



Office of Emergency Communications **Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

General

Q1. What is the purpose of the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) requirement? Is the SCIP a plan or a “plan to plan”?

A1. The purpose of a locally-driven SCIP is to establish a future vision for communications interoperability and align emergency response agencies with that vision and the goals, objectives, and initiatives for achieving that vision across the State. DHS understands that different States, regions, and localities are at different stages in enhancing interoperability. As such, elements of many SCIPs will amount to a “plan to plan.” Some States’ have processes, procedures, and other plans in place that allow them to easily address SCIP elements. Others do not and will through the SCIP show how they plan to do so in the future. Most States will have elements that have not addressed by the submission deadline and so will describe in the SCIP how they will be addressed in the future.

Q2. Who is the intended audience of the SCIP? Should it be written for grant reviewers or emergency responders?

A2. The primary audience of SCIPs is officials at local, regional, tribal, and State levels of government responsible for ensuring interoperable communications for the emergency response community. A SCIP should define a strategic vision and set of goals and objectives for improving interoperable communications statewide. It should be a living document, updated as frequently as needed and at least annually, that provides strategic direction and alignment for those responsible for interoperable communications at the local, regional, and State level.

The SCIP also must be written with peer reviewers and Federal officials in mind, as the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program and the Homeland Security Grant Program have required the development of SCIPs.

Q3. Should the SCIP only address interoperability planning efforts at the statewide level? Or, should the SCIP address the interoperability planning activities of all agencies and jurisdictions throughout the State?

A3. In developing the SCIP, States and Territories should focus their strategic planning efforts on both statewide planning efforts as well as local or regional planning efforts that address the most critical interoperability needs of the State as a whole. A determination of criticality is left to the discretion of the participants engaged in the SCIP process. In instances where local or regional planning efforts are identified, the SCIP should also demonstrate how each effort aligns with the statewide vision, goals, and/or objectives.



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For example, if a major city or region within a State has an individual plan for interoperable communications, the SCIP should identify how that city's vision, goals, and/or objectives align or will align with the SCIP.

SCIPs are *not* required to address the interoperability planning activities between or among all agencies and jurisdictions where there is not an acknowledged, demonstrated, or critical need. The terms "major," "critical," "acknowledged," and "demonstrated" used in this response are left to the discretion of the respective State or Territory for definition.

Q4. How is "statewide planning" demonstrated? Is it necessary for the SCIP to encompass "multiple plans," each addressing the SCIP criteria, for the State agencies, each region and UASI? Or is the approach to look for synergy between the UASIs, regions, and State activities?

A4. The primary approach is to look for synergy between major regions, localities, and State activities. Where there are multiple plans within a State, the statewide planning process should identify where alignment is needed across those disparate plans and identify plans or "plans to plan" for achieving that alignment.

Q5. Who is required to sign the SCIP?

A5. A signature is not required for the SCIP to be submitted or approved. However, it is recommended that the names of the individuals responsible for the development and implementation of the plan are identified and included in the SCIP.

Q6. Is it necessary to document activities that are happening solely within a region or between localities, which do not have a "statewide" impact on interoperable communications? For example, if a fire department from locality A is upgrading its system to also include the police department from locality A as well as fire & police departments from locality B is it necessary to document the governance, technology, SOPs, training and usage characteristics of enhancing this local/regional system?

A6. If the region or locality is considered to be a major part of the State, then this should be addressed in a general way. Though the activities are on a regional or local basis, they will have an impact on statewide interoperability. The SCIP should identify plans or a "plan to plan" for aligning such activities with the SCIP where needed and applicable. The SCIP does not need to document in a detailed way the governance, technology, SOPs, training and usage characteristics of enhancing this local/regional system. It should identify the general needs, gaps, and plans associated with governance, technology, SOPs, training and usage for enhancing the system in alignment with the overall vision, goals, and objectives of the SCIP.

Q7. If the State's interoperable communications baseline is complete, is it necessary to provide all the data? The current guidance alludes to providing information on every



SOP, interoperable communications technology component, training and exercise program and governance body from each jurisdiction, region and discipline across the State whether or not they contribute to “statewide” interoperable communications. In other words, is DHS seeking a “data-dump?”

