation and planning necessary to account for the budget, resources, and timeline your state will face.

Timeline
Two weeks

Outputs
- Roadmap
- Project Plan

Key Considerations
- Identify the major tasks of each phase of the strategic planning process, the sequence of those tasks, their dependencies, and important milestones.
- Assess the level of effort against the anticipated budget.
- Define the size and composition of a core project team required to successfully execute the defined tasks.
- Create a project roadmap.

Tasks
- Develop Detailed Project Plan and Roadmap.
- Vet with Key Stakeholders.

A roadmap helps to reflect the project plan in graphic format. This variety in presentation helps key stakeholders understand the overall effort in detail. See Figures 2 and 3 for the roadmaps used in Virginia.

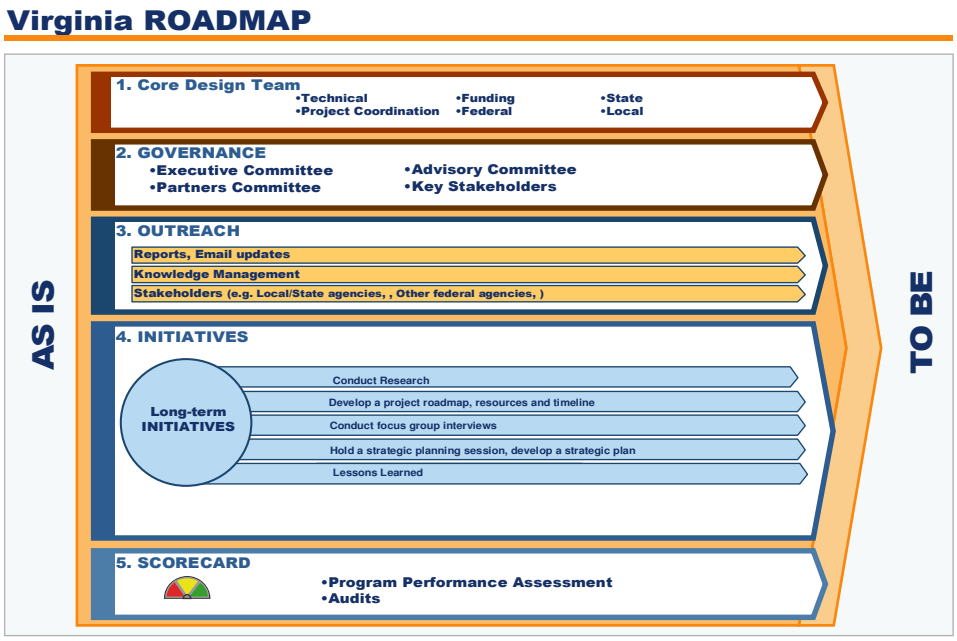


Figure 2: Roadmap I

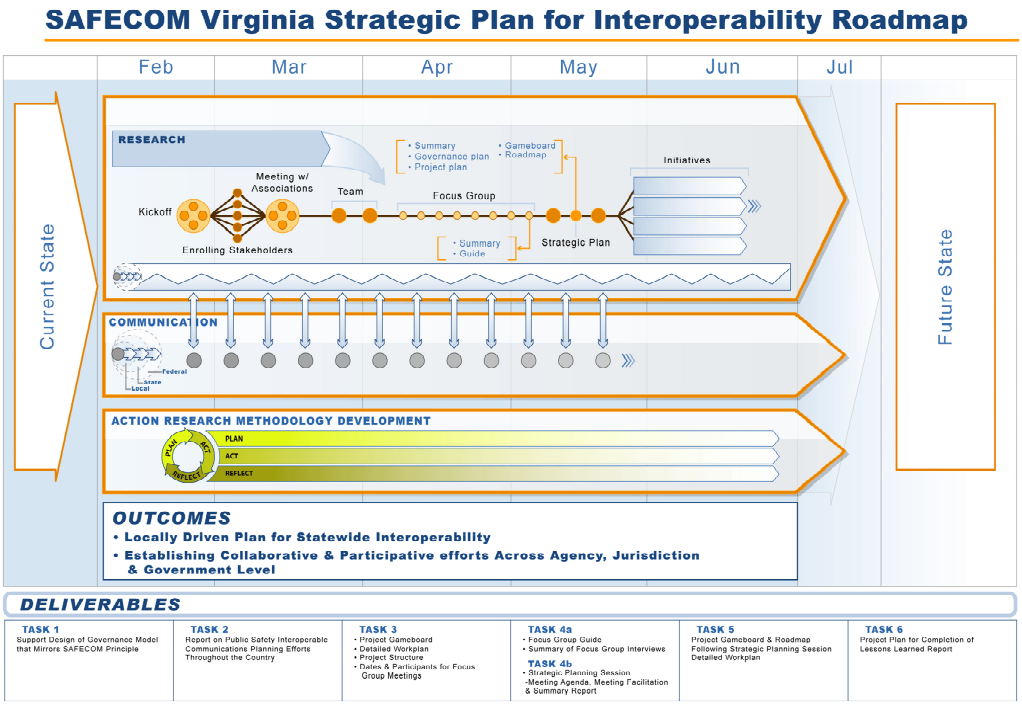


Figure 3: Roadmap II

Task: Develop Detailed Project Plan and Roadmap

Project management tools and resources are available to help support the development of the project plan. Project management is the process of guiding the project from its beginning through its performance to its closure. Project management includes three basic operations:

- Plan
  - Specifying the results to be achieved
  - Determining the schedules
  - Estimating the resources required
- Organize
  - Defining participants' roles and responsibilities
- Control
  - Reconfirming participants' expected performance
  - Monitoring actions taken and results achieved
  - Addressing problems encountered
  - Sharing information with interested people

The basic project management process has five phases or types of activities:

- Initiation
- Planning
- Executing
- Controlling
- Closing

Figure 4 depicts the seven steps necessary to develop an effective schedule for a project. The activities to be performed are defined in Steps 1 and 2. Step 3 is the preparation of the network diagram (*schematic display of the logical relationships of project activities*)[4] using these activities. Steps 4 and 5 include the estimation duration for each activity and the resource requirements. From this data the schedule can be developed, with specific dates for each activity's start and finish. Finally, after coordination with stakeholders, the baseline for implementing and controlling the project is established.

[4] *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2000).

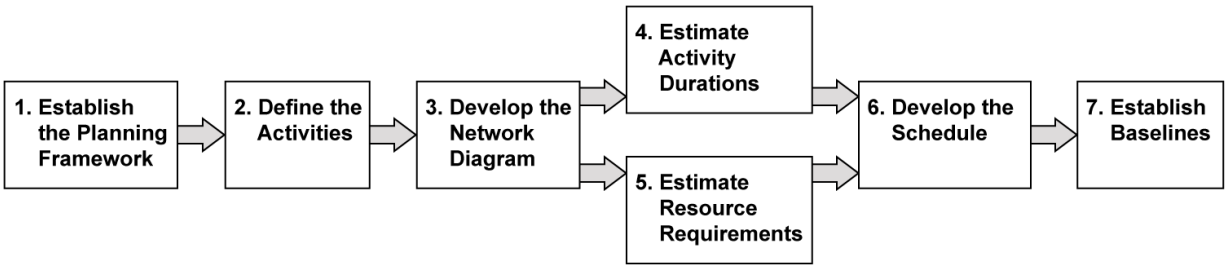


Figure 4: Project Planning Process[5]

See *Appendix H* for the key definitions associated with project management and planning.

Task: Vet with Key Stakeholders

In order to maintain alignment across the project team (described in Phase IV), sponsors and key stakeholders validate the project's design and approach by vetting it with those responsible for carrying it out. Discrepancies may appear early in this collaborative process, particularly when there is more than one way to reach a milestone or achieve an outcome. Consistent and regular check-ins across concerned parties raise these issues, enable early resolution, and demonstrate effective teamwork.

During the next phase, gather feedback from key stakeholders in order to set clear expectations regarding the project scope, milestones, and outcomes.

Resources

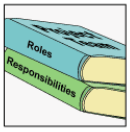
- Appendix G - Sample Roadmap (version I and II)
- Appendix H - Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning

[5] *Project Planning and Scheduling,* Gregory Haugan, (Management Concepts, 2002).

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



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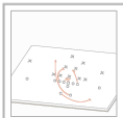


Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

10 PHASE IV- IDENTIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - PROJECT TEAM

The project team plays a vital role in ensuring the success of the entire planning process; as such their roles and responsibilities must be well-defined. This section will help you identify the varied players who must be involved.

Timeline
Two weeks

Outputs

- Kick-off meeting agenda and minutes
- Roles and responsibilities chart
- Mapping of key meetings along project timeline
- Communications plan to build statewide planning support

Key Considerations

- A team of five allows for the most manageable sharing of responsibilities; however, the planning process can be executed with more or less team members depending on the available resources.
- Distribute responsibilities among the team so that each role is filled by someone thoroughly committed to the project's mission and goals.

Tasks

- Propose Individuals/Agencies to Fill a Core Project Team, Clarify Roles and Responsibilities.
- Conduct Project Team Kick-off Meeting.
- Design and Document a Communications Strategy for Progress Reporting and Updates throughout the Statewide Effort.

Task: Propose Individuals/Agencies to Fill a Core Project Team, Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

Determine who can represent each of the core stakeholder groups. This can be completed by referencing the contract, which will determine if there are any parties who are necessary to carry out the planning process. Also, consider groups and associations whose endorsement is critical to implementation. In some cases, the core stakeholder group should include a grant administrator, contract support, a Federal program manager, and other grant-making bodies that have obligated funds to the effort.

Lesson Learned: Establishing and implementing a group or committee to coordinate an effort of this magnitude and this visibility is essential. While practitioner committees can offer guidance and expertise, they may not offer the coordination needed to ensure plan implementation due to their other responsibilities and full schedules. A designated, full-time coordinating body is an investment that can significantly enhance project success.

Task: Conduct Project Team Kick-off Meeting

The purpose of the kick-off meeting is to give project team members the opportunity to understand:

- Activities proposed for the strategic planning effort, the sequence of activities, and dependencies
- Activities that have occurred prior to the kick-off meeting
- Responsibilities expected from the project team

Please see *Appendix I* for a sample kick-off meeting template.

It is recommended that you identify a full-time resource to be responsible for implementing the planning process and development of the statewide strategic plan. The investment of a full-time resource to manage the process creates accountability for the completion of the plan and significantly increases the likelihood of success for your project.

Lesson Learned: Facilitating the project team through a roles and responsibilities exercise was helpful in clarifying individuals' ownership in the outcomes of the strategic planning process.

Please see *Appendix J* for a role clarification exercise.

The table below presents suggested roles and responsibilities from project launch through the completion of the strategic plan. The Assigned Resource column is left blank because the people assigned to each role will vary depending on the specific needs of your state's planning process. Roles and responsibilities can be consolidated as resources demand.

Role	*Description*	Tasks associated with this role	Assigned Resource
Centralized Coordinating Body	*Responsible for overall coordination of the project*	✓ Offer guidance ✓ Offer first-hand expertise	TBD
Sponsor	*Responsible for the overall process, establishing key relationships in the state, and securing funding resources. Also responsible for the overall implementation*	✓ Secure funding ✓ Establish key relationships throughout the state ✓ Help with the buy-in process from local government ✓ Establish relationship with Governor's office ✓ Oversee implementation	TBD
Project Manager/Team Lead	*Responsible for the success of the project*	✓ Set timeline ✓ Manage vetting and comments process ✓ Set participant criteria ✓ Set project standards ✓ Delegate tasks	TBD
Communications and Outreach Lead	*Responsible for internal and*	✓ Send emails to stakeholders	TBD

Role	*Description*	Tasks associated with this role	Assigned Resource
	external communication	✓ Provide agendas and follow- up notes (meetings) ✓ Maintain action items ✓ Develop weekly reports ✓ Develop pre/post focus group documents ✓ Develop press releases	
Meeting Management and Logistics Lead	*Responsible for planning and execution of interviews*	✓ Secure interview room ✓ Manage focus group preparation and follow-up	TBD
Facilitation (Lead and Co-Lead)	*Responsible for facilitation of interviews*	✓ Lead discussions on current state, future state, barriers, case for change, and strategies to achieve future state	TBD
Option: Administrative Coordinator	*Responsible for administrative logistics and coordination of resources*	✓ Manage general administration, coordination, and communications	TBD

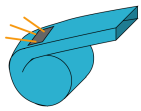
Task: Design and Document a Communications Strategy for Progress Reporting and Updates Throughout the Statewide Effort

Build a shared understanding at the kick-off meeting of how the team will communicate moving forward. Gather expectations from team members and other state and local stakeholders about how they want to be informed of events and updates in the weeks ahead.

Effective communications is critical to the success of a statewide planning effort as they impact partnerships and relationships with stakeholders. Communications intended to build support for a statewide planning effort need to be timely, compelling, and cognizant of stakeholder needs. Communications are most effective when they create a dialogue between stakeholders.

Different groups of stakeholders need different types of information; a successful communications strategy tailors communications vehicles and the level of information delivered to each stakeholder group. During the development of a communications strategy, it is essential to identify which stakeholders will need to receive specific communications. There are several factors to consider when identifying stakeholders' communication needs:

- Outline your goals, principles, and objectives for the communications efforts.
- Develop your communications process and plan. Ensure you have mechanisms to provide the right message, at the right time, for the right stakeholder over the life of the work effort(s).
- Define your key stakeholders, their needs, and desired outcomes.
  - Many stakeholders often need the same kinds of information.
  - Stakeholders may be impacted in a similar way during that particular stage of the communications effort.
  - Stakeholders may have similar responsibilities toward the project at that particular stage.
- Tailor the key points of your message to address your stakeholders' core needs.

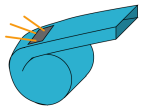


Lesson Learned: Identify multiple ways to communicate progress and gather ongoing feedback.

The work done in Virginia, Kentucky, and Nevada confirmed the importance of communicating status and progress of the planning process with stakeholders. Frequent communications provided to stakeholder groups makes it easier to recruit focus group participants and local strategic plan champions. Sample communication vehicles are below.

- Weekly status reports prior to commencing the focus group interviews
- Weekly conference calls
- Quarterly face-to-face meetings

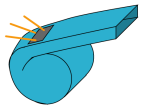
Please see *Appendix K* for an example weekly status report.
Please see *Appendix L* for a communications plan template.



Lesson Learned: Communicate progress to encourage participation from local practitioners supporting the statewide effort.

Often times, focus group interviews will continually increase the stakeholder audience for the strategic planning efforts. This audience will want to remain involved and informed as the planning process continues. In order to keep them informed and updated, it is helpful to establish a Web site to communicate project status and updates:

- Research results
- Federal resources
- Focus session reports



Lesson Learned: Identify critical junctures in the project plan where communication will be a key contributor to success, and schedule meetings to help the project team stay on track.

When designing the project plan, it is helpful to identify meetings that will establish and maintain alignment between the project sponsor and project team. This should also include any meetings for resolving issues once the planning process is underway. A detailed meeting design should be created for any alignment meetings on the project timeline. The meeting design should include participants, the purpose, and the desired outcomes.

At this point, you have identified your project team, clarified each member's responsibilities for the rest of the process, and have begun to create your project plan. You have also laid out the format for your focus group interviews, with only the logistics left to be finalized.

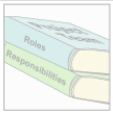
Resources

- Appendix I - Kick-off Meeting Template
- Appendix J - Role Clarification Exercise
- Appendix K - Example Weekly Status Report
- Appendix L - Communications Plan Template

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



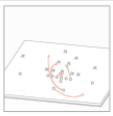
Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

11 PHASE V- RECRUIT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND MEETING PREPARATION

Through focus groups, a state can get the "right" people involved. This will include a diverse representation of practitioners from the major emergency response disciplines of fire, law enforcement, and EMS. Focus groups also support the actualization of a practitioner-driven philosophy, which is the core of SCIP Methodology.

Timeline
Two to six weeks (pending availability of the identified participants)

Outputs
- Focus Group Invitation
- Letter of Confirmation
- Participant Database
- Press Release

Key Considerations
- Use the focus groups as an opportunity to determine how to standardize communication and market this statewide planning process.
- Inform participants about past statewide communications interoperability planning, as those efforts may not have included the local practitioners and may have failed.
- Leverage the networking developed in this phase to send a consistent message about the value placed on local involvement in and leadership of this statewide process.

Tasks
- Define a Criteria for Focus Group Interviewee.
- Leverage State and National Public Safety Associations to Identify Possible Focus Group Participants.
- Communicate about Focus Group Interviews: Invite and Confirm Attendance.
- Enlist State Leadership To Invite Local Practitioners And Leaders Into The Strategic Planning Process.
- Confirm Meeting Facility Logistics.
- Distribute Press Releases To Area Newspapers And Trade Publications.
- Confirm Attendance and Determine the Need for Last Minute Recruiting.

Task: Define Criteria for the Focus Group Interviewee

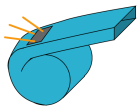
Stakeholder groups associated with the emergency response community may vary from state to state. Identify the range of stakeholders in your state and involve a select number of representatives from some of these groups in the planning process.

Each focus group interview is designed around five core questions:

- How would you describe the existing level of voice and data communications interoperability in the state?
- Why do we need to change the current state, and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want the state's future system for voice and data communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter when working toward this future system?
- What recommendations do we have to move from our current system to our future system?

Practitioners informed about interoperability issues will create a plan that effectively addresses the needs of the user community. The sample participant criteria below will assist planners in identifying practitioners with valuable knowledge and expertise:

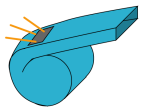
- Field experience
- An identifiable leadership role in the emergency response community
- Familiarity with issues relating to voice communications interoperability
- Familiarity with issues relating to data communications interoperability
- Knowledge or expertise in critical interoperability areas including governance, SOPs, technology, training and exercises, and usage of interoperable communications



Lesson Learned: The Commonwealth of Kentucky found it helpful to include elected and appointed officials in the regional focus group interviews to ensure their comments are included in the focus group data and to have their decision-making authority in the room.

Focus group criteria may help communicate to the emergency response community the expectations for participation in the strategic planning process. However, criteria are not intended to exclude practitioners who express an interest in participating.

See *Appendices M* and *N* for a summary of Virginia's process for identifying participants and a phone script template that can be used to identify participants through phone screening.

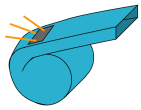


Lesson Learned: Include participants who fall outside the traditional emergency response community to facilitate education and awareness about interoperability issues.

In addition to local emergency responders, it is important to include state and Federal representatives in the focus group interviews. Full participation by all stakeholder groups throughout each phase of the planning process will build shared understanding and awareness of the current situation, and will strengthen relationships essential for successful implementation of the strategic plan.

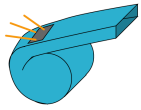
Task: Leverage State and National Emergency Response Associations to Identify Possible Focus Group Participants

Local, state, and National emergency response associations are valuable resources in your statewide planning process. These organizations are comprised of practitioners representing diverse backgrounds and expertise.



Lesson Learned: Contact local practitioners via the state and local associations who represent and organize around the emergency response and government communities.

There is confusion around the term "emergency responder" and who that includes and excludes. It is helpful to establish common terminology and definitions for key terms up front. The Virginia, Nevada, and Kentucky planning processes all dedicated time to define the term "emergency responder." When doing this, it is important to consider the supporting groups that often work alongside emergency responders, e.g., Departments of Transportation and Forestry, Emergency Management, Military Agencies, and utilities.



