

# Statewide Communication Interoperability Planning (SCIP) Methodology

*An Approach Based on the  
Commonwealth of Virginia's Planning Process*



Homeland  
Security



**Partnering to Save Lives**

Dear Friend of Public Safety:

As you are well aware, the lack of interoperable wireless communications is an issue impacting public safety agencies in communities across the country. Now more than ever, our nation's first responders require interoperability – the ability of public 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 authorized.

Interoperability is a critical necessity to

- Improve the ability of public safety officers to save lives and property,
- Facilitate rapid and efficient interaction among all public safety organizations, and
- Provide immediate and coordinated assistance in day-to-day missions, task force operations, and mass-casualty incidents.

With the support of the Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM Program, **the Commonwealth of Virginia recently completed the first phase of an effort to enhance interoperability through the development of a strategic plan for improving statewide interoperable communications.** SAFECOM is the umbrella program within the Federal Government that coordinates the efforts of local, state, federal, and tribal public safety agencies to improve public safety response through more effective, efficient, interoperable wireless communications.

SAFECOM believes the Virginia planning process can be useful in the development of other statewide strategic plans because it describes a process that builds support at all levels of government. Therefore, SAFECOM developed the Statewide Communications Interoperability Planning (SCIP) methodology as an effective model that other states may adapt to their particular needs.

More than ninety percent of the public safety communications infrastructure in the United States is owned and operated at the local and state level. Therefore, any successful effort to improve public safety interoperability must be driven by the local public safety community. **SAFECOM is the first national program of its kind designed by public safety for public safety.** As a public safety practitioner-driven program, SAFECOM works cooperatively with more than 50,000 local and state public safety agencies. The Virginia Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan is based on the same approach; *it is driven from the local level.*

In applying the SAFECOM “bottom-up” locally-driven approach, the Virginia planning process included regional focus group sessions to capture perspectives from numerous local public safety representatives throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, a strategic planning session was held to define recommendations for key initiatives. Implementation of the Virginia plan will begin in late 2004.

Recent reports by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that state and local governments can play a central role in improving interoperable

communications by preparing comprehensive and integrated statewide plans that address the specific interoperability issues present across first responder disciplines and levels of government. **We encourage you to consider adopting the field-tested model outlined in this methodology and begin the planning process in your state.**

By developing and implementing a collaborative statewide interoperability plan, public safety communications in your state can improve and more lives and property can be saved.

For more information about SAFECOM, statewide interoperability planning, or to subscribe to the SAFECOM Newsletter, visit [www.safecomprogram.gov](http://www.safecomprogram.gov) or call 1-866-969-7233 (SAFE). Please join SAFECOM in working to assure a safer America through effective public safety communications.

Sincerely,



David Boyd

Director, SAFECOM Program

Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security

## WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT THE VIRGINIA STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The SCIP Methodology is modeled after the successful strategic planning process undertaken by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Comments from participants and stakeholders are highlighted below.

“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, Office of the Secretary of Public Safety*

“I would like to thank you for the opportunity to attend the Interoperability Focus Group Meeting in Wytheville. I found it to be extremely informative and beneficial. I left the 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.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia the problem has never been cooperation between agencies. The problem has always been coordination and control of resources. Hopefully, this series of meetings will result in a plan which will pave the way for enhanced communications for all concerned.”

~Steven Counts~

*Virginia Department of Forestry*

“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*

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## 1 BACKGROUND

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

The lack of interoperable wireless communications systems is an issue that continues to impact public safety agencies in communities across the county. In many cases, agencies are unable to communicate or share critical voice and data information with other jurisdictions or disciplines during natural disasters, emergency response scenarios, terrorist acts, or even in day-to-day operations. As described in the 2001 National Task Force on Interoperability Guide, this is often due to:

- ◆ Legacy equipment issues,
- ◆ Limited funding to replace outdated systems,
- ◆ Limited and fragmented planning,
- ◆ Cultural issues, and
- ◆ Inadequate radio spectrum (channels or frequencies).

It has become increasingly clear to the public safety community that communications and interoperability cannot be solved by any one entity alone. The solution will require a partnership among public safety organizations (local, state, federal, and tribal) and industry. In addition, a truly effective and interoperable communications system will require a clear and compelling statewide strategy focused on increasing public safety effectiveness and coordination across all related organizations. To truly gain this type of required buy-in, the state strategy must be driven by the local level public safety organizations and officials in the planning process.

In late 2003, as reliable, real time, and adequate wireless interoperable communications became a high priority, the Commonwealth of Virginia realized its need for one focal point to coordinate its interoperability efforts. As a result, the Governor, along with the Secretary of the Office of Public Safety and the Assistant for Commonwealth Preparedness, created the Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator (CIC) position. Virginia's leadership also determined that a statewide strategic plan, with local public safety practitioner involvement, was necessary to guide future interoperability efforts.

After participating in a public safety wireless communications interoperability strategy session held by the Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM Program, Chief Charles Werner, Deputy Fire Chief, Charlottesville Virginia Fire Department and Barry Green, the Virginia Deputy Secretary of Public Safety, asked SAFECOM to provide assistance to the CIC in its efforts to put together a similar interactive process. By bringing together state and local public safety organizations to develop a statewide communications interoperability plan, Virginia could realize broad and meaningful participation. This approach would



also ensure that the state's interoperability strategy received the necessary buy-in for implementation by meeting the needs of the local public safety officials.

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 public safety responders throughout the Commonwealth. The outcomes from these focus groups laid the foundation for a strategic planning session to define recommendations for the Commonwealth's key initiatives.

The planning process resulted in a fiscal year 2005 – 2007 Strategic Plan with four key goals, supporting initiatives, and performance measures to assess progress. The Commonwealth has committed to review and modify the key goals and initiatives on an annual basis and will include the public safety community in the process.

The Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM Program has taken the Virginia process and turned it into a methodology for use by other states. This document outlines in detail the process a state should go through to develop an actionable statewide communications interoperability plan.

For more information on the Virginia project and associated outputs, visit the Virginia Public Safety website at [www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov](http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov).

## 2 OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Statewide Communications Planning Methodology (SCIP) describes a step-by-step process for developing a locally-driven statewide strategic plan for enhancing communications interoperability. As noted, the methodology is based on the efforts employed by the Commonwealth of Virginia, with support from the Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM Program, in developing their Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability.

This document includes:

- ◆ Explanations of tasks associated with each phase of the strategic planning process,
- ◆ Lessons learned from the strategic planning process in Virginia,
- ◆ Recommended outputs, and
- ◆ Templates that may be leveraged where appropriate.

Although the examples and lessons learned are the result of Virginia's planning process, the strategic planning process described in this document is replicable in other states, regions, counties, and cities.

### Target Audience

While the SCIP methodology may be most appropriate for a state interoperability coordinator or an individual in a comparable position, officials at all levels of government may apply this methodology to gain the appropriate support. In addition, this document may be helpful to public safety practitioners interested in promoting a strategic planning process in their state or locality.

### Organization of the Methodology

The methodology identifies the phases, critical tasks under each phase, and lessons learned during the Virginia strategic planning process. The document includes:

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

The following are the suggested phases of SAFECOM's public safety practitioner-driven approach for developing and executing a locally-driven, statewide communications interoperability planning process.

- ◆ 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
- ◆ Phase VI -- Conduct Focus Group Interviews
- ◆ Phase VII -- Analyze Data and Prepare for Strategic Planning Session
- ◆ 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

Below is the structure used to describe each phase:

### Phase Heading

#### **Timeline**

The estimated time it should take to complete the phase.

#### **Outputs**

Documents resulting from the tasks executed during the phase.

#### **Key Considerations**

The key points listed in the phase that special attention should be paid

#### **Tasks**

The tasks listed in the phase

### **Detail**

#### **Task**

Description of activities and tasks associated with this task.

#### **Lessons Learned**

Hints and guidelines from the Virginia project.

#### **Resources**

Templates and examples of documents used during the Virginia process.

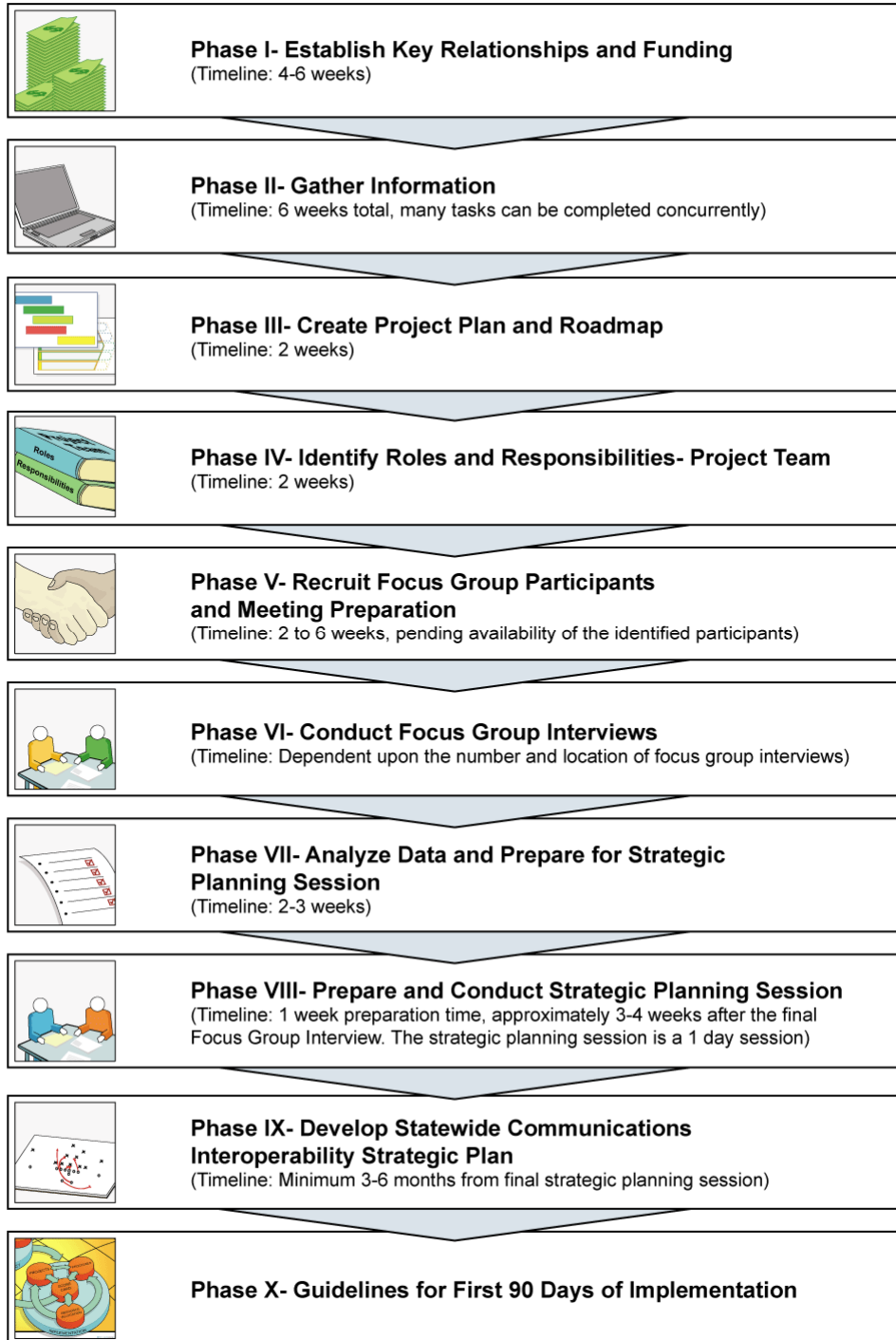
The Implementation Guidelines section provides suggested tasks, outputs, and resources for the first 90 days of implementation following the completion of the planning project.