A7. DHS is not seeking a “data-dump.” The purpose of a SCIP for interoperable communications is to establish a future vision for communications interoperability and align emergency response agencies with that vision and the goals, objectives, and initiatives for achieving that vision. In order to develop the vision, goals, and objectives, there must be an understanding of the current baseline communications environment in the State. This will require significant data gathering. However, States should not include all data gathered in the SCIP. States should analyze the data, provide a summary of critical interoperability gaps and needs that have been discovered through the data collection, and determine plans for addressing those gaps in line with the vision, goals, and objective of the SCIP.

Q8. To fulfill the requirements of the SCIP as laid out in the Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook, particularly the SOP and Technology sections, is it necessary to develop a statewide tactical and/or operational guide?

A8. States do not need to develop tactical and/or operational guides in response to the requirements outlined in the *Guidebook*. If, through the planning process, States have identified a need to develop tactical and/or operational guides, then the SCIP should identify a path forward for developing such guides. However, those guides do not have to be completed and included in the SCIP. If they are completed, they should not be included in full in the SCIP.

Background and Preliminary Steps

Q9. Criterion 1.3 states that “DHS expects that each State will have a full time interoperability coordinator.” If States do not have a full-time interoperability coordinator that meets the criteria, what information should be provided in the SCIP?

A9. The SCIP should identify a single person that is designated as the point of contact for the plan. It should also identify the organization and position through which this person is employed and whether or not the person is able to dedicate 100 percent of his or her time to coordinating and managing the statewide planning and implementation process. When a full-time statewide planning coordinator is not provided as the point of contact for the SCIP, it should specify if and when the State intends to establish a full-time statewide planning coordinator.

Further, it should be clarified that this person does not have to have the title of “interoperability coordinator.” Rather, DHS expects only that there will be a single



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person that will serve as the primary POC and be dedicated to ensuring interoperability on a statewide level.

Q10. In addition, criterion 1.3 states that, "...the coordinator should not represent or be affiliated with any one particular agency." It seems that this person would have to be affiliated with some organization or agency.

A10. Criterion 1.3 should be clarified to read, "...the coordinator should not represent or be affiliated with any one particular *discipline*." The intent of this criterion is to ensure that this person represents a multi-disciplinary, multi-jurisdictional approach to interoperability.

Q11. If a State/Territory does not have a full-time interoperability coordinator that meets the criteria, will it prevent the SCIP from receiving approval?

A11. If the SCIP addresses the necessary information outlined in the above response to the question regarding criterion 1.3, it will not be prevented from receiving approval. However, DHS expects that each State will have a full time interoperability coordinator in the future.

Q12. The Federal Communications Commission has established 700MHz regional coordinators. How is this person different from the interoperability coordinator described in Section 1.3?

A12. State interoperability coordinators may serve in other radio planning roles, but the roles are separate and distinct. In allocation of 700 and 800 MHz blocks of spectrum for public safety, the FCC established planning regions across the country and called for regional plans to be developed by affected agencies. The regions largely coincide with State boundaries, but there are significant discrepancies.

Regional Planning Committees (RPCs) are officially recognized by the FCC for creation and maintenance of these spectrum usage plans. Each is expected to elect a chair, but the RPC bears responsibility for regional plan coordination. RPC chairs are listed at <http://www.fcc.gov/pshs/spectrum/800mhz/regional-chairs.html> and <http://www.fcc.gov/pshs/spectrum/700mhz/regional-chairs.html>.

Q13. Section 1.7 of the criteria requires that State/Territories "set the scope and timeframe of the plan." Further, the explanation of the criteria states that "a timeframe of at least one year" should be established. What level of detail should be expected?

A13. Scope refers to the breadth of agencies addressed and the interoperability topics discussed. The scope of the SCIP should be based on both statewide planning efforts and local or regional planning efforts that address the most critical interoperability needs of the State as a whole. The timeframe refers to the period of time for which the SCIP is



applicable. SCIPs should cover at least one year and provide enough time to complete the critical initiatives identified.