Lesson Learned: There are multiple ways to design the focus group recruiting strategy. Think through all of the options before deciding on the percentage breakdown of participants' expertise.

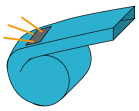
Effective focus group facilitation occurs when the group numbers no more than 25 participants, assuming two lead facilitators. With this in mind, the following percentages are recommended as targets for participation from the stakeholder groups:

- Fire 24 percent
- EMS 24 percent

- Law Enforcement 24 percent
- Local government 8 percent
- State government 8 percent
- Public support providers 12 percent

For each of these categories, IT support and technical representatives should be included. Public service providers should include the expanded emergency response community such as transportation, public health, and forestry.

The Virginia project team looked for individuals who could best represent the local perspective and work as part of a group during the implementation phase. When selecting attendees, they decided on the percentage breakdown noted above.



Lesson Learned: A variety of associations represent the emergency response community. Identify the best points of contact for recruiting to optimally use the emergency response practitioner network during the planning and ultimately implementation phase.

Virginia, Kentucky, and Nevada all exemplified a collaborative process and practitioner driven approach by including state associations in the focus group participant selection process. It is worthwhile to consider how associations that represent the practitioner community can be leveraged during other phases of the planning process and during implementation. Representatives of various associations may be more helpful during one phase than during another. Consider carefully how to build the network to support governance and cooperation in the long term.

Task: Communicate about Focus Group Interviews: Invite and Confirm Attendance

The project team should designate a communications leader. This person will be responsible for communicating the progress of the project and managing any necessary outreach. The communications leader is also responsible for initial communications with the focus group participants. This includes initial contact, invitation to participate in a focus group, confirmation of their participation, and any reminder and follow up communication necessary.

For example, the Virginia project team's communication strategy during the early stages of the interview phase was three-tiered:

- Invitation email 3-4 weeks prior to interview date
- Confirmation email upon receipt of R.S.V.P.
- Final confirmation phone call 48 hours prior to interview date

By contacting participants on three different occasions, the team raised stakeholders' awareness of the planning process, engaged participants, and ensured representation from all stakeholder groups at each regional interview.

Additionally, as stakeholders raise questions about the strategic planning process, the communications leader serves as a consistent point of contact—ensuring continuity of and accountability for information provided and received.

Please see *Appendices O*, *P*, and *Q* for a sample invitation, letter of confirmation, and a participant database template.

In keeping with the transparency of the planning process, the project team should provide participants with a focus group report—detailed in Phase VI— following the interviews. This report is intended to capture information gleaned from interview discussions.

Clear and consistent progress reports and notification of upcoming events are an effective way to engage the practitioner community and regularly evaluate the validity of the project team's approach to the statewide planning effort.

While the development of a communication strategy requires a significant time and effort investment, effective communications is critical to the long-term success of the planning process.

Task: Enlist State Leadership to Invite Local Practitioners and Leaders into the Strategic Planning Process

Leverage the influence of state leaders to promote a locally-driven, strategic planning process. Ask them to support the planning process by writing a letter of endorsement and welcome that can be sent to focus group participants.

Please see *Appendix R* for a sample letter of endorsement.

Task: Secure Meeting Facility Logistics

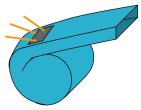
Prior to releasing invitations to and press releases about the dates and times of the focus group interviews, be sure to visit the conference facility where the focus group interviews will be conducted. Confirm directions and contact information for the site as well as any other necessary facility logistics.

Task: Distribute Press Releases to Area Newspapers, Trade, and Organization Publications and Organizations' Web sites

Use press releases to inform local and state stakeholder groups that the focus group interview process has launched. A press release can help a project team achieve the following:

- Maximize visibility of interoperability issues, and increase state level stakeholders' awareness of interoperability as a priority issue.
- Inform local stakeholders of the planning process' practitioner-driven, bottom-up approach.
- Recruit champions for the statewide effort and participants for later phases of the planning process.
- Make information about Federal interoperability efforts and resources available to local and state emergency responders.

Please see *Appendix S* for a sample press release.



Lesson Learned: Keep the state practitioner community informed of National interoperability efforts.

During the Virginia process, the team discovered that there was a general lack of knowledge and awareness across the state and local level emergency response community about the SAFECOM program. You may find it helpful to keep your project stakeholders informed on the SAFECOM and DM programs; including their mission, vision, and initiatives. Both programs are a good source of information on voice and data communications interoperability.

Task: Confirm Attendance and Determine the Need for Last Minute Recruiting

Two weeks before the focus group interviews, assess the balance of participation across groups in terms of disciplines represented. If participation is not balanced across disciplines, you may need to find additional participants beyond the state and National association leads.

The Virginia project team reached out to SAFECOM's practitioner governing body, the Executive Committee, for additional participant recommendations, and followed up with local emergency response referrals directly.

This section described how to recruit participants for focus group interviews. The next section will describe how to conduct those interviews.

Resources

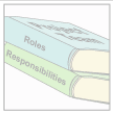
- Appendix M - Virginia's Process Document for Identifying Participants
- Appendix N - Phone Script Template for Contacting Local Agencies
- Appendix O - Sample Letter of Invitation
- Appendix P - Sample Letter of Confirmation

- Appendix Q - Participant Database Template
- Appendix R - Sample Letter for Endorsement
- Appendix S - Sample Press Release

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



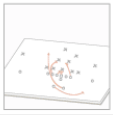
Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

12 PHASE VI- CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Focus group interviews provide an efficient and effective way to both capture diverse practitioner perspectives and identify individuals to include in the strategic planning session. A methodical approach to the delivery of these interviews ensures that interview questions and format is consistent across each region.

Timeline

Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews (Virginia Project – six weeks)

- The Virginia project team conducted six focus group interviews with approximately 20-25 people per interview, in 6 locations throughout the state at the rate of one per week. One to two days of preparation time was required prior to each session.

Outputs

- Agenda and Focus Group Materials
- Focus Group Report (post interview)
- Thank You Letters to Focus Group Participants

Key Considerations

- Enlist the support of a facilitation team to increase the sponsor's ability to actively listen and network with the emergency response community in attendance.
- A facilitation team, made up of the members of the core project team, can standardize the approach to data collection and serve as a neutral party in collecting perspectives about politically sensitive issues and criticism of current systems in place.

Tasks

- Confirm Expectation with the Conference Facilities.
- Research Potential Divisive or Controversial Issues for Each Regional Focus Group.
- Ask Focus Group Participants to Prepare a List of Their Region's Current Capacities and Challenges.
- Enlist an Unbiased Team of Facilitators to Conduct the Focus Group Interviews.
- Reference Best Practices in Conducting Focus Group Interviews.
- Clarify the Purpose and Outcomes of the Focus Group Interview.
- Create Graphics and Visual Displays to Facilitate the Interview Process.
- Visually Capture the Insights and Perspectives of the Participants.
- Listen for Patterns and Trends Across Regions.
- Anticipate the Consequences of Your Public Relations Efforts and the Growing Awareness of the Strategic Planning Effort.
- Thank Participants.

Task: Confirm Expectations with the Conference Facilities
Confirm the availability of all necessary equipment, catering services, and furniture at the conference facility where the focus groups will be held.

Task: Research Potential Hot Issues for Each Regional Focus Group
Review local papers and trade journals to gain an understanding of interoperability issues specific to each region. Knowledge of regional issues will contribute to focus group interviews and will allow you to identify topics that are particularly important to the local communities. Understanding the media's perspective on local issues will enable the facilitation team to identify sensitive topic areas and discuss these topics with focus group participants.

Task: Ask Focus Group Participants to Prepare a List of Their Region's Current Capacities and Challenges
Before the participants attend the focus group interviews, ask them to develop and bring with them a list of their region's current voice and data communications interoperability capacities and challenges. Sharing this information early in the SCIP process will provide valuable, first-hand information on interoperability progress, and concerns of which state leadership should be aware. It will also demonstrate to stakeholders that their input is important and will be taken into consideration during the planning process.

Task: Enlist an Unbiased Team of Facilitators to Conduct the Focus Group Interviews
The integrity of the information captured in the interviews is contingent upon the consistency of the process used to manage the focus group interviews. It can be challenging to conduct interviews across an entire state, gather diverse perspectives, and not become overwhelmed by the complexity of interoperability issues. Managing a discussion between stakeholders who are passionate about improving interoperability requires focus and the ability to manage potential disagreements. An impartial facilitator will encourage full participation and open discussions—allowing strong opinions and disagreement to surface.

Use of professional facilitators to conduct the focus group interviews is recommended. This will enable any state representatives to listen to each regional interview in the context of the overall planning process and strategic planning session. State representatives should track cross-regional themes, group dynamics, regional leaders, and serve as an advocate for the local emergency response community, responsible for carrying their message to state leadership and policymakers.

Task: Reference Best Practices in Conducting Focus Group Interviews
Create an environment that encourages collaboration and participation. The manner in which tables and chairs are arranged in the conference space and the

format in which insights are captured can influence participation and the quality and quantity of information captured.

Please see *Appendix T* for strategies for facilitated sessions.

Task: Clarify the Purpose and Outcomes of the Focus Group Interview

At the beginning of the focus group interview session, review the session purpose and outcomes with the participants. Discuss how the session fits into the overall statewide planning process. Focus group interviews are intended to capture local feedback on communications interoperability. Statewide perspectives from emergency responders—police, fire, EMS, public health, local and state agencies—on near-term ways to improve interoperability will inform the strategic planning session. Outcomes of the focus group interviews include:

- Record of local emergency responder perspectives on communications interoperability
- Shared understanding of communications interoperability issues specific to each region of the state
- Education and shared awareness of communications interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- Record of emergency responder commonalities and differences with regards to communications interoperability

In addition, it is essential to establish a common understanding of the importance of interoperability with the focus group participants from the beginning. Jurisdictions throughout the state will have varying opinions on the importance of communications interoperability and the level of attention it warrants. Communicating the importance of interoperability across the state helps establish a common understanding for all project stakeholders and sets the tone for discussions in the focus group interviews. Additionally, establishing this understanding will assist the process in later phases by creating awareness of the difference in technical and operational cultures among the stakeholders.

Task: Create Graphics and Visual Displays to Facilitate the Interview Process

Graphics can help control the scope of the conversation. For example, the Virginia team used a graphic (Figure 5 to follow) to frame the conversations in the day-long focus group interview. It helped focus conversation around six interoperability issues—funding, spectrum, technology, coordination, training, and operational structure—and the three dimensions of government operating within the Commonwealth of Virginia: local, state, and Federal.

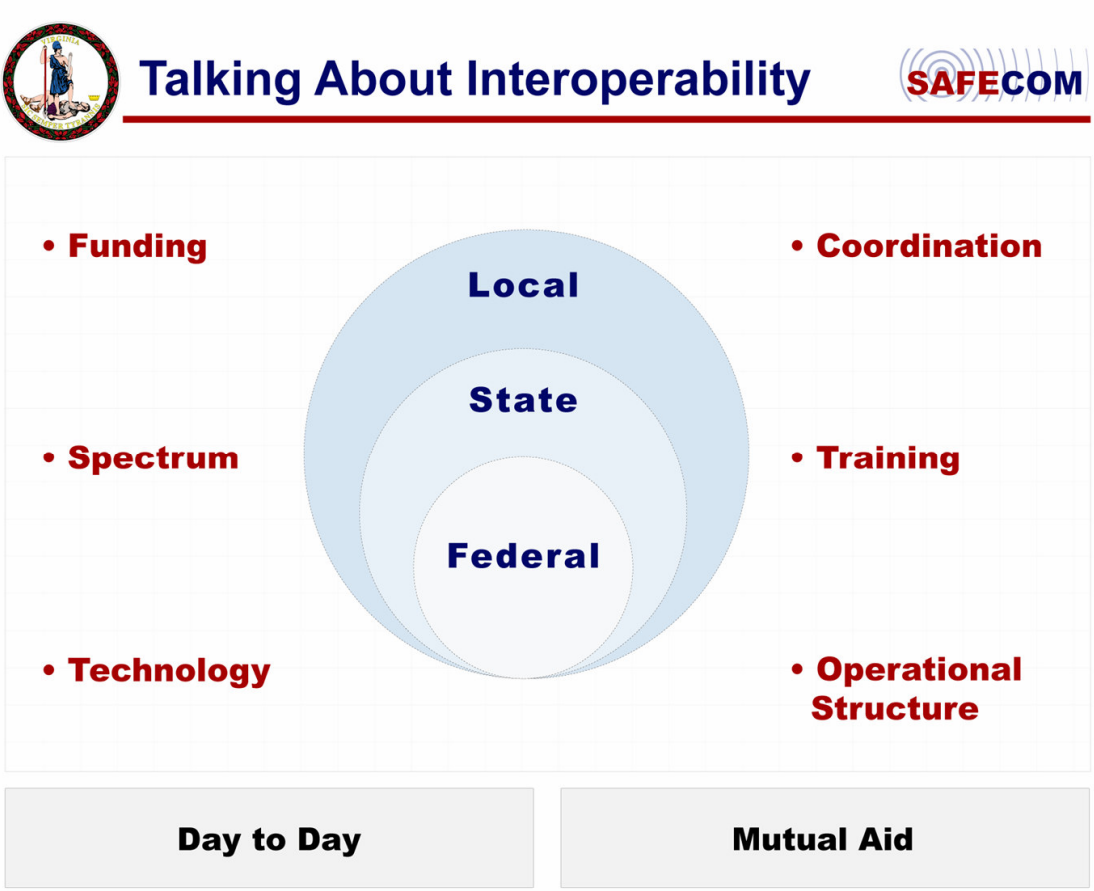


Figure 5: Talking About Interoperability

The critical interoperability factors depicted by the Interoperability Continuum (see Section 3), are another option for framing focus group discussions. During the Kentucky and Nevada processes a similar graphic to the one above was used as underlying themes for focus group discussions as well as the five critical elements of the Continuum and political considerations.

Once the scope of the conversation is established and agreed upon, the interviewees address five core questions:

- How would you describe the existing level of voice and data communications interoperability in the state?
- Why do we need to change the current state, and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want the state's future system for voice and data communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter when working toward this future system?
- What recommendations do we have to move from our current system to our future system?

These questions drive strategic planning; their relation to each other can be clarified by leveraging the use of a *Gameboard* depicted in the graphic below. As interview discussions are completed, the facilitator can return to the graphic to remind the group of the discussion's direction.

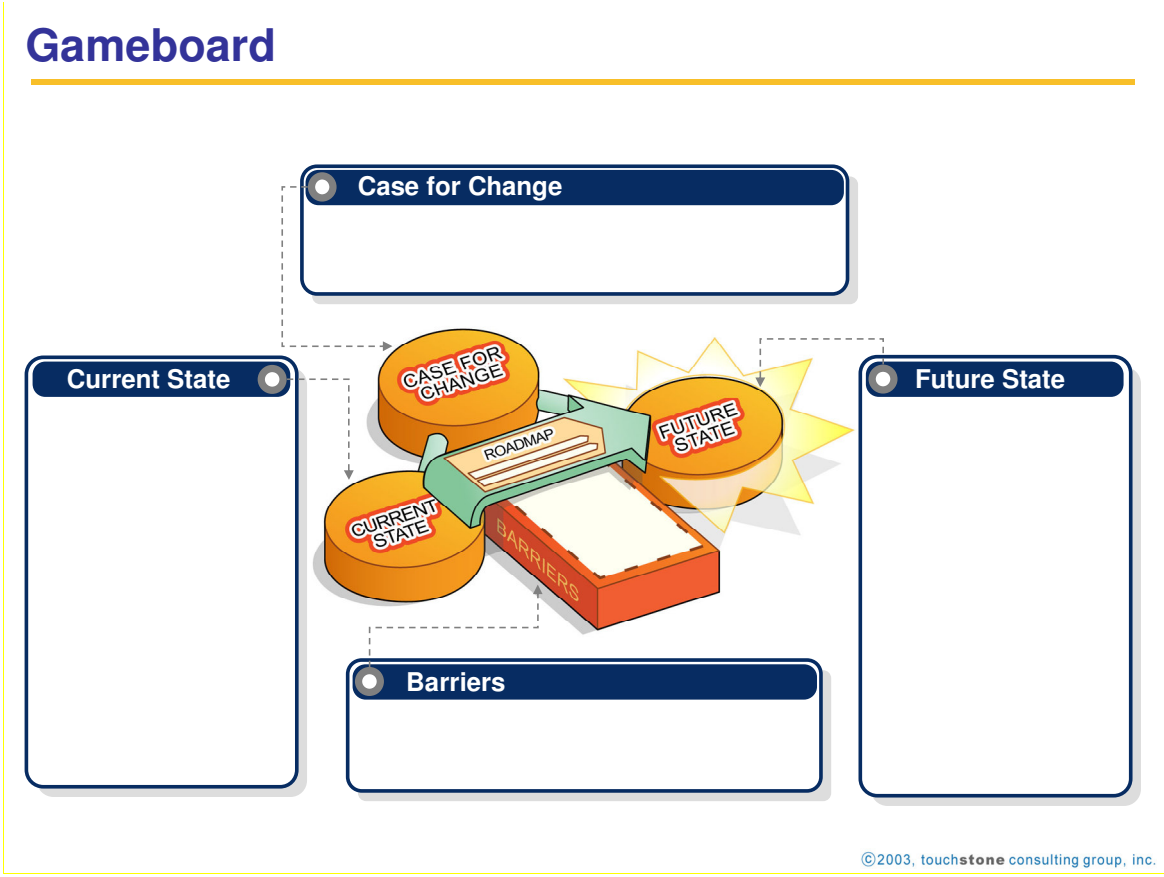


Figure 6: Strategic Plan Gameboard

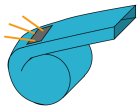
This graphic can be presented as a large poster on the wall of the conference room and can serve as the day's agenda.

Task: Visually Capture the Insights and Perspectives of the Participants
Conversations should be captured on a computer and displayed in real-time to the entire group for validation. In Virginia, Kentucky, and Nevada, discussion information was captured using a dialogue mapping application called Compendium. Throughout the process, participants commented on the value this tool provided in managing and affirming the discussions (Please see Appendix X of this guide for a portion of the dialog map created in one of the Virginia focus groups appears).

Please see *Appendix U* for more information on this mapping technique called Compendium.

These maps also serve as the database for comments captured across the state and directly feed into the focus group reports distributed after each focus group interview.

Please see *Appendix V* for a link to sample focus group report.



Lesson Learned: It may be helpful to bring a template of the focus group report to the actual interview session so that during the session some sections of the report can be completed immediately.

Task: Listen for Patterns and Trends across Regions

It is important to facilitate discussions aimed at addressing the key issues and concerns of the participants. During each focus group interview session, identify patterns or trends in participants' responses. Discussion topics to consider include:

- Expressed needs of each region
- Anecdotes capturing the implications of the lack of communications interoperability
- Areas of disagreement across agencies or jurisdictions
- Similarities across stakeholder groups
- Regions of the state that have interoperable communications and to what extent
- How the local practitioner perspectives on communications interoperability are different than the state and county government understanding of the issue

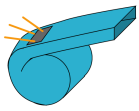
Details about analyzing the results for the final strategic planning session are found in Phase VII.