The Appendix presents graphics, templates, and samples of actual documents used in the Virginia project that can be edited as needed.

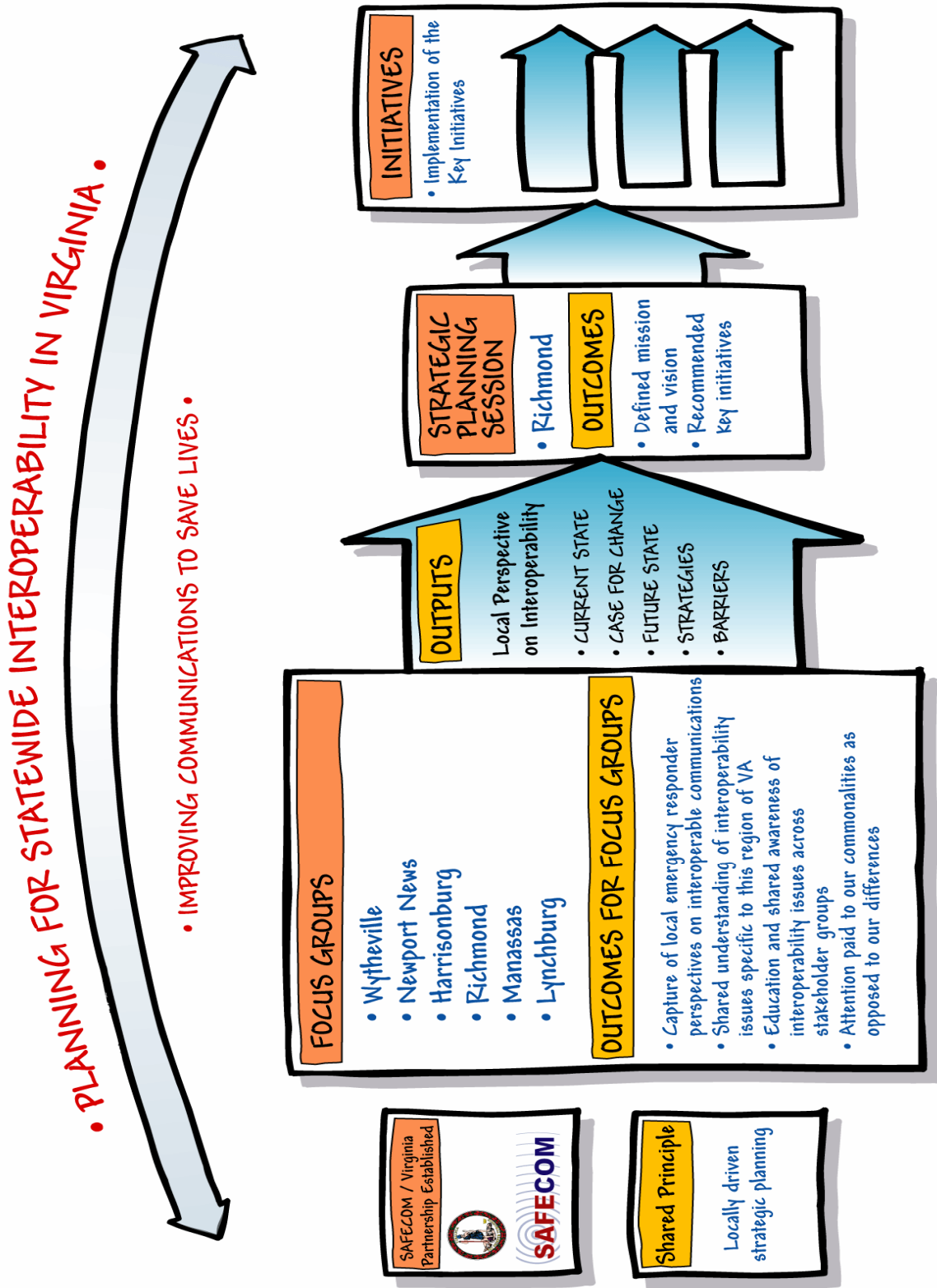
The graphics on the following pages illustrate the planning process and the Commonwealth of Virginia's process map.

3 GRAPHIC

**COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY PLANNING PROCESS**



4 VIRGINIA PROCESS MAP



## 5 KEY ELEMENTS

While this methodology is intended to be a model and aspects can be modified as needed, there are key elements from which the user should not stray. These include:

- Establish key relationships and agreements. This critical first step to undertaking a communications planning process can help provide both the funding and support necessary to 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. Planned and intentional communication to local participants and other key stakeholders should be a commitment the state sponsor honors throughout the entire effort.
- Include local first responders in the focus group interviews. This planning process will not be successful without buy-in from local first responders and their affiliated partners. This locally-driven approach is the foundation of the SAFECOM program.
- Use a consistent and methodical approach to the planning and delivery of the focus group interviews. This will include preparatory work, guiding questions to structure the interviews, and capturing the focus group results on a shared display. The display 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 the 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 in the effort to increase statewide communications interoperability.
- 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 ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumptions are stated for the benefit of the reader, so they better understand the intended audience and use of this document.

- All successful interoperability efforts must build from the local/user level upward and remain as inclusive as possible.
- The reader of this methodology has some background knowledge on issues relating to interoperable communications.
- The target audience for this methodology is a state interoperability coordinator or someone holding a comparable role.
- A state sponsor, or champion of this process, needs the support of a project management team to successfully carry out the steps offered in this methodology. A memo of agreement/understanding between the sponsor and the project team will help.
- Suggestions and recommendations offered in this approach may be modified and applied to a regional or city effort to develop a practitioner-driven strategic plan.
- Tasks may be added to meet the needs of a particular state or region.



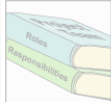
**Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding**  
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)




**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. These relationships will provide the support necessary to implement a statewide communications solution and the ability to identify and secure the funding needed for the planning process.

### Timeline

4-6 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; establish key relationships, and
- 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, 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.

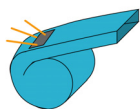
Questions to ask include:

- 💡 Who has influence in the public safety and first responder communities you serve? This includes public safety 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, 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 public safety 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 public safety and first and secondary responder communities.
- 💡 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**

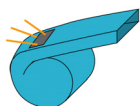
The objective of this task is to identify funding that can be used for the planning process. Begin by investigating funding options that may be available through appropriation or existing grants at the local and state level. These opportunities may have been revealed through the conversations held during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

Next, contact your state's Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) representative to explore federal grant funding opportunities. The ODP 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 ODP 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 (butcher board, markers, paper, pens, etc.)
- 💡 Audiovisual requirements
- 💡 Catering needs
- 💡 Participant information packets and session materials
- 💡 Webpage/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.*



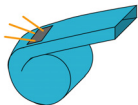
**Lesson Learned: As funding is secured for the planning process, it is also good practice to begin to identify resources for implementing the final communications interoperability plan. Identifying resources early will build confidence among the planning participants by demonstrating the financial commitment 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- Grant Guidance](#), resources section, for a starting point to locate funding in your area. Many federal grants are available, but there may also be local funding resources available in your area of the country.



**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 - Weblink to SAFECOM Grant Guidance



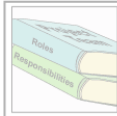
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(Timeline: 2 to 6 weeks, pending availability of the identified participants)



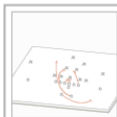
**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
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(Timeline: 2-3 weeks)



**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**

## 8 PHASE II- GATHER INFORMATION

By gaining an understanding of current and past efforts to improve communications interoperability as well as the perspectives of the practitioners, you will create a communications interoperability plan that meets the actual needs of the public safety community. This research may extend beyond internal state efforts to surrounding states and other regions of the country to determine best practices, lessons learned, and coordination opportunities.

### **Timeline**

6 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 and
  - ❖ Building awareness around the need for communication interoperability.

### **Tasks**

- Determine Scope of Research and Leverage Existing Resources
- Create a State Profile
- 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 multitude of factors that will improve communications interoperability can become an initial stumbling block in getting a statewide or local planning process underway. 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.

Begin by clearly defining the scope of research that will be most beneficial to your state's goal; learn from what others have done while still moving forward in your planning effort. The SAFECOM report on the communications interoperability planning efforts across the United States provides one example of how other states are undertaking planning for statewide efforts.

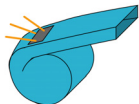
Please see [Appendix B – Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts across the Country](#) for a Web link to a research paper SAFECOM developed on communications interoperability initiatives across the United States.

Next, research the website links and resources listed in *Appendix B* to learn about communications interoperability progress across the United States. Consider states not mentioned in the research report and how efforts elsewhere can inform your strategy. The scope of your research should include, but not be limited to, technology, training, management, policy, procedures, funding, and governance.