The period of performance for PSIC funding allocations is three years. States applying for PSIC funding should tailor the timeframe of their SCIPs to accommodate PSIC-specific initiatives.

Q14. Which nongovernmental organizations should be included in the SCIP?

A14. Nongovernmental organizations should be included in the SCIP where such organizations serve as first responders, which may include, among others:

- For- or non-profit ambulance services and
- Volunteer fire departments.

In addition, nongovernmental organizations should be included in the SCIP where States or Territories deem it necessary and/or appropriate to include. Examples of nongovernmental organizations that may be included in the SCIP, among others, are:

- Red Cross;
- Search and rescue organizations;
- Utility companies; and
- Other organizations that respond to incidents prompted by 911 calls.

States/Territories applying for PSIC funding should reference the authorized nongovernmental organizations identified in the PSIC Grant Guidance and Application Kit.

Strategy

Q15. Sections 2.2 through 2.6 require strategic plans for coordinating with neighboring States and countries; addressing data interoperability; addressing catastrophic loss of communication assets; ensuring the plan is compliant with NIMS and NRP. Sections 2.2 through 2.6 could be large-scale strategies in themselves. What is the level of detail expected in each of these?

A15. Again, the plan should focus on those statewide planning efforts as well as local or regional planning efforts that address the most critical interoperability needs of the State as a whole. The plan should provide a general overview of these planning efforts. In instances where a plan is not in place, the SCIP should identify a plan or “plan to plan” for addressing the criterion in the future. A responsive answer may identify the interoperability need(s) relating to the respective criterion; identify a method for addressing those needs (such as establishing a working group); an initial scope (agencies and jurisdictions to be included); identify the appropriate governance body,



representatives, agencies, and or jurisdictions responsible for initiating the plan; and a timeframe for development of the plan.

In instances where a plan is in place, the SCIP should provide a general overview identifying the scope (agencies/jurisdictions included and critical interoperability needs addressed); timeframe; vision, goals, and objectives; and responsible agencies, individuals, and/or governance bodies responsible for it.

In instances where a plan or plans are in place, but additional planning is needed at the statewide level or for a particular major locality, region, or system, the SCIP should identify this need and provide the appropriate information.

Q16. Section 2.3 requires States/Territories to “provide a strategic plan for addressing data interoperability in addition to voice interoperability.” Which types of data communication should be included in responding to this criterion? What is the level of detail expected in addressing this requirement?

A16. States and Territories have the discretion to identify the types of data communications that are critical and needed for its multi-agency emergency response activities. In situations where a complete data interoperability plan has not been identified, the SCIP should provide the State’s plans for beginning the development of a data interoperability plan.

Methodology

Q17. Section 3.1 requires States/Territories to “describe the method by which multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary input was provided from all regions of the State.” If representatives from different jurisdictions and disciplines are invited to provide input or attend SCIP development meetings, but do not participate, will their lack of participation be counted against the State/Territory in the review of the SCIP?

A17. No, this will not necessarily be counted against States/Territories in the review process. States must document the process for gathering and using local level input. Situations in which input was sought, but not provided should be noted in the SCIP. One way to address this is to provide a list of jurisdictions and disciplines invited to participate in addition to a list of those representatives, jurisdictions, and disciplines that actually participated.

However, should there be a glaring omission in participation; it is possible that it will count against the State/Territory. An example of a glaring omission is the absence of representation from an Urban Area Security Initiative site. SCIPs are referred to as “statewide” because they should incorporate the perspectives and support of all key stakeholders from across the State. Where key stakeholder representation is not included in the process, the SCIP fails to be “statewide.”



Q18. Methodology criterion 3.3 states: “Describe how the TICPs were incorporated into the SCIP.” If TICPs are regional in nature and not statewide how should they be incorporated into the SCIP?

A18. TICPs were created for all identified Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) sites and are regional in nature. However, UASIs represent a major piece of the overall interoperability picture in States. Therefore, TICPs should be incorporated to the extent to which the SCIP identifies where the TICP(s) align or do not align with the vision, goals, and objectives of the SCIP and alignment will be addressed. Further, a State may consider including as an initiative or objective that it will address gaps identified in the TICP scorecard process to improve the interoperability picture of the State as a whole. In cases where TICPs were developed for areas not deemed UASIs by DHS, the same information should be provided as deemed appropriate by the individual State. States should *not* attach TICPs to the SCIP.