Task: Scan Focus Group for Key Practitioners Who Can Represent Each Region at the Final Strategic Planning Session

The final strategic planning session needs to include significant cross-state representation. When attending the focus group interviews, identify local practitioners who are able to effectively communicate their region's needs across all agencies; who will actively support the implementation and adoption of the strategic initiatives; and who will confirm the accuracy and validity of the data

presented to the state leadership. The demographic of the strategic planning session differs from the focus groups in that the final session needs to include a significant amount of cross-state representation. The presence of these participants is critical to obtaining shared agreement on the key initiatives that will be undertaken to improve communications interoperability.

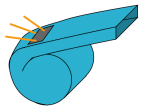
In Kentucky, every member of the focus group interview sessions was invited to the strategic planning session. This helped ensure significant cross-state representation. This may not be possible in every state due to a significant increase in the number of strategic planning session participants.



Lesson Learned: If all focus group interview participants are encouraged to attend the strategic planning session, be sure the strategic planning session is facilitated by a team of experienced facilitators with expertise in handling large group strategic sessions.

Task: Anticipate the Consequences of Your Public Relations Efforts and the Growing Awareness of the Strategic Planning Effort

As the regional focus group interviews are completed, the demand for information and planning updates will increase. The state interoperability Web site suggested in Phase I is a perfect tool to inform stakeholders about the planning process. Encourage focus group participants to visit the Web site to learn more about current efforts in the state and available resources at the Federal level. After completing the final focus group interview, post all reports on the site.



Lesson Learned: The interoperability project Web site can support the project team by maintaining communication across the state while keeping focus group interviews and regional travel on track.

An increase in requests for information may arrive due to the marketing of the focus group interviews. Assign someone at the state's central office of interoperability to frequently update the Web site so that it provides people with the most recent and accurate information on the project. This will eliminate the problem of overwhelming a single individual on the project team with responding to these inquiries. One option is to assign responsibility for Web site updates to an intern from a local university.

Task: Thank Participants

Close the focus group process with a thank you note to each participant, acknowledging their effort and indicating the next steps toward completing the planning process. Maintain open lines of communication between the project team and the stakeholders, as they will become the champions of initiatives that are identified at the strategic planning session.

Please see *Appendix W* for a sample thank you letter.

Phase VI entails conducting the focus group interviews to gather information for the final project: the state strategic plan. The remaining phases will help guide the final strategic planning session that will create initiatives to begin the strategic plan.

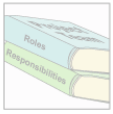
Resources

- Appendix T - Strategies for Facilitated Sessions
- Appendix U - Introduction to Compendium - Web Links
- Appendix V - Web link to Sample Focus Group Report
- Appendix W - Sample Thank You Letter

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

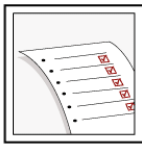
Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

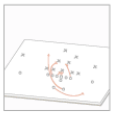
Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)



Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

13 PHASE VII- ANALYZE DATA AND PREPARE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

Data collected during the focus group interviews must be compiled and assessed to determine local practitioners' collective voice on issues pertaining to voice and data communications interoperability. The collective perspectives will fuel recommendations for the development of the statewide strategic plan.

Timeline
Two-three weeks

Outputs
- Results of data analysis and summary

Key Considerations
- Analyze data collected during the focus group interviews to determine the local practitioners' collective voice on issues pertaining to communications interoperability.
- Identify patterns and themes in the data and organize in a manageable form that can be understood by attendees at the strategic planning session.
- Use a dialog mapping tool called Compendium, as the Virginia project team did, to capture data during focus group interviews and then extract the data for analysis and organization.

Tasks
- Organize and Edit Focus Group Interview Comments.
- Match Interview Comments with Themes.
- Create a Master Document for Each Interview Question.
- Identify Patterns and Core Issues within Each Subject Area.
- Define the Top 10 Comments for all Themes.
- Review the Findings and Confirm the Results of Analysis.
- Predict the Top Initiatives to be Discussed at the Strategic Planning Session.

Please see *Appendix X* for an example of a complete Compendium map.

Task: Organize and Edit Focus Group Interview Comments
Re-examine the perspectives and recommendations captured from each focus group interview to check for grammatical errors and determine whether the comments can stand on their own or if the comments require explanation. The regional comments should be easily understood by individuals across the state.

Task: Match Interview Comments with Themes
(See Task: Create Graphics and Visual Displays to Facilitate the Interview Process in Phase VI.)

Review the compiled data related to the five interview questions defined in Phase V and determine which comments can be grouped into the themes defined in Phase VI. Organizing the information by both interview question and themes creates an understandable and manageable format at the strategic planning session.

Task: Create a Master Document for Each Interview Question
Use the themes to create a master document for each interview question. This will result in local or regional data organized at the state level, first by interview question and second by theme.

Figure 7, seen below, is an excerpt from the cumulative comments gathered during an inquiry into the current state.

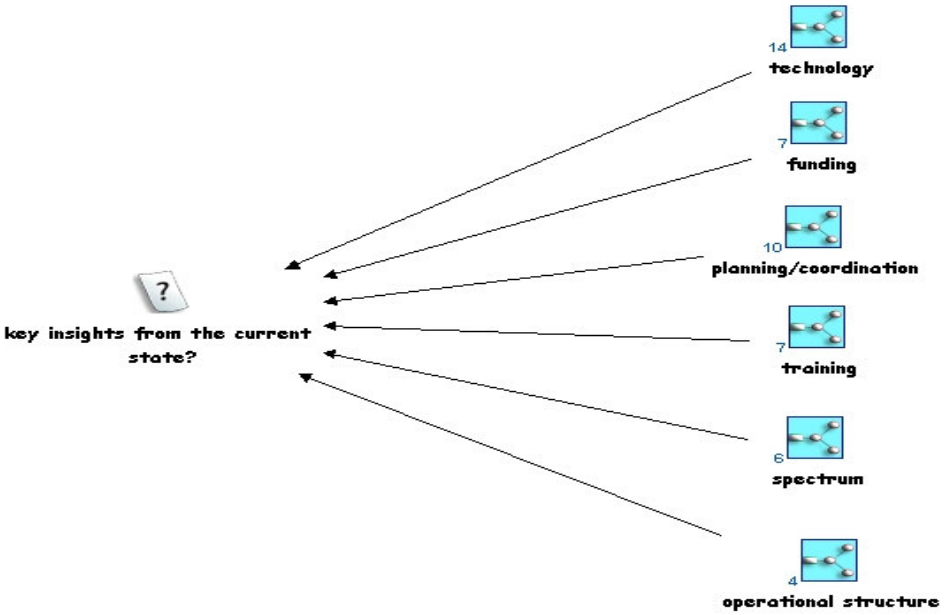


Figure 7: Current State Compendium Map

Task: Identify Patterns and Core Issues within Each Subject Area
Determine the root causes behind the issues plaguing communications interoperability. See Figure 8 for a sample of the patterns found in the current state in during the Virginia process.

The figure below is an excerpt from an inquiry into the current state. It is focused on the topic of planning and coordination in the current state.

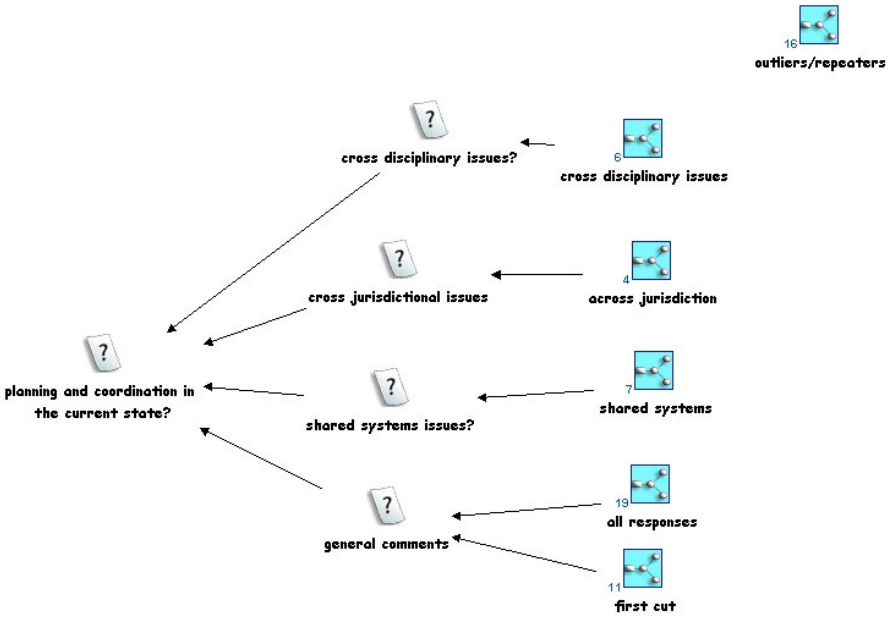
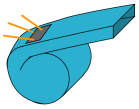


Figure 8: Current State Pattern Compendium Map



Lesson Learned: Further analysis of the data may be necessary to reach the level of specificity needed to develop strategic initiatives, but be cautious. Too much re-packaging of the locally-collected data can result in a collection of comments that are unrecognizable to the practitioners and fail to accurately depict the issues that are specific and critical to the location.

Task: Define the Top 10 Comments for all Themes

Ideally, the participants in the strategic planning session will review the data collected across the state, understand and validate the local perspectives, and determine the best route forward to achieve statewide communications interoperability. To achieve these ends, participants must be presented with the most critical issues facing the local practitioner communities in an accurate, concise, and understandable way. Consolidate the comments into a top 10 list to help identify issue trends across all regions of the state. These “hot topics” will, in turn, drive the strategic initiatives defined later in the strategic planning session.

Figure 9, seen below, is an excerpt from the case for change arguments gathered across Virginia.

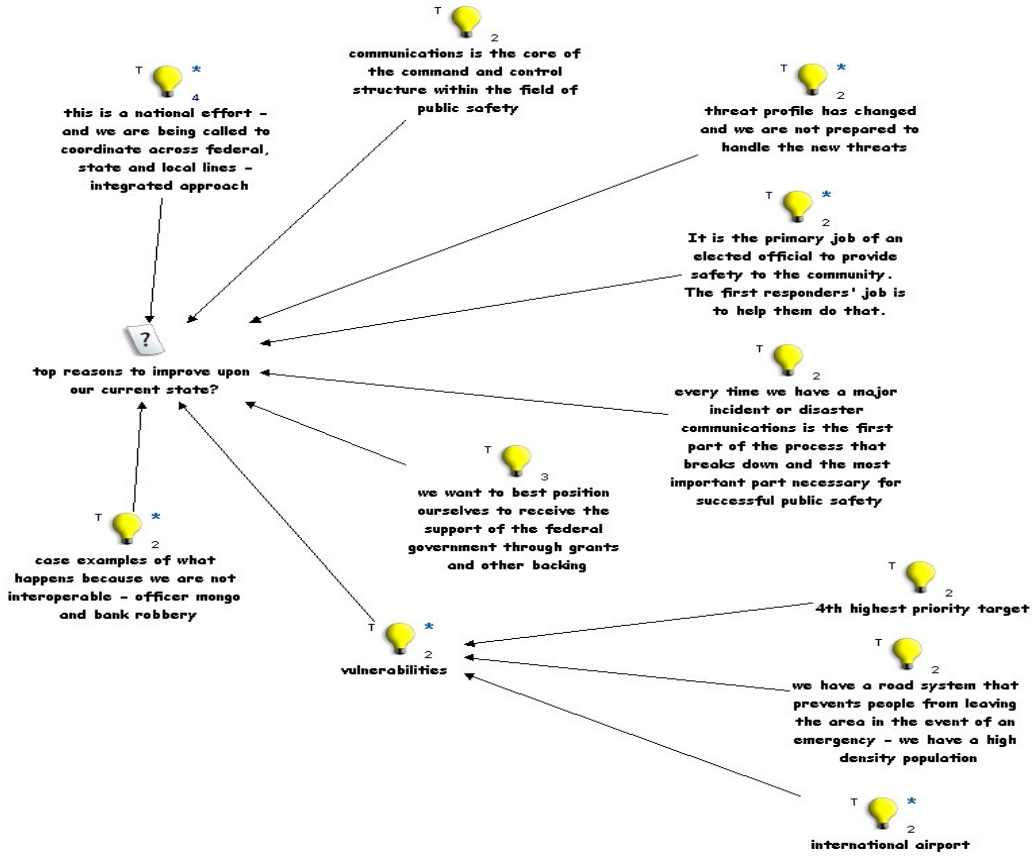


Figure 9: Case for Change Compendium Map

Lesson Learned: Identifying needs that are common to all regions can influence policy and decision makers in determining what to prioritize in addressing communications interoperability. The hot topics found in Virginia were:

- **Establish Regional Interoperability Communication Coordinators.**
- **Establish a unified code/plain text to complete seamless interoperability between all disciplines.**
- **Develop one mobile device/one band/one programmable radio.**
- **Implement a communications plan to educate emergency responders on existing programs and ensure their participation in the creation of new programs.**

Task: Review the Findings and Confirm the Results of Analysis
Review the results of the data analysis with the project team to confirm that it is valid and maintains the accuracy and integrity of the original data. Modify the analysis as necessary to prepare for the presentation to the strategic planning participants.

Task: Predict the Top Initiatives to be Discussed at the Strategic Planning Session
Anticipate what strategic planning participants will identify as key initiatives. Anticipating priorities will assist the interoperability coordinator in preparing information on the support and fiscal backing required to successfully advance each initiative.

This phase includes the steps necessary to analyze the data from the focus group interviews. This analysis must be thoughtful and undertaken with care to preserve the locally-driven approach of the planning process.

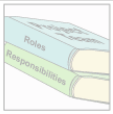
Resources

- Appendix X - Compendium Map

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



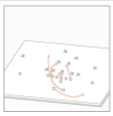
Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

14 PHASE VIII- PREPARE AND CONDUCT STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

The strategic planning session brings together key decision and policymakers who can enable and steer the successful adoption and implementation of emergency response communications interoperability initiatives. The session participants will review the data analysis from the focus groups, and will ultimately confirm initiatives that will immediately and directly impact communications interoperability across jurisdictions and agencies.

Timeline

One week preparation time, approx three-four weeks after the final focus group interview. The strategic planning session is a one-day session.

Note: It is necessary to identify a location for the strategic planning session more than a week in advance of the actual session. It is recommended this be done when selecting locations for the focus group interview sessions.

Outputs

- Strategic planning session report
- Comments and perspectives gathered on the interview data presented to the session participants

Key Considerations

- The strategic planning session brings together key decision and policymakers who can ensure the successful adoption and implementation of the initiatives.
- This session mirrors the focus group interviews, but instead of collecting data, the purpose is to share the data collected from the local first responders during the focus group interviews and make recommendations.
- The session participants will review the data analysis and ultimately confirm initiatives that will immediately and directly impact communications interoperability across jurisdictions and agencies.
- The outcome of the strategic planning session is the backbone for the statewide strategic plan for communications interoperability.

Tasks

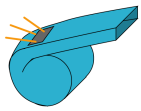
- Select Participants.
- Meet with Policy Makers and Elected Officials Who Will Not Attend the Strategic Planning Session.
- Confirm the Logistics for Preparation and Delivery of the Strategic Planning Session.
- Validate and Confirm Results from the Statewide Focus Group Interviews.
- Confirm and Prioritize Strategic Initiatives.

Task: Select Participants

The strategic planning session requires high-level, key stakeholder participation to ensure buy-in for and implementation of final recommendations. When selecting participants, look to the state and National level emergency response associations for key decision makers and talk to policymakers and members of the state government who participated in the informational interview phase. Consider individuals in existing governance structures that oversee emergency responders and deal directly with communications efforts. These individuals may become involved with the implementation process of the strategic plan. Their involvement in the strategic planning process may create a sense of ownership of the plan on their behalf. Individuals involved in defining and creating the strategic plan are more likely to promote and implement the plan, which will improve the likelihood of success.

During the strategic planning session there is a shift in the process, with focus shifting from planning to implementation. To support this shift, state representation at the session should slightly outnumber representation from the local practitioner community; funding and political support must exist at the state level in order for improvements to be made at the local level, with all regions functioning as a collaborative whole.

Please see *Appendix Y* for a sample letter of invitation: strategic planning session.



Lesson Learned: Due to the differences between the design and purpose of the final stragetic planning session as compared to the focus group interviews, a higher number of attendees will not negatively impact the meeting's effectiveness. For example, recruiting efforts in Virginia resulted in approximately 50 attendees at the final strategic planning session. In Kentucky, the final session had closer to 80 participants.

Please see *Appendix Z* for a list of attending organizations.

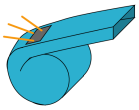
Task: Meet with Policymakers and Elected Officials who will not Attend the Strategic Planning Session

Market the collaborative effort being undertaken to improve statewide communications interoperability by networking with policymakers who cannot attend the strategic planning session. Build relationships across political parties and constituent groups to help secure and keep them informed about all ongoing efforts.

Task: Confirm the Logistics for Preparation and Delivery of the Strategic Planning Session

The timeframe for distributing invitations and confirming arrangements for the strategic planning session is the same as that for the focus group interviews. During the session, however, allot additional time for each of the five key conversations, i.e., current state, future state, case for change, barriers, and strategic initiatives, so that participants can review and process the consolidated data from the focus group interviews. The optimal outcomes of the strategic planning session are for an ever-increasing stakeholder group to fully comprehend communications interoperability issues, and to endorse initiatives intended to address those issues.

Please see *Appendix T* for strategies for facilitated sessions to review best practices for meeting facilitation.



Lesson Learned: Invite a high-ranking elected state official to deliver a keynote address during lunch at the strategic planning session. The official's participation will increase confidence across the emergency response community that the state wants to take action to improve communications interoperability. In Virginia, the Deputy Secretary of Public Safety delivered the opening remarks to the strategic planning session participants. In Kentucky, the Director of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security spoke as well as a representative from the Governor's office.

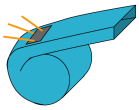
Please see *Phase VII* for a sample dialogue map used to present results of focus group interviews.

Task: Validate and Confirm Results from the Statewide Focus Group Interviews

Walk the participants through the conclusions gleaned from the focus group interviews and subsequent analysis of the data. Consolidated comments from each core interview question should be presented to the entire group; no new comments will be requested in the strategic planning session. Instead, participants should comment on and validate the accuracy and completeness of the information organized by interview question and theme. Be prepared to supply earlier versions of the data and be flexible in re-inserting comments left out during the analysis process and re-prioritizing the result. A crucial outcome of the session is the specific participant reaction to the analysis. *The desired outcome is for the participants to own and understand the results of the focus group interviews.* Participant buy-in of the data's validity facilitates the last and most important conversation of the day: naming strategic initiatives.

Task: Confirm and Prioritize Strategic Initiatives

One of the last conversations of the day involves the selection and prioritization of the state's top three short-term and long-term initiatives for improving communications interoperability. Facilitation of this conversation includes firm prioritization techniques and ensuring that all critical elements of the Interoperability Continuum are considered during the prioritization effort. The participants may have a difficult time identifying the top three initiatives, but failing to prioritize will negatively impact the success of the planning process. Too many initiatives will overwhelm those state officials accountable for implementation, and may dilute funding streams identified and/or secured to support communications initiatives. Collective agreement can build momentum toward driving a strategic plan that is tangible, realistic, and manageable.



Lesson Learned: An interoperability program should include both short- and long-term solutions. Early successes can help motivate regions to tackle more time-consuming and difficult challenges. It is critical, however, that short-term solutions not inappropriately drive the planning process, but function in support of longer-term improvements.