The scope of your research efforts may be narrowed by focusing on key characteristics of the planning process. For example, initiatives that specifically focus on a high level of involvement from local practitioners and best exemplify the SAFECOM philosophy are included in Virginia's scope of research.

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

- 💡 How are other states' communications interoperability planning processes actualizing SAFECOM's emphasis on a locally-driven process?
- 💡 How is the first responder 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 Weblink to SAFECOM's website for more information on the program.



### **Task: Create a State Profile**

After gathering research on other states' communication 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 a state by county (or equivalent), rural/urban, and by discipline.

In addition, become familiar with the state governmental system (structure and function) and how the local government system rolls up to the state level. This research will raise awareness of budgetary flows, key political players/allies, and how to logically separate the state into geographic regions when determining focus group locations.

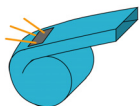
The state profile will include information such as:

- 💡 Public safety demographics,
- 💡 Topography (i.e. description of the region's natural features),
- 💡 Geography (regional organization of public safety communities),
- 💡 Metropolitan areas, counties, state, and local government breakdown,
- 💡 Communication technology systems (statewide and regional),
- 💡 Current and past communications interoperability efforts and the leaders involved in those efforts, and
- 💡 Organization of state and local government.

Please see [Appendix D](#) for a state profile template.

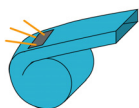
More detail may be added to the template; the categories suggested are a direct result of the information gathered throughout Virginia's communications interoperability planning process. Below are a few lessons learned in Virginia that led to the development of the state profile template.





**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 and privileges first responder communities face during day-to-day and major disaster scenarios.**

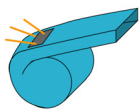
Early focus group interviews highlighted the importance of understanding the challenges faced by different regions in the state as well as privileges enjoyed by others. Improving interoperable communications involves a focus on people, process, and technology. This being said, expanding zones of interoperability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



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

During Virginia's planning process, it became apparent that almost every discipline approached the geographic breakdown of Virginia differently. Following an existing regional structure that is familiar to all, and adopted or endorsed by the governor, benefits the collaborative process – participants can clearly understand the region in which they are assigned and respond accordingly.

**\*\*Note:** The Virginia Project Team discouraged attendees from participating outside their region to preserve the validity of the data from each regional focus group.



**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 amount of 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 public safety community and key stakeholders involved in the process. This can facilitate discussion around the process and resource factors that may contribute to the current ability or inability to communicate data 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 first responder communities,
- 💡 Anticipated budget allocation for the planning process,
- 💡 State size, and
- 💡 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**

DHS' SAFECOM Program endorses a model of governance that involves local practitioner leadership at each level. 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, begin to consider how or if they are locally-driven and practitioner-focused. As the support of local and state level leadership is critical to the successful development and implementation of a statewide communications interoperability plan, your state should support a governance approach that encourages transparency, accountability, and collaboration through:

- 💡 Leadership representative of a broad spectrum of local level public safety,
- 💡 Participatory decision making,
- 💡 Supporting legislation that enforces timely and cost-efficient implementation of statewide communications interoperability,
- 💡 Relationship building at the local, state, tribal, and federal level, and
- 💡 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 E](#) for more information on SAFECOM's approach to governance.

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

### **Resources**

- Appendix B - Weblink- Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts across the Country
- Appendix C - Weblink to SAFECOM Program Website
- Appendix D - State Profile Template
- Appendix E - "A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles," developed by SAFECOM for the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Additional Resources - Weblink to the National Taskforce on Interoperability (NTFI)'s "Why Can't We Talk" publication



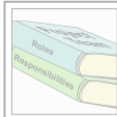
**Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding**  
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)



**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)



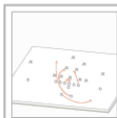
**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)



**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 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 each state will face.

### **Timeline**

2 weeks

### **Outputs**

- Roadmap
- Project Plan

### **Key Considerations**

- Identifying 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, and
- Create a project roadmap.

### **Tasks**

- Develop Detailed Project Plan and Roadmap
- Vet With Key Stakeholders

In Virginia, two roadmaps were created with varying levels of specificity. Two examples are shown in the graphics below.

### Virginia ROADMAP

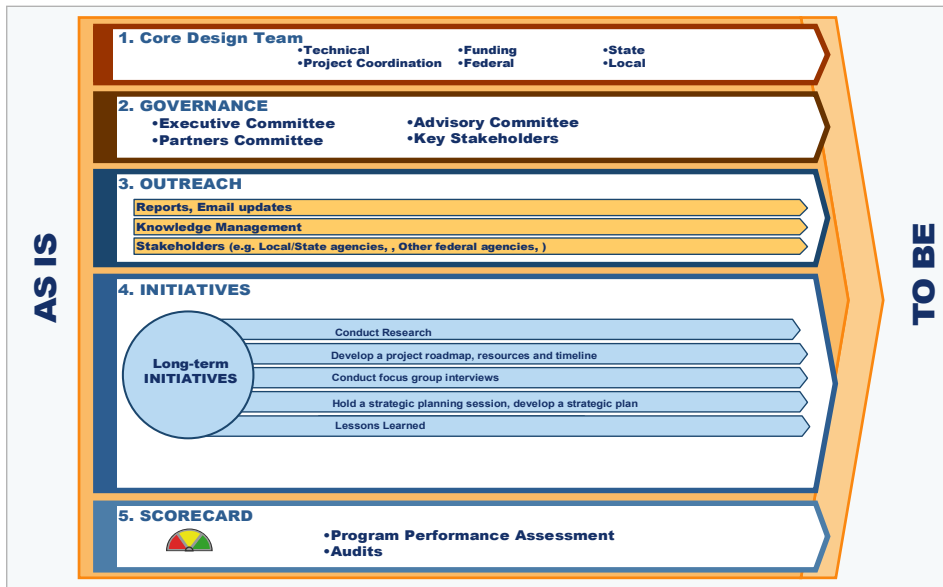


Figure 1: Roadmap I

### SAFECOM Virginia Strategic Plan for Interoperability Roadmap

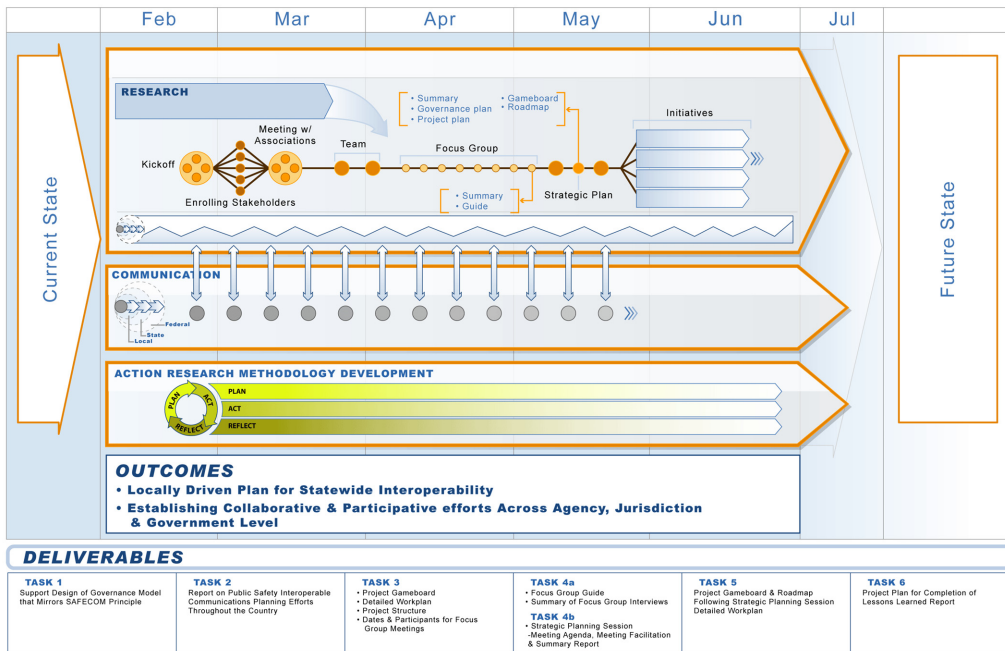


Figure 2: Roadmap II



### 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 people's roles and responsibilities
- 💡 Control:
  - ❖ Reconfirming people's expected performance
  - ❖ Monitoring actions taken and results achieved
  - ❖ Addressing problems encountered
  - ❖ Sharing information with interested people

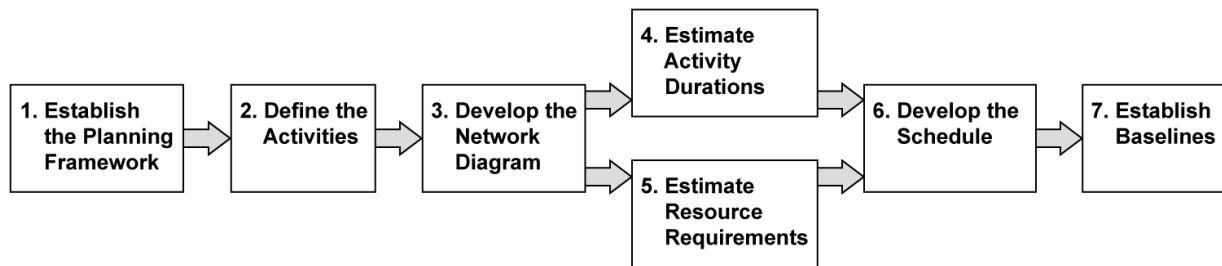
The basic project management process has five phases or types of activities:

- 💡 Initiation
- 💡 Planning
- 💡 Executing
- 💡 Controlling
- 💡 Closing

Figure 3 shows 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*)<sup>1</sup> using these activities. Steps 4 and 5 include the estimation of the duration of 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2000).



**Figure 3: Project Planning Process<sup>2</sup>**

See [Appendix G](#) for the key definitions associated with project management and planning.

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 I and 2 for the roadmaps used in Virginia.



#### **Task: Vet with Key Stakeholders**

In order to maintain alignment across the project team (described in Phase IV), sponsor 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 raises these issues and enables early resolution and demonstrates 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 F - Sample Roadmap (version I and II)
- Appendix G - Key Definitions Associated with Project Management and Planning

<sup>2</sup> *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)



**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**

## 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, so their roles and responsibilities must be well-defined. This section will help you identify the varied players who must be involved.