Q19. Section 3.4 requires States/Territories to “describe the strategy for implementing all components of the SCIP.” Is this a summary of what is contained in the strategy section of the SCIP (Section 2)?

A19. No, this is not a summary of the items contained in Section 2. It is an overall strategy for managing the SCIP, as a whole. Section 3.4 should provide the following:

- An implementation plan that outlines the tasks and milestones necessary to complete the initiative. The importance of the implementation strategy is to identify the immediate steps that need to be taken to set the SCIP in action and establish momentum.
- Demonstration that the tasks directly support the strategic initiatives identified in the SCIP.

Governance

Q20. Section 4.1 requires “States/Territories” to “identify the executive or legislative authority for the governing body of the interoperability.” Is there a specific level of authority that the governing body should possess? What information should be provided if no legislative authority exists?

A20. There is no defined level of authority that a governing body should possess. It is recommended that the governing body have the necessary level of authority, as deemed appropriate by the individual State/Territory, to make decisions and ensure implementation of the SCIP. If no legislative, executive, or other appropriate level of authority has been granted to the governing body, the SCIP should provide a strategy to establish such authority for the governing body and a timeframe in which it is expected to be in place.

Q21. Section 4.2 requires States/Territories to, “Provide an overview of the governance structure that will oversee development and implementation of the plan...” How



thoroughly does the governance structure need to be documented? What should be included?

A21. The SCIP should provide a detailed explanation of the State’s governance structure responsible for managing development and implementation. Consider providing an organizational structure of the governance body and the process(es) by which the body makes decisions. Also, the SCIP should describe the process by which the body was convened.

Q22. Section 4.4 of the criteria requires States/Territories to, “Identify the members of the governing body and any of its committees.” How should members of the governing body be identified? Should individual names be included or only the agency that has a seat on the governing body?

A22. The names of individuals as well as the respective agency or organization they represent should be included. In cases where agencies or organizations hold permanent seats on the governing body, that information should be provided in addition to the individual names.

Technology

Q23. What level of detail is expected in the technology section of the criteria?

A23. The technology section (Section 5) of the SCIP should provide a general overview of the major communications systems within the State. It is left to the discretion of the State/Territory to define what they deem a “major” communications system. States may consider establishing thresholds to determine major systems, such as:

- Number of agencies and/or jurisdictions dependent on a single communications system
- Population of citizens served by the emergency response community using a single communications system
- Criticality of the area(s) served by a particular communications system

At a minimum, the capabilities assessment should include the following for the major communications systems, to include data and incident management systems where applicable, in the State:

- Type (such as trunked or conventional, analog or digital)
- Manufacturer
- Frequency assignments
- Jurisdictions and/or agencies operating on those systems
- Equipment, such as large radio caches or gateways that are critical for ensuring interoperability in major jurisdictions



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States and territories should *not* identify every piece of communications equipment across the State in the SCIP and do *not* need to list every communications system for every agency and jurisdiction within the State.

Where a statewide capabilities assessment has not been developed, a plan for developing one should be identified.

SCIPs addressing criteria 5.2, 5.21, and 5.22 should focus on critical interoperability needs identified in the statewide planning process, whether at the statewide level or the local or regional level. The SCIPs should also focus on improving existing systems and technologies while also planning for newly procured technologies.

Q24. Can existing data containing communications systems inventories be leveraged?

A24. States are encouraged to use existing communication system inventories as they address the level of detail sought, as explained above.

Standard Operating Procedures

Q25. What level of detail is expected for the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) criteria? Is it sufficient to list the number of the SOP? Is it sufficient to provide a website where SOPs are posted?

A25. In addressing Section 6, States should focus on a general assessment and an analysis of critical SOP needs, goals, and objectives as opposed to cataloging all SOPs that exist within the State. In conducting the assessment of criterion 6.1, the SCIP should identify SOPs in place at the statewide level, if applicable, as well as SOPs established in major localities or regions for mutual-aid response, if applicable. By conducting a statewide assessment and categorizing available SOPs, the participants of the statewide planning process should develop an understanding of the critical SOP gaps and needs. This will help shape a path forward for addressing those gaps.