Please see *Appendix AA* for a Web link to the strategic planning session report.

You should consider this the conclusion to the interview process; but more importantly, it is the beginning of the implementation phase.

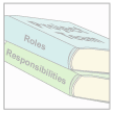
Resources

- Appendix Y - Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session
- Appendix Z - List of Attending Organizations
- Appendix AA - Web link to Strategic Planning Session Report

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
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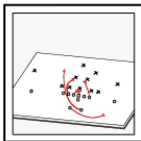


Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: at a minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

15 PHASE IX- DEVELOP STATEWIDE COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The statewide strategic plan will leverage the technical expertise of the project team, the results of the focus group interviews, and the output of the strategic planning session. The design of the strategic plan will depend on the structural and style preferences of the statewide plan author. The SAFECOM and DM programs have created the "Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook" which provides a recommended outline for statewide plans. The document is available at the SAFECOM Web site at www.safecomprogram.gov. The outline can be used as-is or can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the state. It is also recommended that you review the characteristics of other statewide plans that have been well-received.

Timeline
Minimum of three to six months from final strategic planning session

Outputs
- Strategic Plan for Statewide Interoperability
- Executive Committee Roster

Key Considerations
- The design of the strategic plan will depend on the structural and style characteristics present in other statewide plans that have been well-received and enabled implementation.
- Realize the process is challenging. The questions listed below can help frame the thinking of those responsible for converting the strategic planning session results into a comprehensive, statewide plan for improving voice and data interoperable communications.
    - How will the integrity and authenticity of the local recommendations be preserved during the writing process?
    - What concrete, tangible objectives best support the goals?
    - What details should be included in the plan that will clarify the extent to which resources are needed in order for implementation to occur?
    - Will the focus group participants be able to relate to specific goals or objectives in the plan that arose from their input during the interview process?
    - How will success be measured?

Tasks
- Determine the Plan Structure and Function.
- Establish Roles and Responsibilities for Writing and Document and Content Management.
- Design the Strategic Plan Key Components.
- Identify "Official" Reviewers.

- Publish the Strategic Plan.
- Create a Project Plan for Implementing the Initiatives in the Strategic Plan.
- Refine Governance: Complete Roster for the Proposed State Interoperability Executive Committee Modeled After the SAFECOM Federal Governance Model.

Task: Determine the Plan Structure and Function

The strategic plan should include a vision for the future, goals to support the vision, initiatives that will achieve the goals, and a performance measure for each initiative with a realistic timeframe and target metric. The strategic plan should include a proposed organizational and leadership structure focused on managing the initiatives as well as next steps for putting that structure into place.

Lesson Learned: Establish a strategic plan document review process that includes key stakeholders at both the state and local levels to maintain the collaborative approach; incorporate all perspectives as fully as possible.

Task: Establish Roles and Responsibilities for Writing and Document Management

Determine and agree to the roles, responsibilities, level of involvement, and schedules for each project team member during the writing process. The goal of this task is to help the team establish and meet timelines, avoid duplication of efforts, and establish accountability. There may also be a need for a project progress tracking system and interim work products may need to be assigned. It is also helpful to create a system for version control of the document, which will ensure the most current version has been updated by all assigned to it.

Lesson Learned: While establishing the roles and responsibilities during the writing phase, consider who will be the primary point of contact for the public and members of the state and local stakeholder groups. This point of contact should be able to focus on building networks and relationships and may be better suited to a reviewer role rather than one who is responsible for plan content development.

Task: Design the Strategic Plan Key Components

Key components of a strategic plan include: vision, current and future states, strategic goals, objectives, initiatives, how the work will be accomplished and by whom, and the critical next steps.

Please see *Appendix AB* for a Web link to strategic plans for statewide communications interoperability.

Task: Identify "Official" Reviewers

Because this plan will impact such a large and diverse portion of the state's population, many individuals may want to review the document. Gathering feedback is a critical part of the process, as is controlling the amount of feedback. Clarify who will have authority to suggest changes to the document and how many draft versions of the document you plan to produce.

Task: Publish the Strategic Plan

Efforts that fall under the publishing task include, but are not limited to: incorporating last-minute upgrades and edits, finalizing the look and feel of the document, e.g., graphics, appendices, and determining what medium will make the plan accessible to stakeholders, e.g., hard copy, PDF, CD. Many of these details will be influenced by the level of formality expected from the plan's primary audience.

Task: Create a Project Plan for Implementing the Initiatives in the Strategic Plan

The project plan breaks down initiatives into tasks, maps, resources, and expected timeframes for completion. The project plan can also communicate how financial resources should be devoted to each phase of the implementation effort. Finally, the plan should include communications and outreach activities that inform the stakeholders on the final outcomes of the initiatives.

Task: Refine Governance: Complete Roster for the Proposed State Interoperability Executive Committee Modeled After the SAFECOM Federal Governance Model

Whether or not your state has existing governance bodies will depend on how you will proceed in integrating the SAFECOM and DM program principles of governance into your state's current approach. Supporting implementation of the initiatives in the strategic plan requires a centralized governing body that represents the emergency response community's functions and utilizes the statewide network established during Phase V.

When refining your governance structure, consider how to involve local practitioners in leadership and decision-making processes. A locally-driven approach may take several forms.

Please see *Appendix AC* for more information about the SAFECOM governance structure and the DM Practitioner Steering Group (PSG).

The following guiding principles have been used in the past for project governing bodies:

- The majority of the governing body's membership must be from local level (cities and/or counties) emergency response organizations.
- The governing body will have an active role in making recommendations to the governor regarding the state's interoperability direction.
- The governing body should oversee the entire process of the strategic plan's implementation.

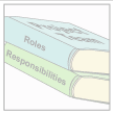
Resources

- Appendix AB - Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability, Web link and Core Structural Layout Document
- Appendix AC - SAFECOM Governance and DM Practitioner Steering Group Information

Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)

Phase II- Gather Information
(Timeline: 6 weeks total, many tasks can be completed concurrently)

Phase III- Create Project Plan and Roadmap
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



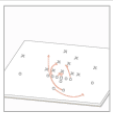
Phase IV- Identify Roles and Responsibilities- Project Team
(Timeline: 2 weeks)

Phase V- Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation
(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)

Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)

Phase VII- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)

Phase VIII- Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session
(Timeline: 1 week preparation time, approximately 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session)



Phase IX- Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan
(Timeline: Minimum 3-6 months from final strategic planning session)

Phase X- Guidelines for First 90 Days of Implementation

16 PHASE X- GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST 90 DAYS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The SCIP Methodology offers a step-by-step guide to a strategic planning process, up to and including the writing of a strategic plan. As shared in Phase IX, the strategic planning session and the writing of the strategic plan mark the start of the implementation process. The purpose of this section is to provide preliminary guidelines for putting the strategic plan into action.

Task: Prioritize Initiatives

The strategic planning session will generate three to five initiatives. As the strategic plan is structured and fully developed, a number of initiatives may be better stated as objectives or goals. Target a maximum of three critical short-term initiatives for initial implementation. If too many initiatives are undertaken at once, the sponsors and stakeholders may feel overwhelmed—causing a breakdown across the network built during the strategic planning process. Consider which initiatives are most feasible to complete, will have the most impact, and can deliver visible results within 90 days. If the initiatives are poorly chosen and not related to the overall strategy and long-term vision, there may be little progress towards the implementation of the strategic plan.

Task: Develop a Comprehensive Project Plan for Implementation

After prioritizing the initiatives, develop a detailed project plan to define the tasks, level of effort, dependencies, milestones, and time boundaries for the top three initiatives. The plan will help guide the state leadership when enlisting support from individuals and organizations. Action teams and representative organizations can be chartered to complete tasks in a self-directed manner. The local community that participated in creating the plan can now share accountability for various aspects of its implementation.

- **Risk:**
  - Without adequate planning and coordination, the implementation can become inefficient and ineffective.

Task: Funding

Accurate mapping of the project plan can help to secure funding for implementation. Informational interviewing and statewide networking during Phase I revealed the availability of funding at the state and Federal levels. Use that information to draft a budget that correlates directly to each initiative in the plan. Also, take into consideration how far into the future the funding will extend. Meet with those responsible for addressing emergency response as part of their budgetary responsibility to obtain more detail on how the funds will be allocated. Present evidence of the consequences faced if the initiatives are not addressed.

- **Risk:**
  - Lack of financial commitment from the state can severely hamper the long- and short-term success of each initiative.

Task: Leverage Governing Bodies

The governance approach recommended in this methodology assumes that leadership for improving voice and data communications interoperability must involve the local practitioner community. A governance team that includes representatives from local communities will help support real, sustainable change. Leverage this group of individuals as subject matter experts and key advisors.

Regular communication was emphasized during the strategic planning process and should continue to be a high priority as implementation begins. Collaboration among those involved in implementation from across the state and local communities depends on a clear and intentional communication plan.

Generate a list of ways to communicate with stakeholders, such as electronic correspondence, mail, face-to-face meetings, or regular conference calls. Regular communications will help to mitigate risk and inform stakeholders of progress in implementing the strategic plan.

- **Risks:**
  - During an implementation effort, failure to meet regularly to monitor initiatives, progress, and make adjustments can result in sub-optimal team work and very little follow-through.
  - Little visible progress leads to frustration, resistance, and barriers.
  - Quick successes are not aggressively pursued, achieved, or communicated.

Appendix

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 76

PHASE I – ESTABLISH KEY RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNDING – RESOURCES 77

Appendix A: Web link to SAFECOM Grant Guidance 78

PHASE II – GATHER INFORMATION – RESOURCES 79

Appendix B: Web link to Interoperability Technology Today 80
Appendix C: Web link to SAFECOM Program 81
Appendix D: Web ink to DM DisasterHelp.gov Website 82
Appendix E: State Profile Template 83
Appendix F: A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles 85

PHASE III – CREATE PROJECT PLAN AND ROADMAP – RESOURCES 90

Appendix G: Roadmap 91
Appendix H: Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning 94

PHASE IV – IDENTIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – RESOURCES 96

Appendix I: Kickoff Meeting Template 97
Appendix J: Role Clarification Exercise 99
Appendix K: Example Weekly Status Report 101
Appendix L: Sample Communications Plan 103

PHASE V – RECRUIT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND MEETING PREPARATION – RESOURCES 107

Appendix M: Virginia Process Document for Identifying Participants 108
Appendix N: Phone Script Template 110
Appendix O: Sample Letter of Invitation 112
Appendix P: Sample Letter of Confirmation 114
Appendix Q: Participant Database Template 117
Appendix R: Sample Letter of Endorsement 118
Appendix S: Sample Press Release 120

PHASE VI – CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS – RESOURCES 122

Appendix T: Strategies for Facilitated Sessions 123
Appendix U: Introduction to Compendium Web links 126
Appendix V: Web link to Sample Focus Group Report 127
Appendix W: Sample Thank You Letter 128

PHASE VII – ANALYZE DATA AND PREPARE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION – RESOURCES 129

Appendix X: Compendium Map 130

PHASE VIII – PREPARE AND CONDUCT STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION – RESOURCES 131

Appendix Y: Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session 132
Appendix Z: List of Attending Organizations 134
Appendix AA: Web link to Strategic Planning Session Report 135

PHASE IX – DEVELOP STATEWIDE COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN – RESOURCES 136

Appendix AB: Web link to Strategic Plans for Statewide Communications Interoperability 137
Appendix AC: SAFECOM Governance and DM Practitioner Steering Group Information 138

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES 145

GLOSSARY OF TERMS 146

Introduction

These appendices are intended to capture the essential tools, templates, and resources mentioned throughout the SCIP Methodology v2.0 in a consolidated and organized manner. The documents in these appendices have been organized according to the chronological order in which they were presented earlier. These resources are provided as reference tools that will help achieve the suggested deliverables. In most instances, deliverables resulting from the planning process will be specific to your state, so examples are provided a starting point or building block from which to begin the creation of your final deliverable. States are encouraged to leverage and modify these tools to best suit their specific needs.

The appendix lists suggested deliverables to complete during each phase of the SCIP Methodology. The deliverables serve as guidance material on several levels: MOUs; MOAs; contracts; research documentation; focus group interview reporting; and organizational analysis. The deliverables are merely the *suggested* outcome from each phase – feel free to track and produce the resulting information in a manner that is most appropriate and productive for your specific requirements.

Phase I – Establish Key Relationships and Funding – Resources

Phase 1 emphasizes the importance of establishing key relationships and funding. These relationships will provide the support necessary to implement a statewide voice and data communications solution and the ability to identify and secure the funding needed for the planning process. The item below has been provided to assist with the process of identifying necessary funding for your interoperability effort.

- ***Web link to SAFECOM Grant Guidance*** – The link in Appendix A directs you to the SAFECOM Grant Guidance and is a starting point for locating available funding for your state's interoperability strategic planning process.

Appendix A: Web link to SAFECOM Grant Guidance

(click here to return to document)

The following Web link provides access to the SAFECOM Grant Guidance referenced in Phase 1 of the methodology. This resource is recommended as a starting point for helping you locate funding availability in your area. The full details of the information can be found at the Web link provided below.

Web link to SAFECOM Grant Guidance:
http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/grant/default.htm

Phase II – Gather Information – Resources

Phase II of the SCIP Methodology v2.0 provides guidance for gathering information and conducting research early in the interoperability strategic planning process. The items listed below have been included in this section for quick reference:

- ***Web link to Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts Across the Country*** – This Web link leads to a compilation and analysis of research on current interoperability in different states across the Nation.

- ***Web link to SAFECOM Program*** – This Web link is provided as a resource for obtaining more information on the SAFECOM program. SAFECOM, a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security, together with its Federal partners, provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies.

- ***Web link to the Disaster Management DisasterHelp.gov Web site*** – DiasterHelp.gov represents a collaborative effort of local, tribal, state, Federal, and related non-government organizations (NGOs) to provide citizens and responders a unified point of access to disaster-related information. DisasterHelp.gov is a place of integration for content, notifications, and Web-based applications where twenty-seven Federal partners, NGOs, and other local and state agencies own and maintain content. The DisasterHelp.gov portal also hosts online tools that aid emergency response groups in administration, assessment, and collaboration to facilitate best practice sharing in preparation for or response to a disaster.

- ***State Profile Template*** – This template is intended to assist states in organizing data while preparing to embark on the interoperability strategic planning process.

- ***Governance Report: A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles –*** This report provides suggestions and tips for governance based on SAFECOM's locally-driven philosophy.

Appendix B: Web link to Interoperability Technology Today

(click here to return to document)

The following Web link will provide you with the most recent issues of the Interoperability Technology Today newsletter published by DHS' OIC. The newsletter is published quarterly and is posted on the SAFECOM Web site. The intent of the newsletter is to provide the emergency response community with information from across the country on communications interoperability.

Web link to Interoperability Technology Today:

http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/library/newsletters/1284_interoperabilitytoday.htm

Appendix C: Web link to SAFECOM Program

(click here to return to document)

Briefly, SAFECOM is the first National program designed by emergency responders for emergency responders. As an emergency response practitioner-driven program, SAFECOM is working with existing Federal communications initiatives and key emergency response stakeholders to address the need to develop better technologies and processes for the cross-jurisdictional and cross-disciplinary coordination of existing systems and future networks. SAFECOM harnesses diverse Federal resources in the service of the emergency response community. The scope of this community is broad. The customer base includes over 50,000 local and state emergency response agencies and organizations. Federal customers include over 100 agencies engaged in emergency response disciplines such as law enforcement, firefighting, public health, and disaster recovery. SAFECOM makes it possible for the emergency response community to leverage resources by promoting coordination and cooperation across all levels of government.

The following Web link will direct you to the homepage for the SAFECOM Program.

Web link to SAFECOM Program:

http://www.safecomprogram.gov

Appendix D: Web link to DM DisasterHelp.gov Web site

(click here to return to document)

DisasterHelp.gov is part of Disaster Management, a communications program with the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC), which is managed by the Science and Technology Directorate's Office of Systems Engineering and Development. DiasterHelp.gov represents a collaborative effort of local, tribal, state, Federal, and related non-government organizations (NGOs) to provide citizens and responders a unified point of access to disaster-related information. DisasterHelp.gov is a place of integration for content, notifications, and web-based applications where 27 Federal partners, NGOs, and other local and state agencies own and maintain content.
The DisasterHelp.gov portal also hosts online tools that aid emergency response groups in administration, assessment, and collaboration to facilitate best practice sharing in preparation for or response to a disaster.

DisasterHelp.gov Services

- A unified access point to Nation-wide, disaster-related information, including news headlines and notifications;
- The collaborative section of the site allows verified members of the emergency management community to:
  - Establish an easy-to-manage Community Page that allows users to display external web pages, updates and alerts to your community members, a shared calendar, links to additional websites, and disaster-related resources;
  - Set up an Enterprise Collaboration Center to quickly and easily share files with authorized users;
  - Customize the Readiness Assessment Tool so that your organization can self-assess, track, and report on its preparedness level to perform mission critical tasks;
  - Personalize Web Page and Calendar enables you to tailor searches and information displayed; and
  - Use Instant Messaging to quickly communicate with other members of the DisasterHelp.gov community.

The following Web link will direct you to the DisasterHelp.gov website:

Web link to Disaster Management Program:

https://www.disasterhelp.gov/suite/

Appendix E: State Profile Template

(click here to return to document)

The profile template listed below is a tool for gathering a variety of information including: emergency response demographics, topography, geography (regional organization of emergency responder communities), metropolitan areas, counties, state and local government breakdown, communication technology systems (statewide and regional), current and past interoperability efforts, and former governance bodies. While more categories for information may be added to the template offered, the categories suggested directly relate to the information gathered throughout Virginia's planning process.

State Profile Template

Answer the following questions to create a state profile, which will help establish many specifics known to the state.

City/Town

- What are the top 5-8 urban areas in the state? (Rank by population density.)

Topography

- What are some of the state's topographic characteristics (i.e. mountainous on the east, coastal on the west)?
- How accessible are various urban areas to state highway systems?

Geography/Regional Structure

- What geographic breakdown do each of the emergency response organizations rely on?
- What are the similarities across such agencies?
- How could the state be broken down to reflect both the rural and urban perspectives?
- How is the state broken down by county/township etc.?

Current and Past Interoperability Efforts

- Who is/was involved in interoperability efforts?
- Where in the state do/did these efforts occur?
- Where does/did the funding for the effort come from?
- Who is/was the point of contact?

Communications Technology Systems

- What technology systems are currently available in the state?
- What vendors have been used?
- What current standards do the vendors comply with?

  - Voice systems – P25 interface standards?
  - Data systems – NIEM standards (including EDXL and Global Justice standards)?
- How are mutual aid channels and shared frequencies used? By whom and under what conditions?
- Are agreements in place to share data across disciplines and jurisdictions?

Governmental Considerations

- What legislation exists at the state/local levels that support interoperability efforts?
- Which elected officials have prioritized increasing voice and data interoperable communications for emergency responders?
- Are there any aspects of the state government that are assigned funds to address the emergency responder communities?

Appendix F: A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles

(click here to return to document)

It is highly recommended that you determine which state organizations and structures are currently in place to address and support interoperable communications. The governance report included below, entitled: *A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM and DM Principles,* provides suggestions and guidelines for governance founded upon the SAFECOM and DM locally-driven, practitioner-based approach. SAFECOM and DM endorse an evolving model of governance that includes local practitioner leadership in each stage of development.