### **Timeline**

2 weeks

### **Outputs**

- Kick off meeting agenda and minutes
- Roles and responsibilities chart
- Mapping of key meetings along project timeline

### **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 and
- 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 establish 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 Virginia, the core stakeholder group included a grant administrator, contract support, a federal program manager, and other grant-making bodies whose monies were going to the effort.

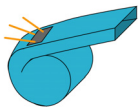


**Task: Conduct Project Team Kick-off Meeting**

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, and
- 💡 Responsibilities expected from the project team.

Please see [Appendix H](#) for a sample kick-off meeting template.



**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 I](#) for a role clarification exercise.

The table below presents suggested roles and responsibilities, assuming five core team members devoted full time to the planning process, from project launch through the completion of the strategic plan. Roles and responsibilities can be combined as resources demand.

Role	Description	Tasks associated with this role	Who performed the role in the Virginia effort
Sponsor	<i>Responsible for the overall process, establishing key relationships in the state, and securing funding resources. Also responsible for the overall implementation.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Secure funding</li> <li>✓ Establish key relationships throughout the state</li> <li>✓ Help with the buy-in process from local government</li> <li>✓ Establish relationship with Governor's office</li> <li>✓ Oversee implementation</li> </ul>	State Interoperability Coordinator
Project Manager/Team Lead	<i>Responsible for the success of the project.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Set timeline</li> <li>✓ Vetting process</li> <li>✓ Set participant criteria</li> <li>✓ Set project standards</li> <li>✓ Delegation of tasks</li> </ul>	State Interoperability Coordinator
Communications and Outreach Lead	<i>Responsible for internal and external communication.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Emails to stakeholders</li> <li>✓ Agendas and follow-up notes (meetings)</li> <li>✓ Action item maintenance</li> <li>✓ Weekly reports</li> <li>✓ Pre/post focus group documents</li> <li>✓ Press releases</li> </ul>	SAFECOM
Meeting management	<i>Responsible for planning and</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Secure interview</li> </ul>	SAFECOM

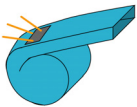
and logistics Lead	<i>execution of interviews.</i>	✓ room Focus group preparation and follow-up	
Facilitation (Lead and Co-Lead)	<i>Responsible for facilitation of interviews.</i>	✓ Lead discussions on current state, future state, barriers, case for change, and strategies to achieve future state.	Consulting firm with expertise in Collaborative Strategic Planning Efforts
Option: student intern	<i>Local or state university student looking to fulfill hours for degree requirement.</i>	✓ General administration, coordination, communications	Masters students from Virginia Commonwealth University

*Note: The roles filled by SAFECOM or a contractor are generic in scope and thus can be filled by any individual.*



**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.



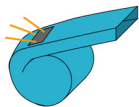
**Lesson Learned: Identify multiple ways to communicate progress and gather ongoing feedback.**

The work in Virginia confirmed the importance of communicating with all those concerned how the planning process was progressing. Frequent communications sent to stakeholder groups made it easier to recruit focus group participants and local strategic plan champions.

Here are some ways by which the project team can communicate with sponsoring communities:

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

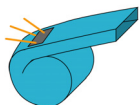
Please see [Appendix J](#) for an example weekly status report.



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

The focus group interviews in Virginia led to a continual increase in the network of individuals who wanted to remain involved and informed of the strategic planning process. The State Interoperability Office sponsored a Website to keep participants updated about the following:

- 💡 Research results,
- 💡 Federal resources, and
- 💡 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.**

Virginia's project team identified the meetings required to maintain alignment between the project sponsor and project team and resolve issues once the process was underway. When defining alignment meetings on the project timeline, include who should be involved, the purpose, and 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 H - Kickoff meeting Template
- Appendix I - Role Clarification Exercise
- Appendix J - Example Weekly Status Report



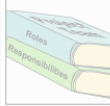
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(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)




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(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)




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(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 public safety disciplines of Fire, Law, and EMS. The focus groups also support the actualization of a practitioner-driven philosophy, which is the core of SCIP Methodology.

### **Timeline**

2 to 6 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, and
- 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
- Distribute Press Releases To Area Newspapers And Trade Publications.
- Confirm Attendance and Determine the Need for Last Minute Recruiting
- Confirm Meeting Facility Logistics





### Task: Define Criteria for the Focus Group Interviewee

Each state has different types of stakeholders affiliated with the public safety and first responder communities. 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 communications interoperability?
- 💡 Why do we need to change, and what will happen if we don't change?
- 💡 What do we want the state's future system for communications to look like?
- 💡 What problems might we encounter when striving for this future system?
- 💡 What recommendations do we have to move from our current system to our future system?

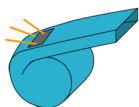
Practitioners informed about interoperability issues will create a plan that most directly meets the needs of the user community. The Virginia project team created criteria to help identify the "right" focus group participants.

The criteria included:

- 💡 Field experience,
- 💡 An identifiable leadership role in the public safety field, and
- 💡 Familiarity with issues relating to communications interoperability.

While the criteria listed above is somewhat general, it is not intended to exclude individuals who wish to attend. It can, however, serve as a tool to communicate with the public safety community about the expectations for participation in the strategic planning process.

See [Appendix K](#) and [L](#) for a summary of Virginia's process for identifying participants and a phone script template by which to identify participants through phone screening.

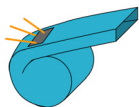


### Lesson Learned: Include participants who fall outside the traditional first responder community to facilitate education and awareness about interoperability issues.

While full participation of local level responders and practitioners in the focus group interviews is important, it is also imperative to include state and federal representatives. Full participation by all groups of stakeholders throughout each phase will build shared understanding and awareness of the current situation and strengthen relationships for the implementation phase of the strategic plan.

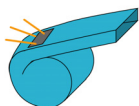


## **Task: Leverage State and National Public Safety Associations to Identify Possible Focus Group Participants**



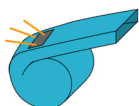
**Lesson Learned: Contact local practitioners via the state and local associations who represent and organize around the public safety, first responder, and government communities.**

These organizations are comprised of an array of local practitioners.



**Lesson Learned: There is confusion around the term “first responder” and who that includes and excludes.**

The work in Virginia unearthed confusion around the term “first responder.” The Virginia project team found it helpful to begin the entire process with the working definition that is also used at the federal level (see National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC), National Taskforce for Interoperability (NTFI), or SAFECOM for references). However, the team found that using this definition to identify participants was too narrow and failed to take into account the supporting groups that often work alongside first responders (i.e. VDoT, Dept. Forestry, and Emergency Management).



**Lesson Learned: There are multiple ways to design the focus group recruiting strategy. Virginia thought through a number of options before deciding on the percentage breakdown of participants.**

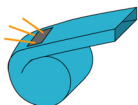
The Virginia project team looked for individuals who could best represent the local perspective while at the same time work as part of a group during the implementation phase. When selecting attendees, they decided on the percentage breakdown noted below, not restricted to having participants attend as a team of three.

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

Fire	24%
EMS	24%
Police	24%

- 💡 Local Government 8%
- 💡 State Government 8%
- 💡 Public Support Providers 12%

Note: Public support providers should include the expanded first responder community, such as transportation, public health, and forestry.



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

The collaborative process (bottom up approach) was exemplified in Virginia by including state associations in the focus group participant selection process. It is worthwhile to consider how state associations can be leveraged during other phases of the planning process and during implementation. Political affiliations of various associations may be more helpful during one phase than another. Consider carefully how to build the network to support governance and cooperation in the long run.



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

The communications and outreach leader on the project team owns the release, confirmation, and tracking of focus group participation. As stakeholders raise questions about the strategic planning process, the communications and outreach leader provides one point of contact for consistent information flow into and out of the project team.

The Virginia project team employed a three tiered communication strategy at the start of the interview phase of the planning process. The three tiered approach was:

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

By contacting participants on three different occasions, the Virginia team raised awareness, invited participants into the planning process, and ensured representation from all stakeholder groups at each regional interview.

Please see [Appendix M](#), [N](#), and [O](#) for a sample invitation, letter of confirmation, and a participant database template.

After each focus group interview, the project team should deliver a follow-up report detailing the information that surfaced from the discussions (the focus group report will be discussed in detail in Phase VI).

Defining the frequency and type of communications sent out to strategic planning participants is a critical element of the SAFECOM locally-driven approach. Despite the fact that the planning process might be led by a representative from the state, the true knowledge and expertise on the current state of interoperability exists in those directly affected by it in their day-to-day work. Clear and consistent updates on what has been accomplished as well as notification of upcoming events are an effective way to:

- 💡 Engage the practitioner community, and
- 💡 Regularly check and re-check the validity of the project team's approach to the statewide planning effort.

This communication strategy takes a significant amount of time and effort, but is a truly worthwhile investment and 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 state leaders to promote the 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 candidate participants.

Please see [Appendix P](#) for a sample letter of endorsement.

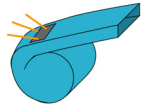


**Task: Distribute Press Releases to Area Newspapers, Trade, and Organization Publications and Organizations' Websites.**

Use press releases to inform the local and state stakeholder groups as the interview process is launched. As a result of the press releases:

- 💡 The state level stakeholders become aware of the increasing attention being paid to communications interoperability,
- 💡 The local stakeholders learn that the current planning process is designed to meet the needs of the practitioner,
- 💡 Individuals may elect themselves to be a part of the strategic planning process as implementation gets underway, and
- 💡 State and local members of the public safety community can find out about the federal efforts underway and what resources federal programs can offer to the local communities.

Please see [Appendix Q](#) for a sample press release.



**Lesson Learned: Pay close attention to informing the practitioner community about national efforts.**

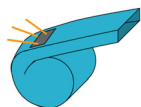
The Virginia project team discovered there was a general lack of knowledge across the state and local level about the mission, vision, and current initiatives carried out by SAFECOM.



**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. If participation is not balanced, you may need to find additional participants beyond the state and national association leads. The Virginia project team tapped into SAFECOM's governing body, the Executive Committee, for additional suggestions and contacted a number of local first responder agencies directly.

Please see [Appendix R](#) for more information about the SAFECOM Executive Committee.