Training and Exercises

Q26. Should the training and exercises section (criteria 7.1 to 7.3) be focused on communications?

A26. Yes, the training and exercises portion should be focused on communications or the communications components of other training or exercises. Moderate and large-scale exercises offer multiple areas for training.

Usage

Q27. How can I meet the criteria for usage in my SCIP?



A27. The SCIP should describe a process or a strategy for achieving regular usage of interagency communications capabilities on a statewide basis in the future that includes the timeframe in which this criterion will be met. In addition, it should provide a general analysis of the current state of usage and the desired future state of usage.

Funding

Q28. Criterion 9.1 requires States to, “Identify committed sources of funding, or the process for identifying and securing short- and long-term funding.” If States have identified committed sources of funding, will their Federal grant funding be cut in future years?

A28. No, a State’s Federal funding will not be affected by a State’s current ability to fund interoperability projects. Statewide planning and communications interoperability projects need constant funding to manage, maintain, upgrade, and train and exercise, among other activities. The intent of this criterion is to ensure that localities, regions, and States understand that funding, beyond what is provided through Federal grant programs, needs to be identified and sustained in order to ensure interoperable communications planning activities and initiatives are supported and maintained.

Q29. Can States use PSIC funding for the interoperability coordinator position?

A29. Refer to the PSIC Grant Guidance and Application Kit and PSIC Frequently-Asked Questions for information regarding eligible funding activities.

Implementation

Q30. Criterion 10.5 requires States to, “Establish a plan for identifying, developing, and overseeing operational requirements, SOPs, training, technical solutions, and short- and long-term funding sources.” These are all distinct activities and seem to encompass the entire SCIP. What is expected in addressing this criterion?

A30. The purpose of this criterion is not to establish and submit a plan for each of those distinct areas; but rather to establish a process by which emergency responders can provide feedback on each of those areas—identifying areas that are working, need improvement, or need to be addressed. In addressing this criterion, SCIPs should include the following information:

- Definition of the process by which field-level emergency responders can submit feedback to the program, as well as a process to evaluate and address that feedback. States should define a response time for all input and feedback received so as to encourage input.
- Where a process has not been defined, the SCIP should identify a strategy to develop the process and a timeframe in which it is expected to be completed.



Q31. Criterion 10.6 requires States to, “Identify a POC responsible for implementing the plan.” Must the SCIP identify an individual or can it identify an agency responsible for implementation?

A31. An individual person must be identified as the primary POC. States should also identify what agency or organization this person is affiliated with. This POC may be the same as the interoperability coordinator. If there is a secondary POC or a committee that oversees implementation, those individual names should also be provided. However, a single POC must be identified.

Review Process

Q32. Will States/Territories have opportunities to make corrections to their SCIPs?

A32. Yes. States/Territories will have opportunities to make corrections to their SCIPs. States have the option to submit a preliminary SCIP to the Department of Homeland Security by September 30, 2007. The Office of Emergency Communications will review the SCIP and provide feedback to the States on areas that need to be addressed or improved. After final SCIPs are submitted, they will undergo a peer review evaluation process through DHS. As a result of this process the Office of Emergency Communications, in consultation with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, will determine whether the SCIP passes or needs additional information. SCIPs that require additional information will be returned to the State with guidance on areas that still need to be addressed. States will have an opportunity to resubmit the SCIP with the necessary information requested. The Office of Emergency Communications will work with the State to address information gaps as requested and appropriate.

Q33. How will SCIPs be reviewed for the PSIC Grant Program?

A33. SCIPs will be reviewed through a peer evaluation process. Members of the local, State, tribal, and Federal emergency response community will participate on peer review panels evaluating the SCIPs against the Statewide Planning Criteria and the PSIC-specific criteria. The Office of Emergency Communications will retain ultimate approval authority over SCIPs, in consultation with NTIA to ensure that PSIC-specific requirements have been met. NTIA will retain ultimate approval authority over inputs related to PSIC-specific criteria.