The following should be considered before inserting a new governing body into the state system:

- Begin by identifying current organizational structures in place that support interoperable communications efforts.
- Begin to consider how or if they are locally-driven and practitioner- focused.
- The support of local and state leadership is critical to the successful development and implementation of a statewide interoperability plan. Your state should support a governance approach that encourages transparent, accountable, and collaborative governance.

A Perspective on Governance
Building a State Model on SAFECOM and DM Principles

Introduction

The following suggestions and guidelines for governance are founded upon the SAFECOM and DM program philosophy and principles and describe the membership, roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines for each party within the Virginia Interoperability Governance structure.

SAFECOM has a mission to serve as the program within the Federal government to help local, tribal, state and Federal emergency response agencies improve emergency response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. Communications interoperability is the ability of emergency response safety agencies to talk across disciplines and jurisdictions via radio communications systems, exchanging voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized.

SAFECOM's process for assisting the Commonwealth of Virginia (hereafter referred to as Virginia) with its development of an emergency response wireless interoperability strategic plan is participative and inclusive. Virginia's Department of Public Safety's leadership is working closely with the SAFECOM team throughout this process to provide direction, feedback and subject matter content as requested. The Virginia and SAFECOM leadership are in the process of

designating, as appropriate, the involvement of planning participants. The participants may include representatives from other emergency response related organizations and councils at the local and state level, as well as policy experts, and representatives of related Federal initiatives. Once defined, the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholder group will feed into a collaboratively designed governance model to support an ongoing participatory approach to drive the implementation of the strategic plan for interoperability.

Governance

Definition

Because the support of local and state level leadership is critical to the successful development and implementation of a statewide interoperability plan, SAFECOM supports a governance approach that encourages transparent, accountable, and collaborative governance through:

- Leadership representative of a broad spectrum of local level emergency responders
- Participatory decision making
- The support of legislation that enforces timely and cost efficient implementation of statewide interoperability
- Relationship building at the local, state and Federal level
- Outcome based strategic planning

Objectives

The design of a state interoperability governance model should rely on two primary objectives:

- **Performance** – The arrangement of the governance model contributes to the overall performance and delivery of services to the emergency response community and ultimately the larger constituency they serve.
- **Adherence** – Governance arrangements committed to ensuring that requirements of the law, regulations, and community standards of accountability and transparency are met.

These objectives are best supported by a risk management perspective which consistently evaluates how the governing board can best achieve its objectives and strategic initiatives with minimal risk.

Employing a collaborative approach to design of a governance model necessitates continuous evolution. A mature model, detailed in structure and process, emerges from the strategic planning process. The core group, around which this model is defined, will organize themselves around the initiatives identified during the strategic planning session.

As we enter the strategic planning process, it is important to hold up a framework and mental model through which we can make sense of our experience. Collaborative efforts depend on intentionally introducing the appropriate

stakeholders into the design and planning process at the right time. The relationships that are built along the way will help to lay the groundwork for leadership by securing a governing body that demonstrates shared ownership in the success of this effort. To arbitrarily insert a governing structure, prematurely and as a directive of state level leadership, would be to function contrary to the principles under which the SAFECOM program and Virginia are operating.

The key elements that appear to contribute to collaborative governance include:

- Attention to stakeholder satisfaction
- Strategically defined long- and short-term outcomes
- Sound budgeting and financial planning
- Performance monitoring and reporting
- Existence of control systems such as policies, guidelines, quality assurance and fiscal compliance
- Awareness of diversity across agency, jurisdiction, discipline, topography, geography and level of government

The Relationship between the State Governing Body and Local Emergency Response Community

The local emergency response community must have a means to provide input into the decision-making processes for any statewide interoperable communications effort. This input will be received primarily from a local Executive Committee, and a local Advisory Committee. Emergency response personnel may become involved in local governance through the following options: (1) the local Executive Committee, (2) the local Advisory Committee.

Emergency response community involvement takes place primarily through associations. There are two reasons for this approach: (1) Associations represent the leadership of their respective constituencies; and (2) Associations are an excellent way to reach out to communities.

Achieving interoperability requires partnerships from all levels of government. As such, SAFECOM recommends that states look to include representatives from local and state government associations in all governance structures. These associations represent the key public decision makers and those with the authority to fund emergency response communications initiatives at the local and state levels.

The actual breakdown of membership in each governing body can be determined any number of ways. One option is to have a representative of each major emergency response agency and a cross section of representatives from various elected government entities. The structure of this body should achieve political and geographic balance.

Ultimately it should be a political decision when finalizing who exactly should be included.

An example of the above might include:

- EMS
- Fire
- Law Enforcement
- Emergency Management
- Elected officials with budgetary responsibility

Establishing the criteria by which membership decisions will be made is a cornerstone for sustaining SAFECOM principles as the newly created governing body defines itself. As the scope of the work package is defined, it will be important to clearly identify who the "right" people are to achieve the strategic goals the committee is setting for itself. A creative tension must be held between who the "right" people are for the job and how these people will work together to maintain participation across diverse communities.

While the internal design of the governing body is being addressed, executive and advisory committees should also consider relationships to local organizations in the larger state context. These organizations might include:

- Office of Public Safety
- Office of Preparedness
- State Preparedness Group

Determining the nature of these relationships will depend on numerous factors, including the financial reporting structure and current legislation. The National Governor's Association (NGA) has offered recommendations on methods in which to empower a governing body.

Powers of the body might include:

- General authority to coordinate responses
- A means of sharing information operationally and technologically to improve emergency response
- The ability to contract for services required to accomplish the body's goals
- Approval of systems users
- System planning
- Implementation of a comprehensive communications system
- Fund generating and financial capability
- Operational control of the system

Effective leveraging of organizations already in existence will allow for a network to be established at the state level exemplifying the effectiveness of a collaborative working model across all stakeholder groups.

Structure and Process

The ultimate success of a governance model is not only determined by an organizational chart but also by committing to quality shared principles. Clearly stating expectations and measures for success will afford governing bodies the highest degree of collaboration across neighboring stakeholder groups.

Governance leadership can be characterized in a variety of ways. Leadership characteristics as they appear in the governance process may include:

- Setting goals to encourage strategic thinking
- Promoting a results driven approach
- Cultivation of productive working relationships across diverse groups

Renewal and Growth

As with any new endeavor, true learning cannot occur without regular review, evaluation and reflection. The establishment of metrics and a system of accountability will help support any governing body in its pioneering efforts. Determining who the Executive Committee will answer to should not solely depend on those bodies to which the committee is fiscally accountable. Maintaining efforts to gather feedback from the emergency response community will allow for repeated opportunities to upgrade approaches and organizational structure as needed. Setting a norm of constant growth and improvement will create an environment that is conducive to innovation and involvement.

Closing

Statewide interoperability is in the hands of the local emergency responders and SAFECOM will continue to promote excellence in this effort. The ability of states to involve the local communities in strategic planning efforts will be the key to establishing interoperable communications across the Nation.

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National Governor's Association - 29 March 2004
http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga

Public Governance Institute - 25 March 2004
http://www.publicgov.org

State Interoperability Executive Committees – 30 March 2004
http://www.apco911.org/frequency/siec/documents/documents.htm

Phase III – Create Project Plan and Roadmap – Resources

The following sample tools and resources were mentioned in Phase III. They have been included in this section of the appendix as a resource to be used in designing a project plan and roadmap for your state:

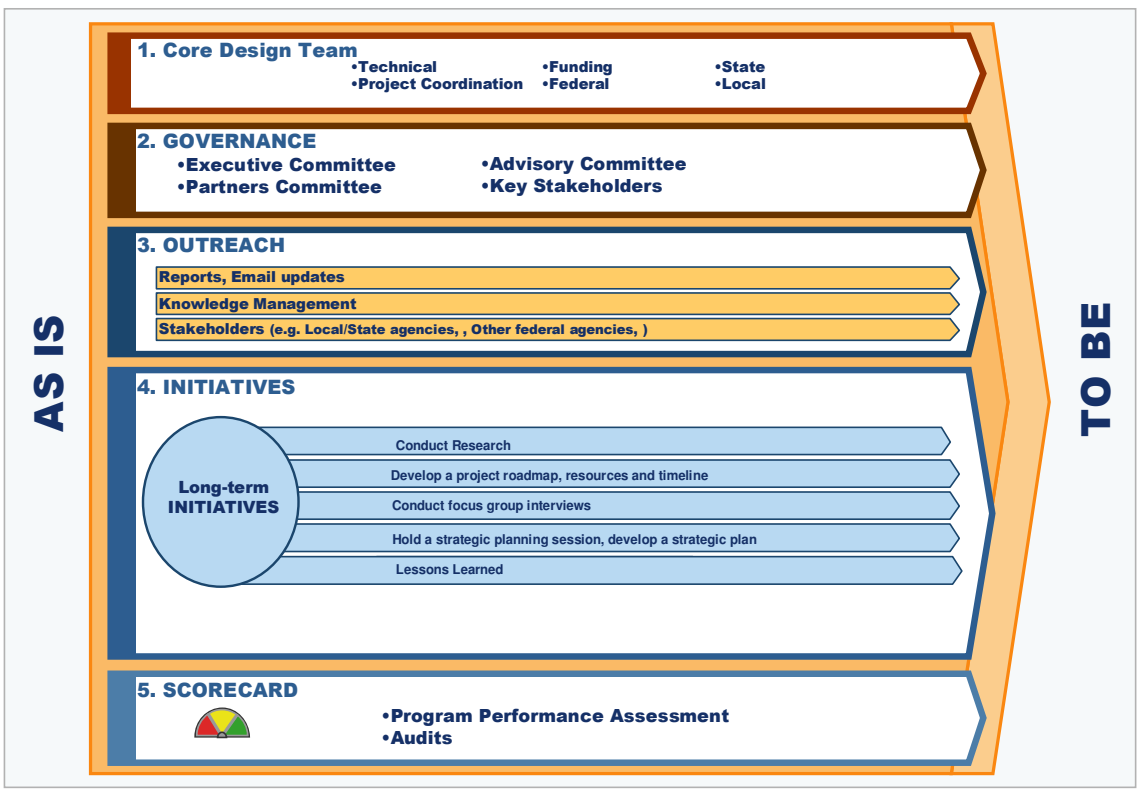
- ***Sample Roadmaps*** – This graphic provides a visual and conceptual overview of the interoperability strategic planning process that can be shared with and accepted by a broad audience. The more detailed roadmap depicts the concurrent events that will take place and key deliverables associated with each phase.

- ***Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning*** – The key terms and definitions provided in this appendix will clarify and guide you in the development of the tasks needed to successfully manage and plan your project.

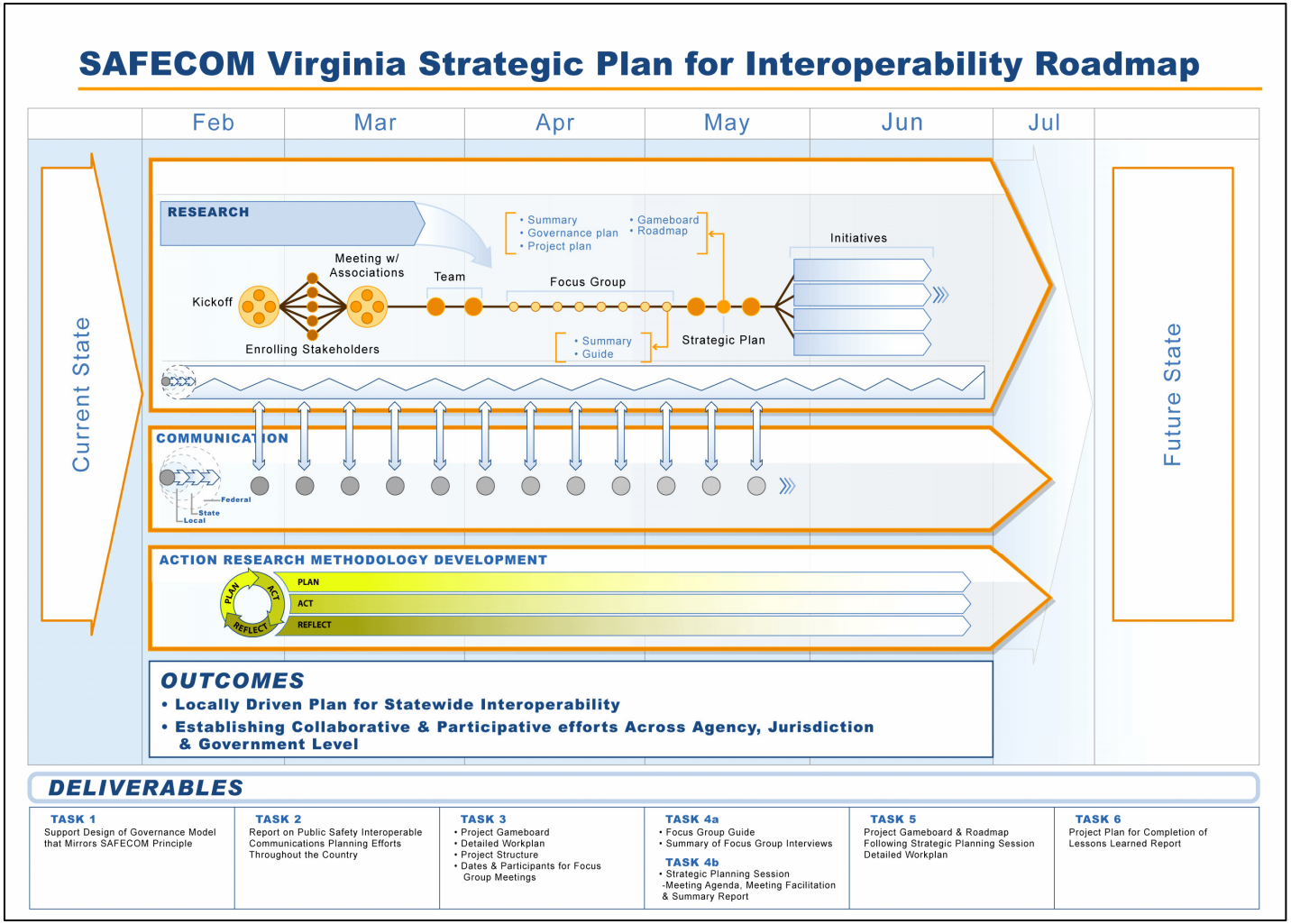
Appendix G: Roadmap

A roadmap is a detailed visual depiction of the state's wireless strategic planning process. It can be useful when communicating to key stakeholders about the strategic planning process, specific roles needing to be filled, and the desired outcomes. Using this roadmap in the focus group interviews will ensure that a consistent message is communicated to all participants. On the following page is a sample version of the roadmap that was used in the Virginia planning process.

Sample Virginia Roadmap (Version I)



Sample Virginia Roadmap (Version II)



Appendix H: Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning

(click here to return to document)

Project management tools and resources are available to help support the development of a project plan. The following key terms are provided to enhance your project planning process from beginning to end.

Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning

The following are definitions for frequently used terms that relate directly to planning and scheduling concepts of project management.

- ***Activity:*** An element of work performed during the course of a project. An activity normally has an expected duration, cost, and list of resource requirements. Activities also have defined beginnings and endings. The terms "activity" and "task" are frequently used interchangeably.

- ***Deliverable:*** Any measurable, tangible, verifiable outcome, result, or item that must be produced to complete a project or part of a project. All work packages and most activities have output products that can be referred to as deliverables. The term is commonly used in reference to an external deliverable, which is a deliverable that is subject to approval by the project sponsor or customer.

- ***Dependency:*** A dependency between two project activities, or between a project activity and a milestone.

- ***Milestone:*** (1) A significant event in the project, usually completion of a major deliverable; or (2) a clearly identifiable point in a project or set of activities that commonly denotes a reporting requirement or completion of a large or important set of activities.

- ***Plan:*** An intended future course of action.

- ***Program:*** A group of related projects managed in a harmonized way. Programs may include an element of ongoing work until the lifecycle of the program is completed.

- ***Project:*** A temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result.

- ***Project Phase:*** A collection of logically related project activities, usually culminating in the completion of a major deliverable.

- ***Project Schedule:*** The planned dates for performing activities and meeting milestones. Schedules or related portions of schedules list activity start or completion dates in chronological order.

- ***Task:*** A generic term for the lowest level of defined effort on a project; often used interchangeably with the term "activity." Tasks are sometimes used to define further breakdown of activities.

- ***Work Breakdown Structure:*** A deliverable-oriented grouping of project elements that organizes and defines the total work scope of the project in a hierarchical structure. Each descending (or "child") level represents an increasingly detailed definition of the project work, and the set of child elements under a "parent" includes 100 percent of the work represented by the parent element.

- ***Work Package:*** The lowest level work element in the work breakdown structure, which provides a logical basis for defining activities or assigning responsibility to a specific person or organization.

Additional Resources on Project Management

1. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (Project Management Institute, 2000).

Project Management for Dummies, Stanley E. Portny, (John Wiley & Sons, 2001).

Project Planning and Scheduling, Gregory Haugan, (Management Concepts, 2002).

Make Things Happen!: Readymade Tools for Project Improvement, Steve Smith, (Kogan Page, 1997).

Phase IV – Identify Roles and Responsibilities – Resources

Phase IV provides guidance on developing and assigning the roles and responsibilities of your project team. The following resources and templates are mentioned in Phase IV as tools that will help guide you through aligning a project team. Please note that each state will have different levels of funding, so the described roles and responsibilities may be subject to change. The items listed below have been included in this section of the appendix for your reference:

- ***Kickoff Meeting Template*** – This template provides a suggested design for the kickoff meeting. The outcomes will be an energetic jumpstart to the process and a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities.
- ***Roles Clarification Exercise*** – This guidance provides a suggested exercise as a means to achieving shared understanding among team roles and responsibilities during the kickoff meeting.
- ***Example Weekly Status Report –*** This report is a regularly scheduled outreach tool that will communicate weekly team progress to stakeholders.

Appendix I: Kickoff Meeting Template

(click here to return to document)

The following template provides an agenda with focus questions for the project leader to use in the initial project team meeting. This meeting is intended to be a forum in which the role clarification exercise is conducted in an effort to establish respective roles and responsibilities while energizing participants. The exercise is provided as the next resource.

Kickoff Meeting Template

Kickoff Meeting
Date
Time

Purpose of the Meeting
Assemble key players to establish a shared understanding of the (State) Strategic Planning process.

Outcomes:

- Shared agreement on:
  - Planning process objectives
  - Core project team membership
  - Planning process timeline
  - Gameboard methodology
  - Project team member roles & responsibilities
- Identification of next steps

Agenda:

- **Opening Remarks**, **Welcome & Process Overview**
  - Review and validate meeting outcomes.
  - Establish meeting ground rules.

- **Current State of Interoperability in *(State)***
  - What did we hear in conversations with our sample group of stakeholders?
  - What did we find out about our state through our research?

- **Discussion of Vision for Interoperability in the Future**
  - What is the best case scenario for interoperability?
  - What are our future goals?

- **Project Team Roles and Responsibilities**
  - Identify the functional areas needed.
    - What are the areas of expertise and influence needed to carry out a successful planning process?
    - ***Use Steps I and II of the Role Clarification Exercise.***

- **Identify Core Project Team Members**
  - What core skill sets and competencies are needed on the core project team?
  - What skills do we possess?
  - How can our affiliations and professional positions serve us in influencing the planning process?
    - ***Use Step III of the Role Clarification Exercise.***

- **Obtain Group Commitment**
  - What role will each team member play?
  - What are our expectations for each role?
  - What is one action you are committed to accomplishing before we come back together?