**Lesson Learned: In Virginia, some potential focus group participants requested to participate in a focus group interview in a region other than where they worked. The project team discouraged participants from attending interviews outside their region to preserve the validity and authenticity of the data collected in each region.**



**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.


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

**Resources**


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

- Appendix P - Sample Letter for Endorsement
- Appendix Q - Sample Press Release
- Appendix R - SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet






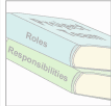
**Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding**  
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)




**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 gather an array of diverse practitioner perspectives while identifying individuals to include in the strategic planning session at the end of the process. A methodical approach to the delivery of these interviews ensures that each region is asked the same type of questions in a similar manner.

### **Timeline**

Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews (Virginia Project – 6 weeks)

- The Virginia project team conducted six focus group interviews with approximately 20-25 people per interview, in six 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 – post interview report
- Thank you letter 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 public safety community in attendance and
- 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 Hot Issues for Each Regional Focus Group
- 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**

Verify the availability of all necessary equipment, catering, and furniture at the conference facility where 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 issues specific to each region. This will aid in supporting the discussions that arise during the interview process, while at the same time allowing you to identify topics that are particularly important to the local communities. Gaining the perspectives on interoperability issues presented in the media will also enable the facilitation team to ask probing questions of the participants and invite the discussion of sensitive issues.

**Task: Enlist an Unbiased Team of Facilitators to Conduct the Focus Group Interviews**

The integrity of the information captured in the interviews is paramount and directly impacted by the consistency of the process used to execute 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 issues related to communications interoperability. Managing a discussion between stakeholders who are passionate about improving interoperability requires focus and the ability to manage disagreements that may arise. An impartial facilitator will encourage full participation, open discussions, and allow strong opinions and active disagreement to surface.

The Virginia project team used professional facilitators to conduct the interviews. This enabled the state interoperability coordinator to listen to each regional interview with the strategic planning session in mind. Virginia's sponsor tracked cross-regional themes, group dynamics, regional leaders, and positioned himself as an advocate for the local first responder community, responsible for carrying their message to state leadership and policymakers.

**Task: Reference Best Practices in Conducting Focus Group Interviews**

Create an environment that is optimal for collaboration and participation. For example, the arrangement of the tables and chairs in the conference space and the manner in which insights and perspectives are captured can influence participation and the quality and quantity of captured information.

Please see [Appendix S](#) for strategies for facilitated sessions.

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

The purpose of the interviews is to capture local feedback on communications interoperability as the first part of the strategic planning process. The information gathered from the focus group interviews will provide input for the strategic planning session to review perspectives from across the state and agree on how to improve communications interoperability in the immediate future. Each of the focus groups will comprise informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and EMS departments with additional representation from public health, local, and state agencies. The outcomes of the focus group interviews are as follows:

- 💡 Record of local first 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.

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

Graphics and well-defined terms can help control the scope of the conversation. For example, the Virginia team used the NTFI (National Taskforce on Interoperability) definition of interoperability along with a graphic to scope the conversations of the day-long focus group interview. The definition reads, “interoperability is the ability of public safety agencies to talk to one another via radio communication systems -- to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized.” The graphic shown in Figure 3 below helped to organize the conversation around the six subject areas of funding, spectrum, technology, coordination, training, and operational structure, as well as the three dimensions of government -- local, state, and federal.



## Talking About Interoperability

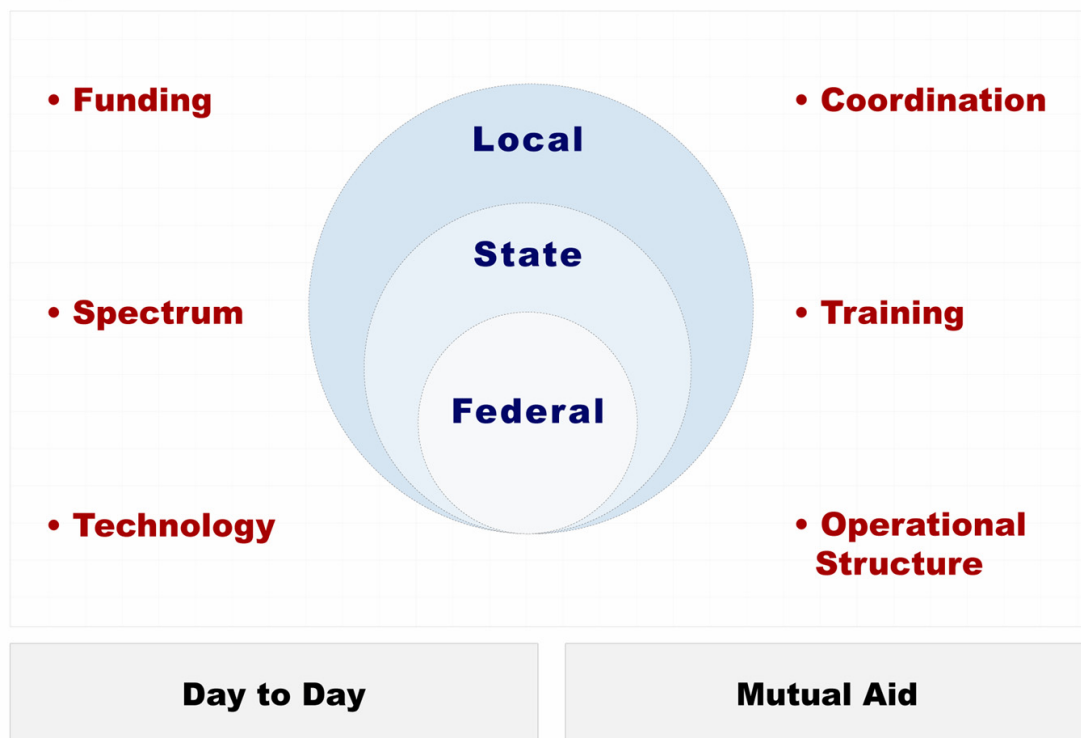


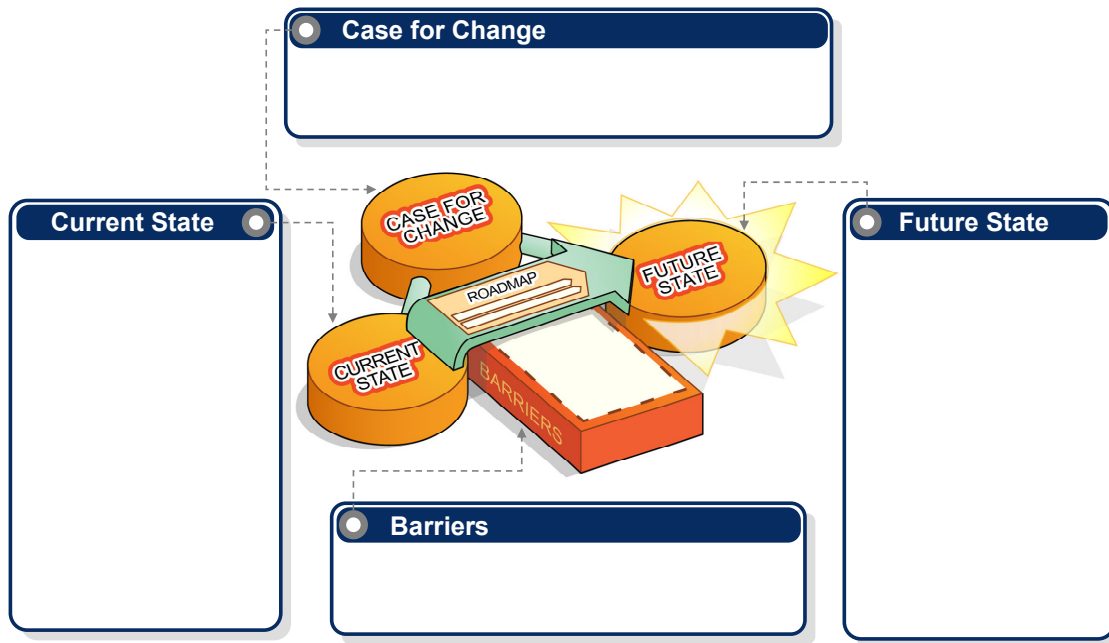
Figure 4: Talking About Interoperability

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

- 💡 How would you describe the state's existing level of interoperability?
- 💡 What do we want our future system for communications to look like?
- 💡 Why do we need to change and what would happen if we didn't change?
- 💡 What problems might we encounter when striving for this future state?
- 💡 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* as shown in the graphic on the following page. As interview discussions are completed, the facilitator can return to the graphic to remind the group where the discussion is headed.

## Gameboard



©2003, touchstone consulting group, inc.

**Figure 5: Strategic Plan Gameboard**

In Virginia, this graphic was presented as a large poster on the wall of the conference room and served 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 for group validation. In Virginia, the information was captured using a dialogue mapping application called Compendium (see appendix for details and Web links to this free software tool). Throughout the process, participants commented on the value this tool provided in managing and affirming the discussions. A portion of the dialog map created in one of the Virginia focus groups appears in Phase VII.

Please see [Appendix V](#) 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 W](#) for a link to sample focus group report.



### **Task: Listen for Patterns and Trends across Regions**

During each focus group interview, listen for patterns or trends in the responses offered by participants. Topics to consider:

- 💡 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, and
- 💡 How the local practitioner perspectives on communications interoperability are different than the state and county government understanding of the issue.

Details about the 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**

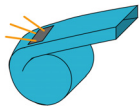
The final strategic planning session needs to include significant cross-state representation. When attending the focus group interviews, identify local practitioners who are adept at communicating their region's needs across all agencies, will be active in supporting the implementation and adoption of the strategic initiatives, and can 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. Their presence is critical to obtaining shared agreement on the key initiatives that will be undertaken to improve communications interoperability.



### **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 Website suggested in Phase I is a perfect tool to inform stakeholders about the planning process. Encourage focus group participants to visit the 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 Website 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 update the Website so no single individual will be overwhelmed with responding to these inquiries. In Virginia, Website updates were handled by a student 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. Keep the 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 X](#) 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 S - Strategies for Facilitated Sessions
- Appendix T - "Talking About Interoperability" Graphic
- Appendix U - Gameboard Graphic
- Appendix V - Introduction to Compendium- Web Links
- Appendix W - Weblink to Sample Focus Group Report
- Appendix X - 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)



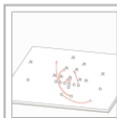
**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)



**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 the local practitioners' collective voice on issues pertaining to communications interoperability. The collective perspectives will fuel recommendations for the development of the statewide strategic plan.