- **Identification of Next Steps**
  - Identify next meeting date, time, and participants.
  - Review participants' committed action items.
  - Ensure that outcomes have been achieved.
  - Close.

- **Closing Remarks**

Appendix J: Role Clarification Exercise

(click here to return to document)

The Role Clarification Exercise is a recommended tool that is useful in clarifying individual ownership in the outcomes of the strategic planning process. This can be used as a focal point of a single meeting or incorporated into the kickoff meeting. However, SAFECOM will caution against trying to achieve more than shared alignment, ownership of the high-level project outcomes, and individual roles and responsibilities in a single meeting.

Role Clarification Exercise

Role Clarification:
Building Shared Understanding

Steps

I. Identify suggested functional areas.

(Facilitator should offer suggestions based on the larger context client group that is operating within – ask the group for confirmation and agreement for using these as a starting point.)

- Technical
- Program Coordination
- Funding Oversight
- Federal
- State
- Local

II. Vet and confirm with key players.

Do these high level categories make sense to you?

III. Map key players to functional areas.

- What functional areas do you have expertise in?
- Is your area of expertise different from your area of influence?

IV. Define functional areas for the purpose of this project.

Write down the top three things that you believe the group is expecting from this functional area to help achieve the overall mission.

Facilitation Notes

Once the top three expectations have been identified, ask individuals to survey the room examining what other groups recommended. Encourage participants to add or offer upgrades to other functional area initiatives.

Re-group and review each set of recommendations. Ask for questions, comments, and areas of concern. Determine the level of agreement on the expectations from each functional area.

Finally, once each area has been defined, determine if those responsible for a given area are able to commit to delivering the expectations outlined.

The next layer of thinking will involve the following questions: What would these expectations look like? What actions/strategies would support these expectations? What resources are needed to implement these strategies? What in the environment supports these efforts? What constraints are visible? How large are the constraints? How can we leverage our areas of strength to counter the constraints?

The first group meeting will cover no more than defining and agreeing to high-level initiatives. Additional expectations at this stage may lend to shallow thinking and unsustainable approaches to problem solving and critical thinking.

Appendix K: Example Weekly Status Report

(click here to return to document)

The following weekly status report provides a suggested format for sharing weekly communications. This format is a quick yet effective way to inform key stakeholders of project updates. The suggested elements of the report include:

- ***Areas of Attention*** – This section provides an area in which to highlight specific items of importance for readers to know. These items may range from key accomplishments of the week to any needs and challenges that an audience may be able to help address.

- ***Lessons Learned*** – This section provides a periodic report on critical news or knowledge that was gathered during the specified period. This may include a reflection made while on the road conducting the focus group interviews throughout the state or an important new development that the broader audience should receive.

Example Weekly Status Report

Virginia Interoperability Planning Weekly Report

Date: 3/15/04 – 3/19/04

Areas of Attention

- Followed up with recommended focus group attendees to confirm participation.
- Conducted a second round of recruiting efforts to identify additional attendees for the Southwest region.
- Added focus group to cover the south central area of Virginia on May 6.
- Outlined research report of existing statewide plans for communications interoperability for emergency response.
- Researched logistical and budgetary needs for focus group sessions.

Focus Group Dates

April 7, 2004	SW Virginia
April 13, 2004	Tidewater area
April 20, 2004	NW Virginia (Shenandoah)
April 27, 2004	Richmond
May 4, 2004	Northern Virginia
May 6, 2004	South Central
May 18, 2004	Richmond *(Strategic Planning Session)*

Lessons Learned/Observations

- The use of technology, (a Web site for example), to communicate information on the statewide initiative can support the statewide coordinator in answering questions and responding to requests.

- Throughout the data collection phase of strategic planning, create alternative methods of participation beyond attendance at a focus group session. This will enable those not able to attend focus group sessions to share their perspective on interoperable communications through other means.

- In an effort to ensure efficiency and collaboration within focus group recruitment, outline all emergency responder associations in the state and ask these associations to submit names of leaders in their community.

- The process for recruiting candidates for focus groups is simplified by utilizing the most common geographical breakdown of the state when defining emergency responder perspectives by region.

Appendix L: Sample Communications Plan

(Click here to return to document)

The following sections provide a template for documenting a comprehensive communications strategy.

SECTION 1: COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

Action: Specify the overall desired results of each phase of the Communications Plan. Throughout the life of the communications plan, these objectives will be used to determine the plan's level of success. If the objectives are not achieved, a plan to remedy the issues will be able to be implemented early enough to ensure that the next stage in the campaign builds upon a firm foundation. Example objectives:

1) Inform stakeholders about mission and vision of X *(Awareness)*.
    i. Develop a consistent clear message.
2) Ensure stakeholders understand how X directly impacts their work. *(Understanding)*
    i. Require more relationship-building in a manner that helps stakeholders understand day-to-day impacts.
3) Support the implementation of X by gaining buy-in from stakeholders. *(Engagement)*
    i. Nurture relationship-building in a way that stakeholders are now engaged and informally communicating with SLT.
4) Ensure effective input from stakeholders *(Action)*.

SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER SELECTION

Stakeholder Definition

Action: Group stakeholders by organization:

Stakeholder Category	Impact on X

Within each stakeholder category is a variety of stakeholders with interests in different aspects of the project. The following sections provide a brief description of the stakeholders within each category.

Internal Stakeholders

Action: Describe internal stakeholders, their interests, and their locations (if applicable).

Stakeholder	Location	Focus	Interest

Complementary Initiatives

Action: Depict various complementary initiatives among the stakeholder groups.

External Stakeholders
Action: Identify the significance of external stakeholders in order to address their impact on the overall communications effort.

SECTION 3: KEY MESSAGES

Action: Outline key themes and messages of the communications planning effort below:

Key Themes	
Project Description	
Theme	
Project Mission	
Project Vision	
Project Strategy	
Key Messages	
Why will it work?	
What will it look like?	

Key Messages for Stakeholder Segments
Action: Map and refine messages to stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders

Internal Audience	***General Messages***
	•
	•

External Stakeholders

External Audience	***General Messages***
	•
	•

SECTION 4: COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Action: Assign the role of Communications Manager with support from at least one (1) other staff member to oversee the following functions:

- ***Communications Planning*** – Ensures that the identified implementation planning is on track and that key messages are able to reach key stakeholders. It also oversees the overall communications effort.
- ***Stakeholder Relations*** – Maintains directory of all stakeholder organizations and individuals.
- ***Resource Management*** – Ensures that all appropriate materials are current. In addition, resource management will also include maintaining a calendar of events.

- ***Evaluation & Measurement*** – Tracks measurement on key communications planning efforts and tracks input from stakeholders. In addition, it tracks and reviews feedback on ongoing communications, and recommends improvements to approaches and materials.

Should the full-time resources be unavailable, the SLT should explore additional options to perform the tasks needed, such as:

- Hiring additional contractor staff
- Requesting employees to be "detailed" from Program Offices
- Soliciting volunteers who are able to devote at least 20 percent of their time to implement specific tasks for the Communications Plan
- Creating a separate group of senior leaders to serve as "ambassadors"

SECTION 5: POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Action: Establish any specific policies and procedures that must be put in place. Examples include:

- *Policy:* When meeting with stakeholders, make the most efficient use of their time.
- *Policy:* Communications materials will comply with Section 508.
- *Procedure:* At the beginning of meetings with internal stakeholders, announce which principal offices are in attendance and how principal offices without representatives will be informed of outcomes.

SECTION 6: COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

Action: Establish various methods for delivering and receiving messages to and from audiences. These methods may be "impersonal," such as memos and e-mail, or "personal," such as one-on-one conversations and staff meetings. Media need to be selected on the basis of the message to be delivered, the audience to whom the message is delivered, and the phase of the communications effort. The following table illustrates the various communications media that can be used in support of identified communications objectives.

Type of Communications	Objective 1: Awareness	Objective 2: Understanding	Objective 3: Engagement	Objective 4: Action
Web site	**X**			
Open House	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Fact Sheet	**X**	**X**		
E-mail Updates to Interested Stakeholders	**X**	**X**		
Staff Meetings	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Program Office Visits	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**

Type of Communications	Objective 1: Awareness	Objective 2: Understanding	Objective 3: Engagement	Objective 4: Action
Meetings with?	**X**		**X**	**X**
Conferences	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Etc…				

Since people will be at different stages of engagement, all types of communications need to be performed concurrently throughout the effort.

Push Internal Communications

"Push" communications include:

1. Regularly scheduled meetings
2. Interviews
3. Regularly scheduled newsletters
4. "Open Houses"
5. Demos

Action: Establish a mechanism, and schedule/purpose/topic:

Date (Thursdays) *Note: bi-weekly initially, then weekly*	Purpose and Topic

Pull Internal Communications

Action: Create mechanisms for "pull" communications.

Push External Communications

Pull External Communications

SECTION 7: MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS

Action: Establish measures and mechanisms to measure effectiveness.

Objective	Measure	Measurement Tool/Frequency
Awareness		
Understanding		
Engagement		
Action		

Phase V – Recruit Focus Group Participants and Meeting Preparation – Resources

Phase V of the methodology discusses specific tasks that will add to your success in recruiting focus group interview participants and executing the meeting preparations. The following samples and templates have been consolidated as useful references for accomplishing the desired outcomes of Phase V:

- ***Process Document for Identifying Participants*** – Serves as a guide through the process of identifying practitioner participants. This includes an emphasis on the desired characteristics and leadership qualities that focus group interview participants should possess.
- ***Sample Phone Script*** – Provides useful language for contacting local agencies.
- ***Sample Letter of Invitation*** – Provides a sample format and useful language for inviting participants to the focus group interviews.
- ***Sample Letter of Confirmation*** – Provides a sample format and useful language for confirming invitees' presence in the focus group interviews.
- ***Participant Database Template*** – Provides a sample format in a useful tool for tracking participant contact information.
- ***Sample Letter of Endorsement*** – Provides a sample format and useful language for an executive sponsor to endorse your state's interoperability project.
- ***Sample Press Release –*** Provides an example for communicating and marketing project efforts around the state through the press.
- ***SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet –*** Provides information on the governing body that initiated additional focus group interview contacts in the beginning phase of the project.

Appendix M: Virginia Process Document for Identifying Participants

(click here to return to document)

Since each state has different stakeholders affiliated with emergency response communities, identifying the right stakeholder will require special consideration when deciding upon focus group interview participants. Developing criteria to help identify participants is recommended to standardize the invitation process. It serves the purpose of setting expectations from the project team for participation in the strategic planning process. The criterion may be based on a combination of field experience, an identifiable leadership role in the emergency response field, and familiarity with issues relating to interoperable communications. It should not exclude individuals who wish to attend that may or may not meet the description offered. Below is the process design used in the Commonwealth of Virginia to develop criteria to identify participants.

Process Design and Participant Selection for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Process Design

The Commonwealth of Virginia, with the support of SAFECOM, a Federal program created to help emergency response agencies improve communications interoperability, designed a process to solicit input and obtain consensus from local, regional, and state emergency response practitioners and policymakers on the fundamentals of a statewide strategic plan for communications interoperability. The locally-driven nature of the strategic planning process was designed to secure the participation and buy-in of those who ultimately will be implementing and complying with the strategic goals and initiatives outlined in the plan.

The strategic planning process designed by SAFECOM and Virginia consisted of six (6) regional focus group interviews across the Commonwealth and a final strategic planning meeting. During each focus group interview, an average of 20 representatives from the emergency response community, along with state and local government, offered their perspectives on the current state of communications interoperability in their region; established a case for change; envisioned the ideal future state of communications interoperability; recommended strategies for reaching that future state; and highlighted potential barriers to achieving those recommended strategies.

The strategic planning process concluded in a strategic planning session. The culmination of the session served as a forum to discuss and validate the data gathered from the regional focus group interviews. Participants provided further clarification to the regional perspectives, prioritized the strategies gathered during the focus group interviews, and offered the state valuable insight into what efforts would result in the biggest positive impact on the level of communications

interoperability statewide. These strategies were offered as cornerstones of the Communications Interoperability Plan for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Participant Selection

Virginia's Office of Interoperability partnered with SAFECOM to establish criteria for identifying "the right" participants. The criteria were based on a combination of field experience, an identifiable leadership role in the emergency response field, and a familiarity with issues relating to interoperable communications. They were created to ensure productive discussion and valuable contributions to the strategic planning process. SAFECOM and representatives from the Commonwealth Office of the Secretary of Public Safety met with emergency response associations and state department leaders to identify potential participants who met the proposed criteria.

Leaders from the following associations were asked to provide names and contact information for potential focus groups and strategic planning participants:

- Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police
- Virginia Department of Emergency Management
- Virginia Department of Fire Programs
- Virginia Department of Health
- Virginia Sheriffs' Association
- Virginia State Police

The criteria were not strictly adhered to; in fact, they were used primarily as a shared reference point to guide any and all individuals involved in the recruiting process.

In an effort to ensure optimal representation of disciplines and jurisdictions, the strategic planning team (SAFECOM and the VA Office of Interoperability) proposed a numerical breakdown for a comprehensive representation of stakeholders. The breakdown appears below:

- Fire 6
- EMS 6
- Police 6
- Local Government 2
- State Government 2

When representation was particularly low in a specific discipline or jurisdiction, the project team proceeded with additional recruiting efforts by contacting local emergency response leaders for further recommendations.

Appendix N: Phone Script Template

(click here to return to document)

The following phone script template is a recommendation to be used when inviting local agencies to send a participant to the focus group interviews. The phone conversation will explore the participants' knowledge of interoperability within your state and may lead to referrals or new contacts.

Sample Phone Script

1. Introduce yourself by saying that you are working with the governor, following a methodology laid out by SAFECOM, a Federal program with a primary focus of improving communications interoperability for emergency responders, and you are seeking practitioners to attend local interview sessions.

"SAFECOM and the local Interoperability Coordinator are working together to create a strategic plan to help solve the issues surrounding interoperability in the state. Our state is just one of many that will be holding these sessions, which will in turn improve this issue nationally.

We are calling you as a result of your established role and expertise as a key stakeholder in the emergency response community. We would like to work with you and your organization while identifying potential participants for our focus group interviews."

2. Ask if they received a "Save the Date" e-mail on _____ from _____. The "Save the Date" e-mail stated that an all-day stakeholder focus group interview session is being held on _____, in _____.

The desired outcomes of the _____ meeting are:

- Capture local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
- Establish a shared understanding of interoperability issues specific to this region of the state
- Educate and share awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- Pay attention to our commonalities as opposed to our differences

3. Based on the information in the "Save the Date" e-mail, ask the individual if they or someone in their organization are the appropriate person from their organization to attend. It is very possible that they will designate another attendee.

4. Ask if the individual will be able to participate in the meeting on _____. If they

are unable to attend on _____, ask for any suggestions they may have of additional individuals that might be interested. Recommended participants should be able to answer the following questions:

- How would you describe Virginia's existing level of interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter while striving for this future state?
- What recommendations do you have in moving from our current state to our future state?

5. If the individual will be attending, inform them of read-ahead materials they will receive prior to the interview.

** **Ask for any further questions & thank the individual for his/her time and effort. REMEMBER: The meeting is _____ in _____.**

****If questions are asked that you are unable to answer, inform the individual that you will get back to them soon or you'll have _____ contact them as quickly as possible.**

Appendix O: Sample Letter of Invitation

(click here to return to document)

The sample letter below is a reference to be used when extending invitations to selected participants in the focus group interviews. This information provides the general content and includes the purpose of the focus group interview.

The elements of the letter include:

- Background on the current voice and data interoperability level in your state;
- An overview of the process for gathering data in the interviews;
- The date and time of the interviews;
- The discussion topics for the interviews;
- Requests for confirmations or an alternate invitee; and
- Logistical and funding details for the day of the interview.

Sample Letter of Invitation from Virginia Project

Good Morning/Afternoon,

For those I have not had the good fortune of meeting, my name is _____ and I am the new State Interoperability Coordinator. As you can imagine, we have a lot of work to do to improve communications and interoperability in our area. Currently the State of _____ is beginning the process of developing a Statewide Interoperability Plan to assist state agencies and localities by identifying where we are now, where we need to be to achieve interoperability, and obstacles we may encounter in the process.

We are working with a several partners across local, state, and Federal levels to carry out a collaborative strategic approach to interoperability. With that in mind, we're looking to you, as an expert and highly networked individual, to participate with other leaders at the local level in supporting the success of this process. To ensure that local emergency responders are included in the development of this plan, we are conducting five focus groups around State in the month of _____, which will be comprised of law enforcement, fire, and EMS emergency responders. We envision the focus group attendees to have a broad knowledge of wireless communications and to hold a formal or informal leadership position within their agency.

State is working with SAFECOM, a Federal program that is assisting states and localities with strategic interoperability planning. We would like to invite you to meet with us either in person or by conference call in order to ensure that your organization has the opportunity to identify potential focus group participants. We plan to meet on Date from time in the Location. Please let me know if you or your designee will be able to attend this meeting to represent your organization. We look forward to ensuring that this planning process is a large step toward addressing interoperability in State. Please

feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

Signature

State Interoperability Coordinator
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety
Phone
E-mail

Appendix P: Sample Letter of Confirmation

(click here to return to document)

The sample letter below provides a reference to be used when confirming participants in the focus group interviews. If possible, we suggest a simple e-mail format that will allow participants to efficiently respond.

The elements of the letter include:

- Ability to confirm attendance to a specific focus group date
- Ability to decline invitation and submit an alternate participant
- Option to update personal information
- Ability to obtain directions to the meeting location

Sample Letter of Confirmation

Overview

Thank you for your interest in attending the Communications Interoperability Focus Group Session to be held on _____ from _____ at the _____. The purpose of our day-long session is to gather local perspectives on interoperability among emergency responders in an effort to design a statewide plan for communications interoperability.

This one day session will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

- How would you describe your state's existing level of interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for interoperable communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter while striving for this future state?

The session's design and facilitation will be carried out with support from SAFECOM, a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security.

In an effort to make your participation in this process as easy as possible, I have included information to help you prepare for this event.

Directions

Please visit the Web site listed below for directions to the hotel: _____

Travel and Lodging

For those attendees needing accommodations in _____, we suggest the hotel where the session is being held as one option.

SAMPLE HOTEL
CITY
Address
Address II
City, State Zip

Toll-Free: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Tel: (XXX) XXX-XXXX
Fax: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Check-In Time: _____
Check-Out Time: _____

Attendees traveling 75 miles or more can request information on reimbursement for the hotel and dinner on the evening preceding the session via travel POC (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Per Diem rates are as follows:
Hotel $$$$
Meals $$$$

Questions and Concerns

Any additional questions or concerns can be directed to the Office of the Secretary of Public Safety.

Contact:

State Interoperability Coordinator
(XXX) XXX-XXX
e-mail@statecoordinator.gov

Lunch will be provided at the session which will begin promptly at _____.

I look forward to meeting you and discussing your perspective on interoperability in _____.