#### **Timeline**

2-3 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, and
- 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 Y](#) 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 comment can stand on its own. The regional comments should be easily understood by individuals across the state.



**Task: Match Interview Comments with Themes**

(See “Talking about Interoperability” diagram 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:

- 💡 Technology
- 💡 Spectrum
- 💡 Funding
- 💡 Operational structure
- 💡 Planning and coordination
- 💡 Training
- 💡 Other

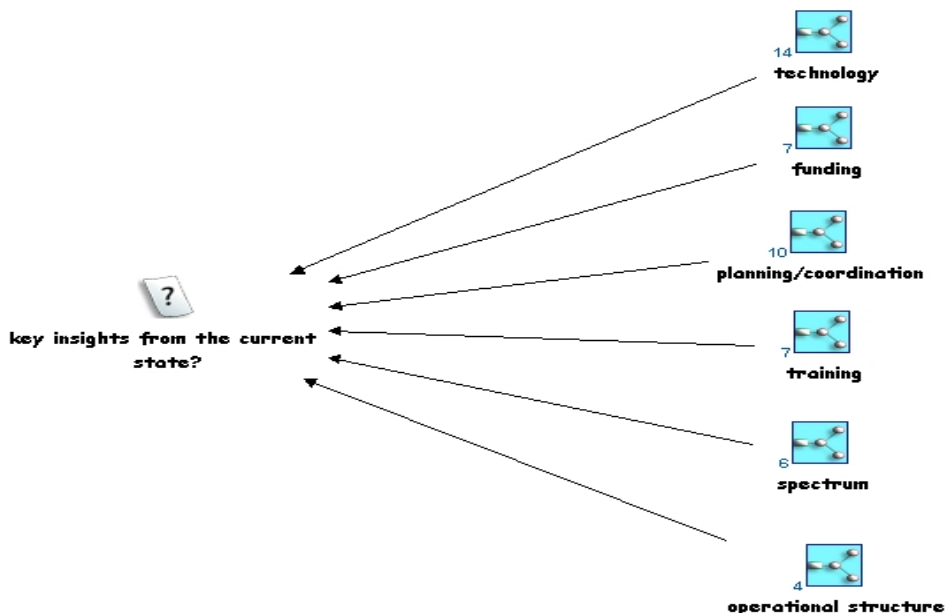
Organizing the data by both interview question and themes, creates an understandable and manageable format at the strategic planning session.



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



**Figure 6: 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 7 below for a sample of the patterns found in the current state in Virginia.

The figure below is an excerpt from an inquiry into the current state – patterns in the planning and coordination theme.

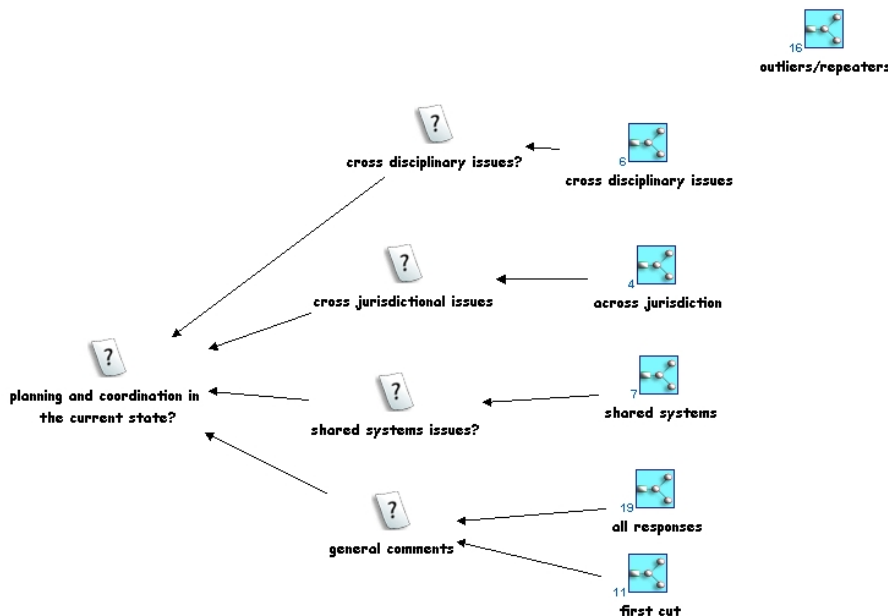
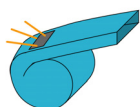


Figure 7: Current State Pattern Compendium Map



**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**

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. Therefore, the 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 uncover a handful of hot topics that appear across all regions of the state. These hot topics will in turn drive the strategic initiatives defined later in the strategic planning session.

Figure 8, seen below, is an excerpt from the case for change arguments gathered across Virginia.

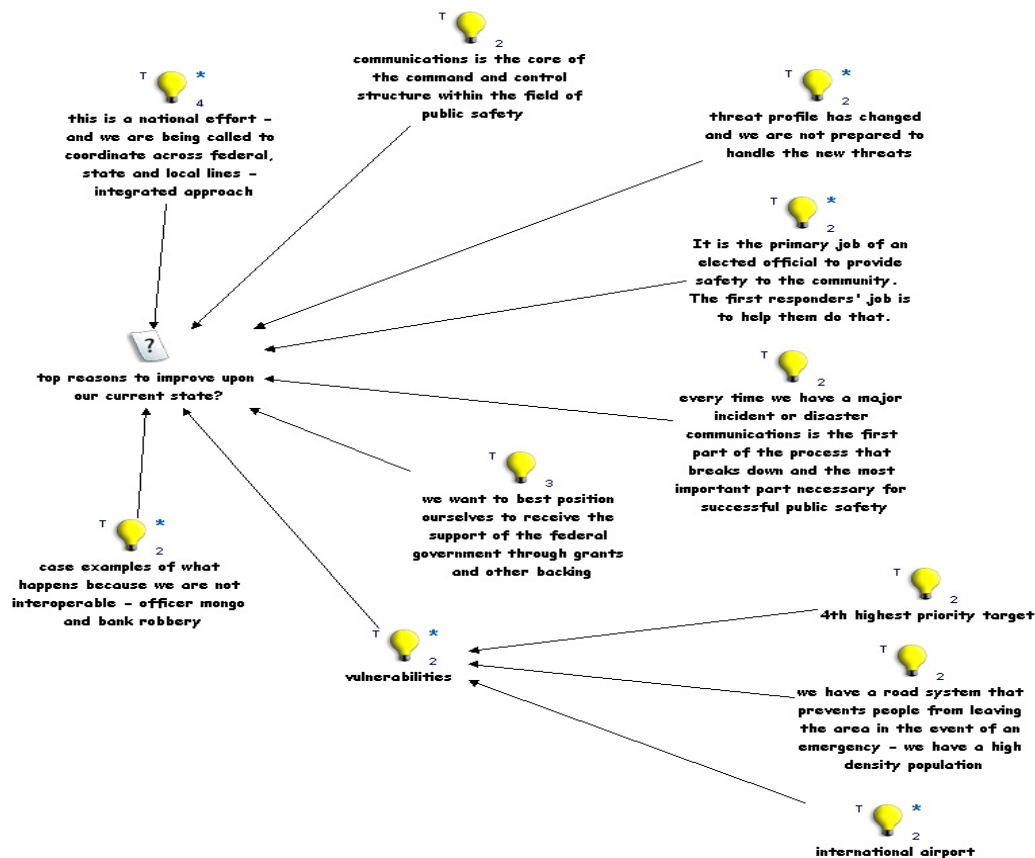
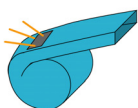


Figure 8: Case for Change Compendium Map



**Lesson Learned: Identifying needs that are common to all regions can influence policy and decisionmakers 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 first 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 sound and maintains the accuracy and integrity of the original data. Modify and make adjustments 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**

Forecast what the participants will identify as key initiatives. This prediction can help an interoperability coordinator to prepare state and local stakeholders to understand what support and fiscal backing each initiative will need in order to declare it a success.

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 aspect of the communications interoperability planning process.

**Resources**

- Appendix Y - Compendium maps



**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)



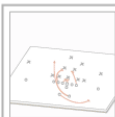
**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
 (Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)



**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 ensure the successful adoption and implementation of public safety communications interoperability initiatives. The session participants will review the data analysis from the focus groups and ultimately confirm initiatives that will immediately and directly impact communications interoperability across jurisdictions and agencies.

### **Timeline**

1 week preparation time, approx 3-4 weeks after the final Focus Group Interview. The strategic planning session is a 1 day session.

### **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, and
- 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

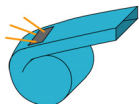


### Task: Select Participants

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 public safety associations for key decision makers and talk to policymakers and members of the state government who participated in the informational interview phase. Consider what governance structures are currently in place that oversee first responders and deal directly with communications efforts. These individuals may become directly affiliated with the governance structure required for the implementation process.

The strategic planning session serves as a turning point, 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 Z](#) for a sample letter of invitation: strategic planning session.



**Lesson Learned: Recruiting efforts in Virginia resulted in approximately 50 attendees at the final strategic planning session. Due to this session's differences in design and purpose as compared to the focus group interviews, a higher number of attendees will not impede the meeting's effectiveness.**

Please see [Appendix AA](#) for a list of attending organizations.



### Task: Meet with Policymakers and Elected Officials who Will Not Attend the Strategic Planning Session

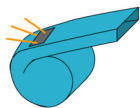
Market the collaborative effort being undertaken to improve statewide communications interoperability by networking with policymakers who cannot attend the strategic planning session. Build relationships across political parties and constituent groups to help secure and keep them informed about all ongoing 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 should mirror what was done for each focus group interview. During the session, however, allow extra time for each of the five key conversations (current state, future state, case for change, barriers, and strategic initiatives) so participants can review and digest the consolidated data from the focus group interviews. The optimal outcome of the strategic planning session is a full understanding by an ever-increasing stakeholder group about communications interoperability issues and the endorsement of initiatives to address those issues.

Please see [Appendix S](#) for strategies for facilitated sessions (previously mentioned in Phase IV) 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. His/her participation will increase confidence across the public safety community that the state wishes 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.*

Please see [Phase 7](#) for a sample dialogue map used to present results of focus group interviews.



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

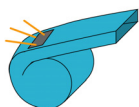
Walk the participants through the conclusions gleaned from the focus group interviews and subsequent analysis of the data, following the plenary and break-out group formats used during the focus group interviews. Consolidated comments from each core interview question should be presented to the entire group; no new comments will be requested in the strategic planning session. Instead, the participants should 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. The most important outcome of the session is the participant reaction to the analysis, not necessarily the accuracy of it. *The desired outcome is for the participants to own and understand the results of the focus group interviews.* Participant buy-in of the validity of the data 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 ruthless prioritization techniques. The participants will have a hard time identifying the top three initiatives, but failing to prioritize will negatively impact the success of the planning process. Too many initiatives will overwhelm the 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: Virginia's strategic planning session yielded the following initiatives, which were later used to design a comprehensive, locally-driven statewide plan.

Top 3 identified key short term initiatives:

- ❖ Create a method to extract lessons learned from disaster exercises and actual incidents.
- ❖ Develop and distribute a set of public safety communications requirements, which include the federal interoperability grant guidance.
- ❖ Leverage existing resources and systems.

Top 3 identified key long term initiatives:

- ❖ Develop desired outcomes for interoperability based on stakeholder input and leverage earmarked funds to localities to achieve the outcomes.
- ❖ Create regional interoperability work groups that have direct representation on the state level interoperability working group.
- ❖ Establish information and outreach strategy to educate public safety responders, policy makers, and the public about interoperability in Virginia.

Please see [Appendix AB](#) for a Weblink 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 Z - Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session
- Appendix AA - List of Attending Organizations
- Appendix AB - Weblink to Strategic Planning Session Report



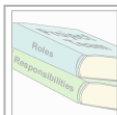
**Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding**  
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)



**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**  
(Timeline: 2 weeks)



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



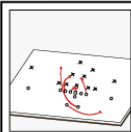
**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
(Timeline: Dependent upon the number and location of focus group interviews)



**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: 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 characteristics of other statewide plans that have been well-received and implemented.

### **Timeline**

Minimum of 3-6 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 and
- Realize the process is challenging. The questions listed below can help frame the thinking of those responsible for taking the strategic planning session results and translating them into a comprehensive, statewide plan for improving 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?

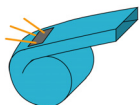
### **Tasks**

- Determine the Plan Structure and Function
- Establish Roles and Responsibilities for Writing and Document 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.

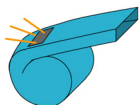


**Lesson Learned: Establish a strategic plan document review process that includes key stakeholders at both the state and local levels to maintain the collaborative approach; incorporate all perspectives as fully as possible.**



### **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 AC](#) and [AD](#) for a Weblink to the Virginia Strategic Plan and the core structural layout used.



### **Task: Identify “Official” Reviewers**

Due to the size and diversity of the community this plan will impact, 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 (including graphics, appendices, etc.), and determining what medium will make the plan accessible to stakeholders (hard copy, PDF, CD, etc.). Many of these details will be influenced by the level of formality expected from the plan's primary audience.

Please see [Appendix AE](#) for Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability.

**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 SAFECOM's 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 public safety and first responder communities' functions and utilizes the statewide network established during Phase V. The relationship and flow of information between SAFECOM and two other governing bodies is depicted in the model below. This graphic appears in Virginia's strategic plan and mirrors the approach to governance seen at the federal level.

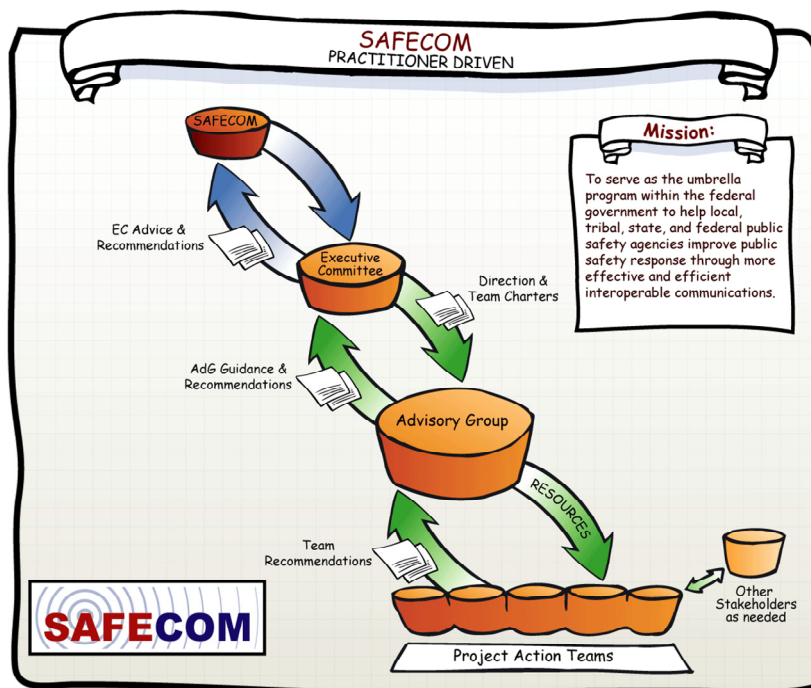
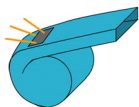


Figure 9: Governance Structure

Notice the Executive Committee is supported by the Advisory Group. Project Action Teams can be chartered from the Advisory Group to complete short term implementation efforts that are dependent on public safety technical and subject matter expertise. The Advisory Group will probably not be launched until one year after the stand up of the Executive Committee. These two groups partner with the state's centralized interoperability office to follow through on the initiatives in the strategic plan in a manner that exemplifies ongoing, locally-driven leadership. Consider how to involve the local practitioner in the leadership and decision-making processes carried out by this group. SAFECOM's locally-driven philosophy drives the planning process and champions the implementation process. It is possible to follow this philosophy using alternative approaches to governance. The one presented in this methodology is fully supported by the SAFECOM program and continues to evolve at the federal level.




**Lesson Learned: Virginia's Executive Committee (EC) structure followed these guiding principles:**

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


Please see [Appendix AF](#) for SAFECOM governance charter, model, and position paper.

### **Resources**

- Appendix AC - Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability, Web Link and Core Structural Layout Document
- Appendix AD - SAFECOM Governance Charter
- Appendix AE - Virginia's Governance Model
- Appendix AF - Virginia's Governance Charter



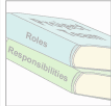
**Phase I- Establish Key Relationships and Funding**  
(Timeline: 4-6 weeks)




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**Phase VI- Conduct Focus Group Interviews**  
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**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 methodology presented in this document offers a step-by-step approach for a strategic planning process, up to and including the writing of a strategic plan. However, as mentioned in Phase IX, the strategic planning session and writing of the strategic plan mark the start of the implementation process. The purpose of this section is to provide some preliminary guidelines for putting that strategic plan into action.



### Task: Prioritize Initiatives

Three to five initiatives will emerge from the strategic planning session. 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 taken on at once, the sponsors and stakeholders might feel overwhelmed, causing a breakdown across the network built during the strategic planning process. Consider which initiatives are easiest to complete, will have the most impact, and can show visible results within 90 days.

- **Risks:**
  - ❖ If too many initiatives are taken on at once, stakeholders can be overwhelmed, resulting in a breakdown of the team and process.
  - ❖ 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. The informational interviewing and statewide networking during Phase I revealed the availability of funding at the federal and state 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 public safety 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 communications interoperability must involve the local practitioner community. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia is creating a communications interoperability governance team that includes key players from local organizations. 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 electronically, by mail, face-to-face meetings, and 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.

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## Introduction

These appendices are intended to capture the essential tools, references, deliverables, and resources mentioned throughout the Methodology in a consolidated and organized section. The documentation in the appendices has been collected and grouped by phases. It is listed in the chronological order of where a particular tool or reference was mentioned in the methodology.

The deliverables section in each phase of the methodology is intended to list suggested outputs that you will create when executing each task of the phase. The deliverables serve many purposes, such as documenting agreements with key stakeholders in the form of MOUs, MOAs, or contracts, tracking your progress and results in the form of research documentation, focus group interview reports or a strategic plan, and organizing information you've collected as you proceed into the next phase for future analysis. The deliverables are the suggested outcome from each phase; however, you are free to track and produce the resulting information, reports, or agreements in manner that is most effective and efficient for you.

The resources listed in each section of the methodology are examples or templates that are provided to you as reference tools that will help you achieve the suggested deliverables. The resources are presented in the form of sample deliverables from Virginia, Weblinks, or ready-to-use templates. The resources are intended to provide you with a useful and sometimes ready-made tool to execute your work and achieve the desired deliverable. In some instances, the deliverable will be specific to your state, so examples are provided to provoke your thoughts. We encourage you to leverage and modify these tools to best suit your needs.

## Phase I – Establish Key Relationships and Funding – Resources

Phase 1 discusses the importance of establishing key relationships and funding. The following sample tools and resources were mentioned in Phase 1. They have been consolidated in this section of the appendices for your convenience as you embark on your state's interoperability strategic planning process:

- **Weblink to SAFECOM Grant Guidance** – These links to grant guidance are a starting point for locating available funding for your state's interoperability strategic planning process.

## **Appendix A: Weblink to SAFECOM Grant Guidance**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following information is the introduction from 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 Weblink provided below.

### **Weblink to SAFECOM Grant Guidance:**

<http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov/Grants/GrantGuidelines.cfm>

### **Recommended Federal Grants Guidance**

#### **Public Safety Communications & Interoperability Grants**

**May 2004**

#### **I. Introduction**

One of the major issues facing the Emergency Services Sector is the inability of emergency service workers, including traditional “first responders” to communicate with one another when the need arises. These emergency first responders have long been defined as the “first arriving organized responders with the capability and mission to contain, mitigate, and resolve the emergency at hand.”<sup>3</sup> Their effective and efficient emergency response requires coordination, communication, and sharing of vital information among numerous public safety agencies. As recognized in the National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets, “most systems supporting emergency response personnel, however, have been specifically developed and implemented with respect to the unique needs of each agency.”<sup>4</sup> Such specification without regard to the need for interoperability tends to complicate the ability of those agencies to effectively communicate with others in the future. This fact is echoed by the public safety community in the National Task Force on Interoperability’s report “Why Can’t We Talk? Working Together To Bridge the Communications Gap To Save Lives.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Emergency First Responder Report.” Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration. January 1981.