Response Card
Please cut and paste the response card below into an e-mail message and direct all correspondence to: **name@e-mail.gov**

Yes, I will attend the interoperability focus group session on _____ in _____, ___.
Name:
Title:
Agency:
E-mail:
Phone:
I will need information on funds available for travel and lodging.
❑ Yes
❑ No

No, I cannot attend the interoperability focus group session on _____ in _____, ___. I suggest the following candidate to attend on my behalf.
Alternate Candidate Name:
Title:
Agency:
E-mail:
Phone:
I will need information on funds available for travel and lodging.
❑ Yes
❑ No

Appendix Q: Participant Database Template

(click here to return to document)

The following database template is a reference that can be used while tracking participant contact information. The template is designed to track personal information for each participant as well as the amount and type of outreach that each has received.

Map	Region	Discipline	Name	Title	Phone	E-mail	Division/ Dept.	Notes	Invite	Letter	Call	Attend	Travel
01	Southwest	Fire	Jake Jones	Comm. Dir.	703-555-1234	Jake@fire.net			8/1	8/8	8/15	Y	N

Appendix R: Sample Letter of Endorsement

(click here to return to document)

The following example letter is a reference to be used by an executive sponsor when endorsing the state's interoperability project. Obtaining this letter enlists executive support from state leaders and ensures that their support is critical in this locally-driven effort. In addition, their endorsement will help alleviate the concerns of certain participants who may be involved in similar efforts through the invitation from leaders.

Sample of Letter for Endorsement

MEMORANDUM

TO: Strategic Planning Focus Group Participants
FROM: State Leader
DATE: Date
SUBJECT: Statewide Interoperability Plan

The lack of interoperable wireless communications has been an issue plaguing emergency response organizations for decades. In many cases, these organizations do not have adequate radio channels, radio frequencies, hardware, emergency response software applications, or equipment to perform mission-critical duties. Emergency responders are then unable to communicate or share critical voice and data information with other jurisdictions or disciplines during natural disasters, terrorist acts, or day-to-day operations. The Governor has recognized the need to address the interoperability needs of your community by supporting the creation of a new position in the Office of Public Safety, known as the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator.

_____, the State Interoperability Coordinator, has assumed this leadership role and is committed to driving the design of a strategic plan for statewide interoperability founded on SAFECOM principles. SAFECOM is a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security. The program strives to improve emergency response communications through input gathered from *practitioners in the field*. The Office of Public Safety is committed to involving local emergency responders in this endeavor and believes the success of this effort depends on it.

We will be conducting six focus group sessions throughout the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first step of the strategic planning process. Each focus group will be comprised mainly of leaders from fire, law enforcement, and EMS agencies, with additional help from representatives of other relevant organizations.

You have been identified as a local leader in _____ community of emergency responders and you are cordially invited to attend our first focus group session. This one day event will be held on _____ in _____ at the _____.

The session running from _____ (lunch provided) will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

- How would you describe _____ existing level of interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter while striving for this future state?

Please let us know if you are available to join us to share your perspective on interoperable communications. If you are unable to attend, we would appreciate a suggestion of an alternate to represent your agency on your behalf. Funding is available for those traveling 75 miles or more to attend this session.

We look forward to discussing your perspective and experience with interoperable communications in _____.

Appendix S: Sample Press Release

(click here to return to document)

The following example of a press release from Virginia is a reference to be used as a means to communicate and market the interoperability project's efforts around the state through the development of a media buzz. The Submittal of media releases to local newspapers and trade associations as the interview process is launched will serve as a method to inspire and validate participating.

Sample Media Press Release

Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety

March 1st, 2004

Contact: State Interoperability POC (000) 000-0000

VIRGINIA TO CONDUCT AN INTEROPERABILITY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

Richmond, Virginia - The lack of interoperable wireless communications has been an issue plaguing emergency response organizations for decades. Virginia is currently coordinating the development of a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan to identify issues and develop strategies to increase interoperability throughout the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth of Virginia is driving the design of a strategic plan for statewide interoperability founded on SAFECOM principles. SAFECOM, a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security, together with its Federal partners, provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies through input gathered from practitioners in the field. The Office of Public Safety is committed to involving local emergency responders in this endeavor and believes the success of this effort depends on it.

Six focus group sessions will be conducted throughout the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first part of the strategic planning process. Each focus group will be primarily comprised of leaders from fire, law enforcement, and EMS agencies with additional representation from other relevant organizations.

The focus groups will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

- How would you describe Virginia's existing level of voice and data interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for voice and data interoperable communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter while striving for this future state?

The focus groups sessions and strategic planning session will take place on the following dates and locations:

• Focus Group 1	April 7	Wytheville
• Focus Group 2	April 13	Newport News
• Focus Group 3	April 20	Harrisonburg
• Focus Group 4	April 27	Richmond
• Focus Group 5	May 4	Manassas
• Focus Group 6	May 6	Lynchburg
• Strategic Planning Session	May 18	Richmond

For more information, please contact the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator at (000) 000-0000.

Phase VI – Conduct Focus Group Interviews – Resources

The following resources were mentioned as tools that will assist in conducting the focus group interviews in Phase VI:

- ***Strategies for Facilitated Sessions*** – This information provides guidance and useful tips to the facilitator who is conducting the focus group interviews.

- ***Web link to Introduction to Compendium*** – This document provides guidance on the conversation mapping tool that was used in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

- ***Web link to Sample Focus Group Report*** – This sample report presents a standard format in which focus group results can be systematically shared with the entire stakeholder community.

- ***Sample Thank You Letter*** – This sample letter provides an example of the note that can be shared with meeting participants at the conclusion of the focus group interviews.

Appendix T: Strategies for Facilitated Sessions

(click here to return to phase 4)
(click here to return to phase 8)

The Strategies for Facilitated Sessions provide in-depth assessment and advice on how to prepare for the focus group interviews with details that will help encourage a collaborative environment.

Strategies for Facilitated Sessions

As suggested in the Methodology, enlisting a facilitator, or team of facilitators, to conduct the focus group interviews will allow the sponsor to fill an extremely important role during each session. The primary responsibility of the sponsor is to listen during regional interviews. The key messages and perspectives offered by the local practitioners being interviewed will feed directly into the content needed to write the statewide strategic plan. By partnering with a facilitation team, the sponsor can actively listen to the interview responses and leave time management and facilitation of the discussion in the hands of an objective facilitator. A successful facilitator will be careful to constantly develop an alliance and collaborative partnership with the focus group interviewees and the state sponsor.

SAFECOM and DM believe that in order to fully understand the impact that the lack of interoperable communications has on the emergency response community and in order to absorb their recommendations on the best route forward, the sponsor must create a relationship with the local responder communities that is built through open and sincere dialogue.

The description of a focus group interview can be delivered as an *agenda* as well as a day long *session design*. The agenda is typically prepared for the benefit of the interview attendees and describes the day's events. A session design not only outlines the order of events, but also goes into detail about who is responsible for delivering each section of the day, the outcome(s) for each section, the process used to meet the outcomes, visual aids and tools available as a resource (roadmaps, gameboards, state maps etc.), and any materials needed (i.e. markers, tape, flip charts).

Following is a sample session design that organizes one element of a focus group interview.

Time	Agenda Item	Outcome(s)	Exercise/Approach	Owner	Visual Aids	Materials
9am	Welcome	Participants are oriented to the facility. Contents of welcome folders are made clear. Sponsor is introduced.	Large group/lecture format	Sponsor	Picture of focus group, interview process (dates, locations, outputs)	Markers, name tags, welcome folders

The information captured in the table above can be used by the facilitator to partner and communicate with the sponsor on his/her needs and expectations for delivering a successful practitioner-centered focus group interview.

Expectations must be set between the sponsor and the facilitation team regarding the team's approach and philosophy on the design of the day and how responsibilities will be shared. Listed below are the main agenda items to consider during discussions with the facilitation team.

- **Preparation**
  - Prepare the room

  Note: Consideration should be made regarding tables and chairs (small round tables that seat 6-8 are more effective than theater style), coupled with a diverse mix of participants at each table.

- **Welcome**
  - Orient participants to the facility
  - Distribute folders and review contents
  - Review agenda

- **Opening the interview**
  - Review, modify, and agree on purpose and outcomes
  - Check and document participant expectations
  - Clarify roles and responsibilities of facilitators, participants, and sponsor

- **Conducting the Interview**
  - Introduce interview model
  - Encourage participation
  - Manage behaviors
  - Ask for case examples and anecdotes
  - Focus discussions

- Minimize interruptions
- Surfacing core issues
- Clearly explain the intent behind each question before beginning each new conversation
- Capture and display output
- Validate information captured with the group
- Solicit feedback throughout the day (verbal and written)

- **Closing the interview**
  - Summarize results and match each against previous expectations
  - Review outstanding issues
  - Complete workshop on time or agree on more time with the group
  - Develop commitment to follow-through by associating action items with owners
  - Clearly explain next steps and how participants will be notified about future events/news associated with the planning process

These considerations build heavily from SAFECOM's ongoing efforts to promote experiences and practices that reflect inclusiveness and bring attention to making the most of a local practitioner's experience during a statewide planning process. Facilitated events can be approached in a variety of ways; this reality strongly reinforces the need for the sponsor to enlist the support of a facilitation team that values collaborative and participatory techniques while working with large and small groups.

Appendix U: Introduction to Compendium Web links

(click here to return to document)

The following Web links will direct you to detailed information for a tool, known as Compendium, which can be used to capture results of the focus group interviews.

Links to Introduction to Compendium:

http://cognexus.org/execsum.pdf

and

www.compendiuminstitute.org

Appendix V: Web link to Sample Focus Group Report

(click here to return to document)

The sample focus group report demonstrates a standard format in which focus group results can be systematically shared with the stakeholder community. We recommend that these reports be posted on the state interoperability Web site at the conclusion of the entire set of focus group interviews. This will ensure that focus groups conducted later in the phase are not influenced by the results of the previous input.

Link to Sample Focus Group Reports:

http://www.interoperability.virginia.gov/focusgroups.html

Appendix W: Sample Thank You Letter

(click here to return to document)

This example letter provides a resource to be used when thanking participants at the conclusion of a focus group interview. The intent is to acknowledge stakeholders for their effort and engage interest in the future development of strategic initiatives.

Sample Thank You Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you again for attending the Communications Interoperability Focus Group Session on _____. Your input from will be extremely valuable in the development of the statewide emergency response interoperability strategic plan. The ideas and concerns identified by the state emergency response point of view are essential to the planning process and will establish a basis for the goals and initiatives required to achieve communications interoperability in _____.

The value of this strategic planning approach centers on the importance of a statewide perspective on saving lives. Coordination is critical to this effort and will leverage a collaborative strategy that can enable the state to work more efficiently and effectively. Finally, the focus on the statewide perspective highlights the critical importance of establishing and maintaining a strong relationship at the Federal level, which can foster awareness and education about the variety of support mechanisms available to state and local efforts to increase interoperability.

We will continue to update you on the progress and development of the statewide interoperability plan. If you have any additional comments, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Thank you,

State Interoperability Coordinator
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety

Phase VII – Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session – Resources

The following resources were mentioned in Phase VII and are references for use while analyzing data in preparation for the strategic planning session. These include:

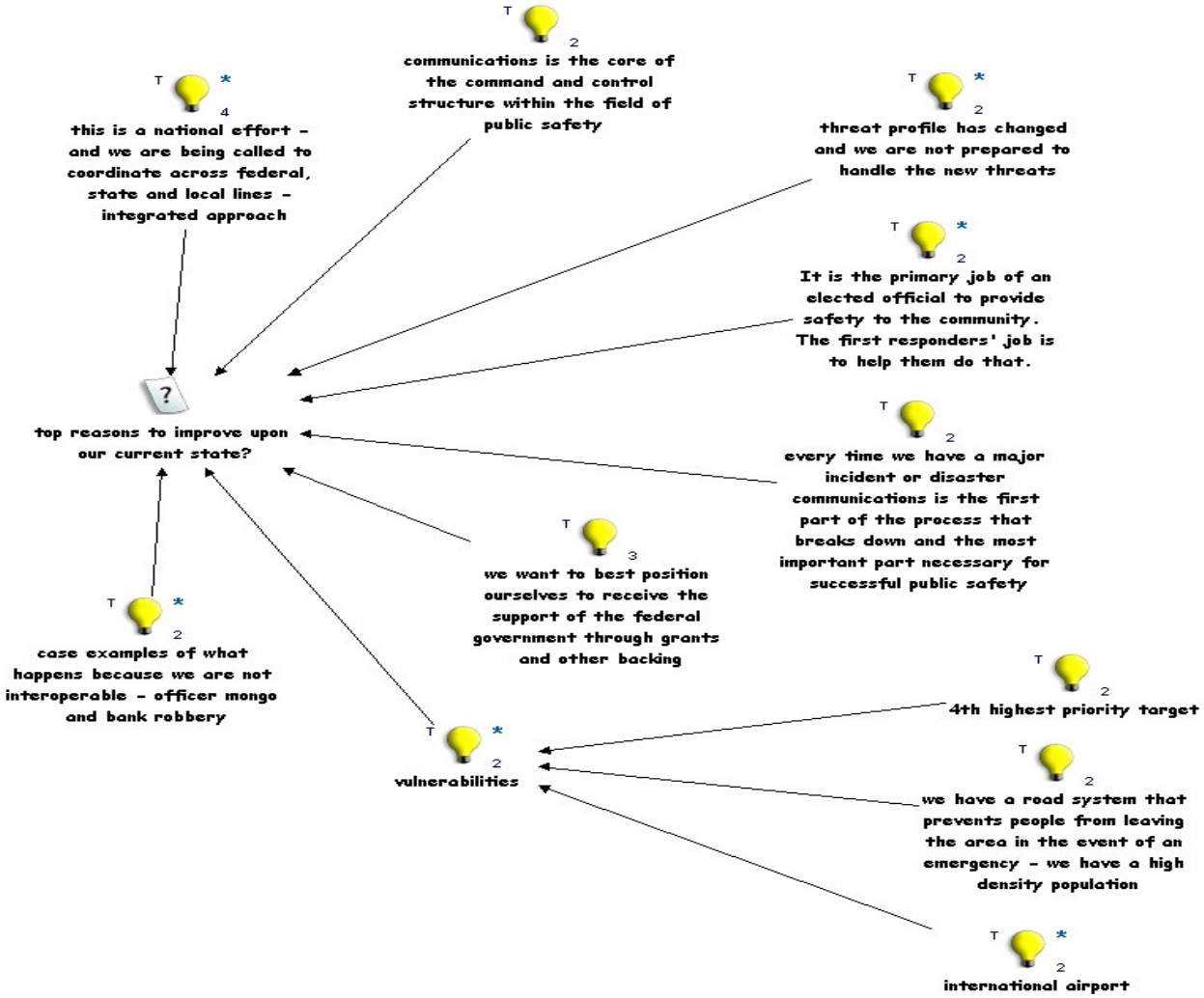
- ***Compendium Maps –*** The following sample Compendium maps are for your reference in viewing the transformation of data from the regional level to an aggregated state level perspective.

- ***Sample Analysis Results –*** This sample provides the results from the data analysis in Virginia, which was used for discussion in the strategic planning session.

Appendix X: Compendium Map

(click here to return to Phase VI)
(click here to return Phase VII)

The following map shows how the conversations of the focus group interviews are captured in the Compendium dialog mapping tool.



Phase VIII – Prepare and Conduct Strategic Planning Session – Resources

In Phase VIII, the resources listed below were mentioned as references for use while conducting the strategic planning session. The strategic planning session brings together key decision and policymakers that are integral to the success of adoption and implementation of the statewide planning effort.

- ***Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session –*** This sample letter is directed to the key decision and policymakers who will be invited to attend the strategic planning session.

- ***List of Attending Organizations –*** This sample list from the state of Virginia will provide guidelines for the type of organizations and positions that will benefit the strategic planning session.

- ***Web link to Strategic Planning Session Report –*** This sample report contains the resulting key initiatives and goals agreed upon by the key decision and policymakers from the strategic planning session in Virginia.

Appendix Y: Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session

(click here to return to document)

The following letter provides a reference to be used when inviting participants to attend the strategic planning session.

Sample of Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session

MEMORANDUM

TO: Strategic Planning Participants

FROM: State Leader

DATE: Date

SUBJECT: Statewide Interoperability Plan

As you well know, the lack of interoperable wireless communications systems has been an issue plaguing emergency response organizations for decades. In many cases, organizations do not have adequate radio channels, radio frequencies, hardware, emergency response software applications, or equipment to perform mission-critical duties. Emergency responders are then unable to communicate or share critical voice and data information with other jurisdictions or disciplines during natural disasters, terrorist acts, or even in day-to-day operations. The Governor has recognized the need to address interoperability by supporting the creation of a new position in the Office of Public Safety, known as the State Interoperability Coordinator.

The State Interoperability Coordinator has assumed this leadership role and is committed to driving the design of a strategic plan for statewide interoperability founded on SAFECOM principles. SAFECOM a communications program of the Department of Homeland Security, together with its Federal partners, provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies through input gathered from practitioners in the field. The Office of Public Safety is committed to involving local emergency responders in this endeavor and believes the success of this effort depends on it.

We are conducting six focus group sessions throughout the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first step of our strategic planning process. Each focus group is comprised of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and EMS departments with additional assistance from other relevant organizations.

We are now in a position to leverage the knowledge and perspectives gathered from the state's emergency response community. On _____, we will conduct a full day strategic planning workshop. The intended outcome of this session is a shared strategic direction defining the most effective and efficient route to begin the implementation of statewide communications interoperability, driven by the expertise of local emergency responders.

You have been identified as a leader in _____ community of emergency responders and you are cordially invited to attend our strategic planning session. This one day event will be held on _____ in _____ at the _____.

The session running from _____ (lunch provided) will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

- How would you describe _____ existing level of interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what will happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter while striving for this future state?

Please let us know if you are available to join us to share your perspective on interoperable communications. If you are unable to attend, we would appreciate a suggestion of an alternate representative on your behalf. Funding is available for those traveling 75 miles or more to attend this session.

We look forward to learning more about your perspective and experience with interoperable communications in _____.

Appendix Z: List of Attending Organizations

(click here to return to document)

The following list contains the organizations that attended the state of Virginia strategic planning session as a means of providing you with a sense of participating local and state government officials. While this exact list may not be replicated in every case, ensuring the balance of state and local representation is critical to enforcing the locally-driven philosophy of this effort.

List of Attending Organizations for the State of Virginia Strategic Planning Session

1. Alexandria Police Department
2. VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
3. Henrico Police Department
4. Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
5. Virginia State Police
6. DHS – SAFECOM
7. Virginia Department of Transportation
8. VA National Guard
9. Virginia Department of Emergency Management
10. Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
11. Department of Criminal Justice Services
12. VA Office of Public Safety
13. VA Department of Health/Office of EMS
14. Capitol Police
15. Chesterfield County
16. Alexandria Fire Department
17. Department of Justice – National Institute of Justice
18. Southwest VA EMS Council
19. VA Information Technologies Agency
20. Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center
21. York County Department of Fire and Life Safety
22. Virginia Department of Transportation - Safety Service Patrol
23. Charlottesville Police Department
24. Roanoke Fire Department
25. Commonwealth Preparedness
26. Communications Systems Department of Information Technology
27. VA Department of Forestry
28. Axiom Communications Group
29. VA Department of Health
30. Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police
31. VA Department of Health NW Regional Hospital Coordinator
32. Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
33. Planning and Information Systems
34. STARS
35. DIT, Radio Services Center
36. VA Department of Fire Program

Appendix AA: Web link to Strategic Planning Session Report

(click here to return to document)

Conducting the strategic planning session marks a critical transition point from planning to implementation. The final session report will contain a reflection and confirmation of the information gathered in the regional focus group interviews. In addition, the report will contain a few prioritized initiatives for the short and long term that will begin to address the interoperability challenges facing the state's emergency response community. The group's collective agreement on the item that is most important to act on will build momentum toward driving a strategic plan that is tangible, realistic, and manageable. It is important to reiterate that too many goals can overwhelm a state effort and may dilute funding.

Web link to Strategic Planning Session Report:

The following is a link to the Session Report for the Nevada Strategic Planning Session for Statewide Communications Interoperability.

http://nitoc.nv.gov/ncsc/FocusGroupReport/2005-09-14Report.pdf

Phase IX – Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan – Resources

The following items are resources mentioned in Phase IX provided for use in developing a Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan:

- ***Link to Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability*** **–** The Virginia Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability provides a sample of how one state has gathered the data, feedback, and technical expertise of interested emergency responders and state leaders to address interoperability issues. This appendix presents the Web link to the entire strategic plan and the structural layout.

- ***Web link to SAFECOM Governance Charter*** **–** The SAFECOM governance charter is a sample structure that to be used for managing strategic initiatives.

Appendix AB: Web link to Strategic Plans for Statewide Communications Interoperability

(click here to return to document)

The following Strategic Plans for Statewide Communications Interoperability provide an example of how the data, feedback, and technical expertise of interested emergency responders and state leaders has been successfully documented into a focused plan for addressing interoperability issues. It is critical to include the following elements in a strategic plan:

- A vision for the future
- Goals to support the vision
- Initiatives that will achieve the goals
- Performance measures for each initiative with a realistic timeframe and target metric
- A proposed organizational leadership and governance structure focused on managing the initiatives and next steps

Additionally, the SAFECOM and DM programs have created the "Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook" to provide states with assistance on creating comprehensive state plans. The guidebook includes a standard outline for state plans which can be used as a foundation for creating your state's statewide strategic plan

Web link to Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability:
Please visit the Virginia Interoperability homepage at
http://www.interoperability.virginia.gov/strategicplan.html *for the complete plan.*

Web link to The Commonwealth of Kentucky Statewide Strategic Plan for Communications and Interoperability:
Please visit the Kentucky Wireless Interoperability Executive Committee Web site at
http://kwiec.ky.gov/resources/Strategic+Plan+for+Communications+and+Interoperability.htm
for the complete plan.

Appendix AC: SAFECOM Governance and DM Practitioner Steering Group Information

(click here to return to document)

SAFECOM Governance Structure

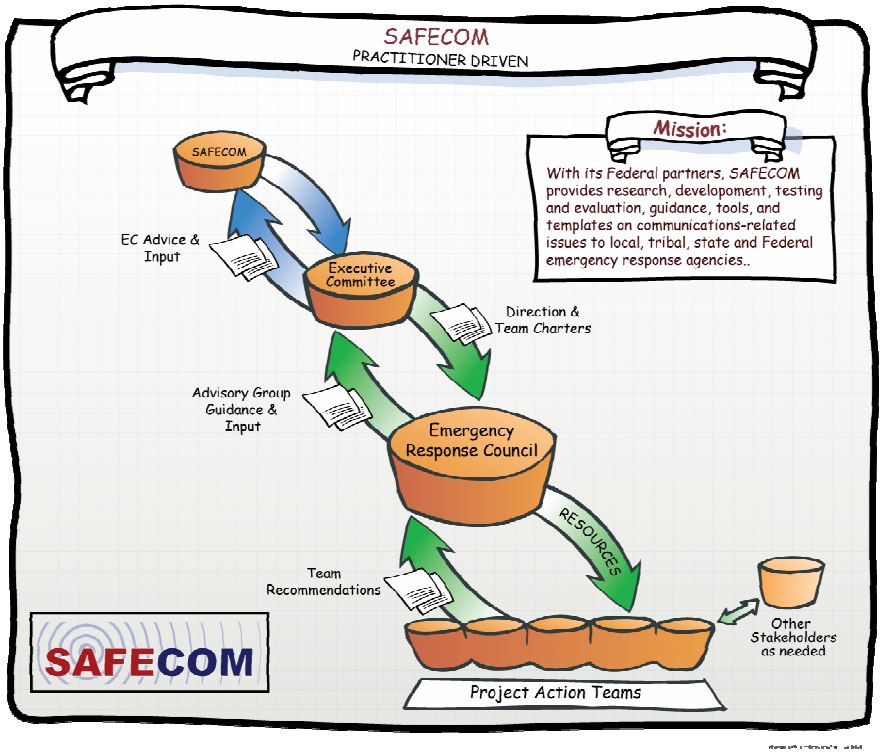
SAFECOM Approach

The SAFECOM Program recognizes that the development of a successful solution to improving public safety communications and interoperability requires a focus on user needs and requirements. This means ensuring the input of both practitioners and policy makers- representatives across disciplines, jurisdictions, and levels of government, who are able to represent their own needs and to strategically approach the greater needs of the public safety community. As a result, SAFECOM has adopted a strategy for improving public safety communications and interoperability that is based on user needs and expertise and driven from the bottom up.

In order to support this approach, the Program has developed a governance model to ensure a local and state government and practitioner-driven approach to the problem of public safety communications. Working cooperatively with the Nation's local and state public safety and governmental associations, SAFECOM practices and encourages transparent, accountable, and collaborative governance and follows a strategic direction developed with input from the public safety community.

SAFECOM Governance

SAFECOM has created the model depicted on the following page to facilitate the user-needs input of the public safety community to the Program's strategy and activities. Members are included as part of the Program's Executive Committee (EC) or as part of the Emergency Responder Council (ERC). Both EC and ERC members have the opportunity to lead and participate in Project Action Teams and Working Groups as needs within the Program arise.



Executive Committee (EC)

The SAFECOM Executive Committee serves as the leadership group of the Emergency Responder Council and the Program's primary resource for access to public safety practitioners and policy makers so the Program can gather the public safety community's user needs.

Responsibilities

The SAFECOM Executive Committee will:

- Provide strategic leadership and guidance to the SAFECOM Program on emergency responder user needs from the perspective of practitioners and policy makers at all levels of government
- Communicate decisions, plans, and results to relevant constituencies, practitioners, and subsets that are not directly engaged
- Define and articulate the needs of the public safety community in order to inform the development of materials targeted at that community
- Build relationships with the ERC in order to leverage their subject matter expertise as a broader pool of resources

Membership

The SAFECOM EC will include representation from the Nation's leading public safety and local and state government associations, representatives from interested, contributing federal agencies, and two seats for public safety at-large members. Current Executive Committee members will assist in identifying additional organizations for inclusion as appropriate. The SAFECOM Program

Director will ensure that the group is constituted in accordance with governmental regulations and practices.

EC Members will be expected to participate for a minimum of one year. The standard time commitment is approximately two to four hours per month as well as attendance at the quarterly meeting and may fluctuate with quarterly meetings. Time can be spent on an ad hoc basis to review materials and participate voluntary in Working Groups

One permanent alternate may be designated for each organization. The alternate must have equal authority to formulate advice and make decisions in the absence of the primary member. While the alternate can contribute on a conversational (non-voting basis) if the primary is in attendance, each organization receives only one formal seat. Public safety at-large members are selected for their personal experience and expertise and do not have an alternate.

EC Leadership

The SAFECOM Executive Committee shall elect its own Chair and Vice Chair annually.

The Chair shall:

- Preside over Executive Committee meetings
- Oversee the coordination of the Executive Committee meetings, including the setting, time and location of such meetings
- Work closely with the PMO to create and distribute an agenda, relevant read-ahead material, and notes or reports for all EC/ERC meetings and teleconferences
- Preside over and oversee coordination of all regular Emergency Responder Council meetings
- Serve as the official spokesperson of the EC

The Vice Chair shall:

- The Vice Chair will take on the responsibilities of the Chair when he or she is absent or any other duties as appropriate

Voting Procedures

The SAFECOM Executive Committee will operate by consensus whenever possible. On occasion when the Executive Committee will have to vote on SAFECOM-related issues, each organization will have one vote. An alternate may vote only in the absence of the primary EC member, though Executive Committee members can abstain from voting on any issue if they so choose. Members may also give another member permission to serve as a proxy on any vote.

Emergency Responder Council (ERC)

The SAFECOM ERC was developed to serve as a vehicle to provide a broad base of public safety community input on emergency responder user needs to

the SAFECOM Program. This group will provide a mechanism for individuals with specialized skills and common interests to share best practices and lessons learned so that interested parties at all levels of government can gain from one another's experience.

Responsibilities

The SAFECOM Emergency Responder Council will:

- Provide general guidance and recommendations on emergency responder user needs to the SAFECOM Executive Committee
- Participate in project action teams to develop work products and user needs requirements as requested by the SAFECOM Executive Committee
- Communicate decisions, plans and results to relevant constituencies, practitioners, and subsets that are not directly engaged
- Participate in periodic, pre-scheduled meetings

Membership

SAFECOM Emergency Responder Council membership is comprised of representatives from the local, tribal, state, and federal public safety practitioner and policy maker communities and up to 25 public safety at large members. Members of the SAFECOM Executive Committee and their alternates are also members of the ERC.

The membership of the Emergency Responder Council will be subject to review by the Executive Committee.

- A standard application form to the SAFECOM ERC will collect information on membership criteria, including:
    - Representation of a relevant discipline within the public safety community not currently represented by another organization
    - Expertise in a specific area relevant to the public safety community that provides a specific contribution to the SAFECOM Program
    - Ability to provide the EC with a perspective on unique local, state, and federal practitioner user needs
    - Ability to participate on Working Groups and Project Action Teams to provide more in-depth input into SAFECOM mission critical Program activities from the perspective of emergency responders' user needs
- Participation in the SAFECOM ERC will be re-evaluated after two unexplained absences from bi-annual meetings. In such an event, the SAFECOM Program shall:
    - Inform the EC of the situation
    - Alert representative's organization that the designated representative has not attended meetings and provide an opportunity to appoint another point of contact
    - Evaluate representation based on organization response

An alternate may be designated for each organization in the event that the primary member is unable to attend a meeting. The alternate must have equal

authority to formulate advice and make decisions in the absence of the primary member. Public safety at-large members are selected for their personal experience and expertise and do not have an alternate.

Web link to SAFECOM Governance Charter:

A complete copy of the SAFECOM Governance Charter can be viewed on the SAFECOM Web site at

http://www.safecomprogram.gov

DM Practitioner Steering Group (PSG)

The DM Practitioner Steering Group (PSG) plays a key role in the definition, execution, and direction of the program. The group will provide input and recommendations to the Program Manager (PM) regarding standards development, the Disaster Management Interoperability Services (DMIS) software, the OPEN interoperability backbone, and the DisasterHelp.Gov portal.

Responsibilities

PSG members will:

- Provide recommendations on DM's components and activities to the DM PM from the practitioner perspective and offer advice about changes in direction and scope for the overall program
- Represent the end-user practitioner community (for example, law enforcement, fire fighting, emergency medical services, public health, transportation, emergency management) or policy-making body when formulating advice
- Participate in periodic, pre-scheduled meetings
- Participate in or delegate members from their respective organizations to serve on Working Groups
- Prepare appropriate briefing and presentation materials for PSG review, as required

Membership

The PSG includes local, tribal, and state representatives from leading emergency response and government associations. Members must have experience in information sharing and have the authority to speak on behalf of their organization.

The OIC Director and DM PM will oversee the initial selection of the PSG members and ensure that the group is constituted in accordance with governmental regulations and practices. PSG members will assist in selecting additional members from other organizations, as appropriate. A two-thirds vote will be needed before the DM PM will accept a nominated association for

consideration. Justification for the nomination may be requested and the nomination should be communicated to the group at least 2 weeks before the vote takes place. The PM reserves the right to invite new associations to participate on the PSG.

PSG members nominating additional associations must demonstrate that the association meets the following criteria:

- Representation of a relevant discipline within the emergency response community
- Expertise in a specific area relevant to the emergency response community that provides a specific contribution to the DM Program
- Ability to provide the DM program with input about DM's strategic direction based on unique local, state, and federal practitioner or policy maker perspective
- Ability to participate on Working Groups to provide more in-depth input into mission critical program activities

One permanent alternate member may be designated for each member. The alternate must have equal authority to give advice and make decisions on behalf of his or her constituents. In addition, the PM and/or PSG may designate at-large members to attend meetings and stay involved with group activities. Representatives from other organizations may be invited to participate in one or more of the PSG meetings. Alternatively, additional working sessions may be scheduled to involve a broader representation of interested groups.

Members should be able to attend all or most of the pre-scheduled meetings and should be available to respond to ad hoc requests from the Chair or PM. Members are expected to participate for a minimum of two years and may be re-nominated by their respective associations. The time commitment requires approximately 2-4 hours per month as well as attendance at the regularly scheduled meetings.

Chair Roles and Responsibilities

The DM PSG elects its own Chair and Vice Chair every two years. The Chair and Vice Chair shall not serve consecutive terms but may serve again after the next election cycle.

The Chair will:

- Preside over all regular and, if required, special PSG meetings
- Oversee the coordination of PSG meetings, including setting the time and location of such meetings
- Work with the Program Management Office (PMO) to create and distribute meeting agendas, briefing materials, notes, and reports
- Serve as the official spokesperson for the PSG

The Vice Chair will:

- Assume the responsibilities, as appropriate, of the Chair when he or she is absent or unable to perform any other duties

Rules of Engagement

Meetings

- There will be a standing meeting calendar for the PSG. The group meets a minimum of once a quarter and more often when necessary. The PM is responsible for maintaining the meeting calendar and proposing future meeting dates. The DM PSG may schedule additional meetings.
- The PM reserves the right to call special meetings or conference calls, as needed, to resolve a specific issue.
- There will be an agenda and briefing materials for each meeting. The outcomes of each meeting will be documented in writing and communicated, as appropriate. Meetings may be scheduled around National or regional meetings that attract the participation of most PSG members.

Decisions

- The PSG will operate by consensus whenever possible. If consensus cannot be achieved, members must vote on decisions. Each organization included in the PSG will have one vote. PSG members can abstain from voting on any issue if they so choose. One member may give another member permission to serve as a proxy on any vote.
- The PSG will act on the agreement of a majority of the members who are present and voting. Dissenting opinions should be aired and noted in the meeting minutes.
- Proposed recommendations regarding documents, policy positions, plans, etc. shall be provided to PSG members at least one week prior to the meeting in which a decision is required.

Additional Resources

(click here to return to document)

National Taskforce on Interoperability (NTFI) - *WHY CAN'T WE TALK? Working Together To Bridge the Communications Gap to Save Lives*

This publication was developed as a result of the ongoing dialogue among state and local emergency response and policy-making officials. Throughout the guide, these members are referred to collectively as "public officials." Public officials include elected and appointed members at every level of government who serve in a variety of roles. These roles may include governors, mayors, state legislators, city and county council members, city and county managers, police chiefs, fire chiefs, sheriffs, chief information officers, and chief communications officers among others. It is hoped that this guide will serve as a catalyst for public officials to initiate dialogue with peers in their localities, regions, and states to develop collaborative solutions.

Web link to NTFI's "Why Can't We Talk" Publication
http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/library/interoperabilitybasics/1159_nationaltask.htm

Glossary of Terms

- **Boilerplate:** A standardized model that can be used in other processes of the same nature

- **Buy-in:** The process of involving stakeholders to commit to the cause of strategic planning

- **Case for Change:** A description of the reasons why change is necessary

- **Channel:** A band of frequencies of sufficient width to allow a single radio communication

- **Communications Interoperability**: The ability of emergency response agencies to talk across disciplines and jurisdictions via radio communications systems, exchanging voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized

- **Communications System:** A collection of individual communication networks, transmission systems, relay stations, tributary stations, and data terminal equipment usually capable of interconnection and interoperation to form an integrated whole. The components of a communications system serve a common purpose, are technically compatible, use common procedures, respond to controls, and operate in unison.

- **Coverage:** The geographic area included within the range of a wireless radio system

- **Current State:** The present state of a process, organization or situation. The current state should be stated as facts or statements that can be proven.

- **Deliverables:** The presentation of the product that was promised, expected, or desired.

- **Emergency Responders**: Individuals who in the early stages of an incident are responsible for the protection and preservation of life, property, evidence, and the environment, including emergency response providers, as well as emergency management, public health, clinical care, public works, and other skilled support (such as equipment operators) that provide immediate support services during prevention, response, and recovery operations.

- **Emergency Response Communities:** Emergency responders of various disciplines and jurisdictions

- **Frequency:** The number of cycles or events of a periodic process in a unit of time

- **Future State:** The ideal way a process or organization would operate in the future.

- **Gameboard:** A simple visual tool that describes the current state, future state, key barriers, and pinpoints the case for change that necessitates a transition. A gameboard helps organizations to understand business dynamics as they are and assist in making a shift to the ideal state.

- **Governance:** Activities and policies extended on behalf of senior management such as performance standards, purchasing policy, information technology strategy, and investment strategy

- **Grant:** Funding made available to local agencies from state and Federal government agencies, as well as from private sources. Grants usually require the submission of a formal application to justify one's funding request.

- **Infrastructure:** The hardware and software needed to complete and maintain voice and data communications systems.

- **Initiatives:** A new measure or course of action

- **Interoperability:** *Please see Communications Interoperability*

- **Jurisdiction:** The territory within which power or authority can be exercised

- **Key Relationships:** Communication with and support of stakeholders essential for the success of an initiative

- **Locality:** A particular neighborhood, place, or district

- **Local Revenue Fund:** Funding obtained by local governments through local taxes (e.g. sales tax, property tax), user fees, and other user charges, as well as through the issuing of debt instruments, such as bonds

- **Metric:** A measurement of a specific component

- **Objectives:** Something toward which effort is directed**:** an aim, goal, or end of action

- **Plenary:** Fully attended or constituted by all entitled to be present

- **Public Support Providers:** An expansion of emergency responders which includes transportation, public health, and forestry

- **Roadmap:** A graphical depiction of the strategic planning process used to help to establish a common, visual understanding of resources, activities and deliverables

- **Spectrum:** The region of the electromagnetic spectrum in which radio transmission and detection techniques may be used

- **Stakeholder:** An individual or association that has stake in a particular process

- **Standards Initiative:** A practitioner-driven program to create information sharing capabilities between disparate incident management software applications and systems (DM Messaging Standards Initiative). The resulting eXtensible Markup Language (XML) standards assist the emergency response community in sharing data seamlessly and securely while responding to an incident.

- **Statewide Interoperable Communications:** The ability for emergency and supplemental responders to communicate efficiently and effectively, in real time, across state jurisdictions and disciplines.

- **Supplemental Responders:** Responders who provide support to emergency responders during incidents requiring special assistance. Supplemental responders include:

    - Emergency Management: Public protection, central command and control of emergency response agencies during emergencies
    - Environmental Health/Hazardous Materials Specialists: environmental health personnel
    - Homeland Security and Defense Units
    - Search and Rescue Teams
    - Transportation Personnel

- **Transmitter:** The portion of a radio device that sends out the radio signal

- **Vet:** The process of reviewing information or documents with key stakeholders to receive support for the content and presentation style

SAFECOM is the overarching Federal umbrella program managed by the Department of Homeland Security that coordinates all initiatives pertaining to public safety communications and interoperability.

Visit www.safecomprogram.gov or call 1-866-969-SAFE