<sup>4</sup> “National Strategy for the Physical Protection of Critical Infrastructures and Key Assets,” The White House. February 2003, page 43.

<sup>5</sup> “Why Can’t We Talk? Working Together To Bridge the Communications Gap To Save Lives,” AGILE Program. February 2003.

In line with the needs of public safety and the national strategy cited above, federal fiscal year 2004 appropriations make grant funding available to improve the effectiveness of public safety communications systems and to resolve interoperability issues. By definition, communications interoperability refers to the ability of public safety agencies to talk across disciplines and jurisdictions via radio communications systems -- to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized. The federal program offices recognize that many law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical service, and other emergency response personnel currently lack effective and modern communication systems within their respective organizations. The programs support the need to improve those systems as long as the improvement planning includes a vision for improved interoperability with other agencies.

In an effort to coordinate the way in which funding is allocated and to maximize the prospects for interoperable communications, some general grant criteria has been developed in concert with representatives of the public safety community. What follows is an outline of who is eligible for the grants, purposes for which grant funds can be used, and eligibility specifications for applicants.



## Phase II – Gather Information – Resources

Phase 2 of the methodology provides guidance for gathering information and conducting research early in the interoperability strategic planning process. The items listed below have been pulled into this section of the appendix for quick reference and include:

- ***Weblink to Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts Across the Country*** – This Weblink leads to a compilation and analysis of research on current interoperability in different states across the nation.
- ***Weblink to SAFECOM Program*** – This weblink is provided as a resource for obtaining more information SAFECOM, which is the umbrella program within the Federal Government established to help local, tribal, state, and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications.
- ***State Profile Template*** – This template is intended to assist each state in organizing its data as it prepares to embark on its 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: Weblink to Research Report: Statewide Strategic Planning Efforts Across the Country***

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following Weblink leads to the sample research paper on current state interoperability efforts nationally that was created during the information-gathering phase of the Virginia interoperability strategic planning process.

The purpose of the research paper is to provide examples of individual states' planning efforts complemented by a brief analysis of how some of these efforts have been successful and fit within SAFECOM principles. By taking this approach, one might gain a sense of the broad, strategic perspective called for when initiating interoperable communication planning efforts at the local and state levels.

### **Weblink to Research Report:**

<http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov/Library/index.cfm>

## **Appendix C: Weblink to SAFECOM Program**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

Briefly, SAFECOM is the first national program designed by public safety for public safety. As a public safety practitioner-driven program, SAFECOM is working with existing federal communications initiatives and key public safety 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 public safety community. The scope of this community is broad. The customer base includes over 50,000 local and state public safety agencies and organizations. Federal customers include over 100 agencies engaged in public safety disciplines such as law enforcement, firefighting, public health, and disaster recovery. SAFECOM makes it possible for the public safety community to leverage resources by promoting coordination and cooperation across all levels of government.

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

**Weblink to SAFECOM Program:**

<http://www.safecomprogram.gov>

## Appendix D: State Profile Template

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The profile template listed below is a tool for gathering a variety of information, including: public safety demographics, topography, geography (regional organization of first responder communities), metropolitan areas, counties, state and local government breakdown, communication technology systems (statewide and regional), current and past interoperability efforts, and the leaders involved in those efforts. 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 first responder 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?
- How are mutual aid channels and shared frequencies used? By whom and under what conditions?

**Governmental Considerations**

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

## **Appendix E: 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 currently in place address and support interoperable communications. The governance report included below, titled *A Perspective on Governance: Building a State Model on SAFECOM Principles*, provides suggestions and guidelines for governance; these are founded upon the SAFECOM philosophy and principles. This report is aligned with the participation, roles, responsibilities, and operating guidelines for Virginia. SAFECOM endorses 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 communication efforts.
- 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 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 Principles**

##### **Introduction**

The following suggestions and guidelines for governance are founded upon the SAFECOM 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 umbrella program within the federal government to help local, tribal, state and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. Communications interoperability is the ability of public 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 a public safety 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 public safety 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 first 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 public safety 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 necessitates an evolving model of governance. 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 introducing intentionality into how and when stakeholders are invited into the design and planning process. The relationships that are built along the way help lay the groundwork for leadership by 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, runs 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 outcomes or Defining 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 Public Safety Community**

The local public safety community must have a way to provide input into the decision making processes for any statewide interoperable communications effort. Public safety personnel may participate in governance as members of three essential groups: (1) the Executive Committee, (2) the Advisory Committee, and (3) the work package (as outlined in the strategic plan).

The public safety community can be involved primarily through associations. There are two reasons for this approach: (1) the associations represent the leadership of their respective constituencies and (2) as demonstrated by National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) experience with the National Task Force on Interoperability (NTFI), the associations are an excellent way to reach out to these communities. Achieving interoperability requires partnerships from all



levels of government. As such, SAFECOM recommends that Virginia look to include representatives from local and state government associations in its governance structure. These groups represent the key public decision makers and those with the authority to fund public safety communication initiatives at the local and state levels.

The actual breakdown of the membership can be arrived at in any number of ways. A practice offered by the National Governor's Association suggests:

One option is to have a representative of each major public safety agency and a cross section of representatives from various elected government entities.

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
- ❑ The structure of this body should achieve political and geographic balance.

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

While the internal design of the governing body is being addressed, the executive and advisory committees should also consider their relationship to the organizations in existence in the larger state context. In Virginia, these organizations might include:

- ❑ Office of Public Safety
- ❑ Office of Commonwealth Preparedness
- ❑ Commonwealth Preparedness Group
- ❑ Secure Virginia Panel

Determining the lateral and/or vertical nature of these relationships may depend on the financial reporting structure, current legislation and/or how each group's charter maps to the named powers of the executive and advisory committees.

The National Governor's Association offers a suggestion on the ways in which the interoperability governing body may be empowered:



Powers of the body might include:

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

Effective leveraging of organizations already in existence allows for a network to be established at the state level that exemplifies 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 shared principles. Clearly stating expectations and measures for success afford governing bodies the highest degree of collaboration across stakeholder groups. Governance leadership can be characterized in a variety of ways. Listed below is just one sample set of characteristics a governing body may strive towards.

Leadership as it appears in 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 they are fiscally accountable. Maintaining efforts to gather feedback from the public safety community allows for repeated opportunities to upgrade approaches and organizational structure as needed. Setting a norm of constant growth and improvement creates an environment that is conducive to innovation and involvement.

## Closing

In conclusion, SAFECOM promotes learning through action and implementation. Statewide interoperability is in the hands of the local first responders and it is SAFECOM's intent to promote excellence in this effort by continually positioning that community in the role of expert. Virginia's ability to involve the local community in the strategic planning efforts affecting that community will be the key to establishing interoperable communications and creating one model for collaborative excellence across local, state and federal lines.

## Bibliography

National Governor's Association - 29 March 2004

[http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C\\_ISSUE\\_BRIEF^D\\_5853,00.html](http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C_ISSUE_BRIEF^D_5853,00.html)

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 3. They have been collected in this section of the appendix for your convenience in designing a project plan and roadmap for your state:

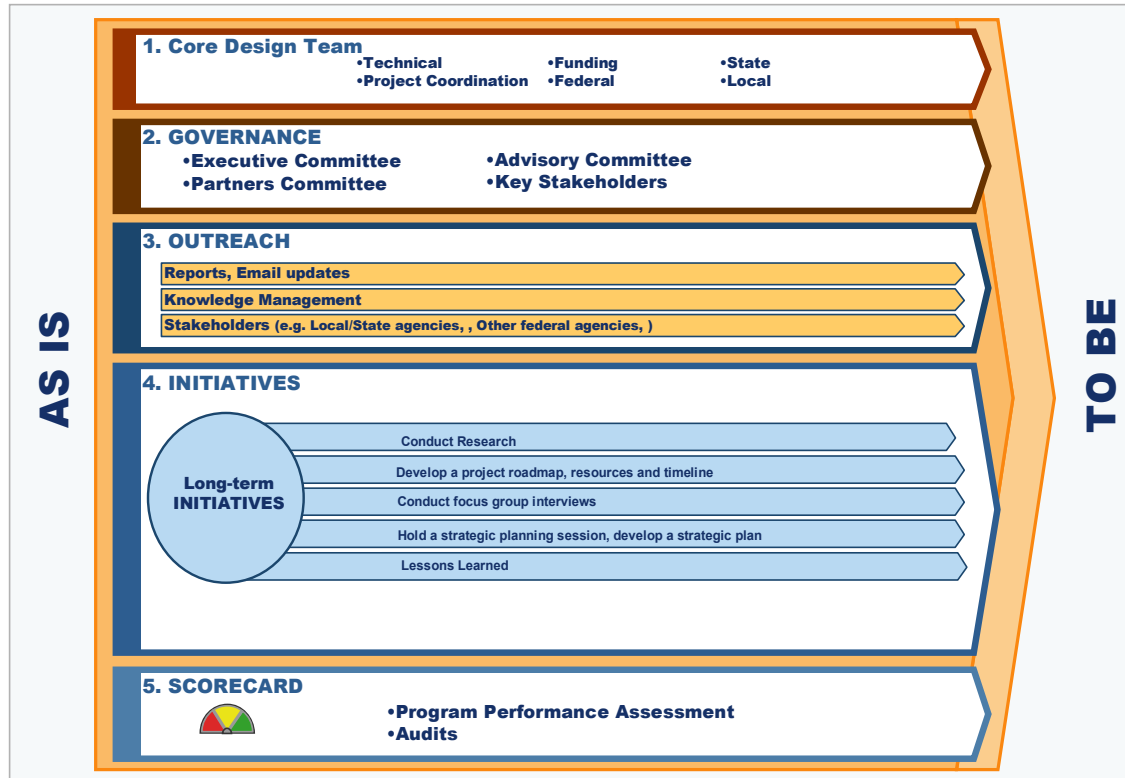
- **Sample Roadmaps** – This graphic provides a visual and conceptual overview of the interoperability strategic planning process that can be shared with and accepted by a broad audience. The more detailed roadmap depicts the concurrent events that will take place and key deliverables associated with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

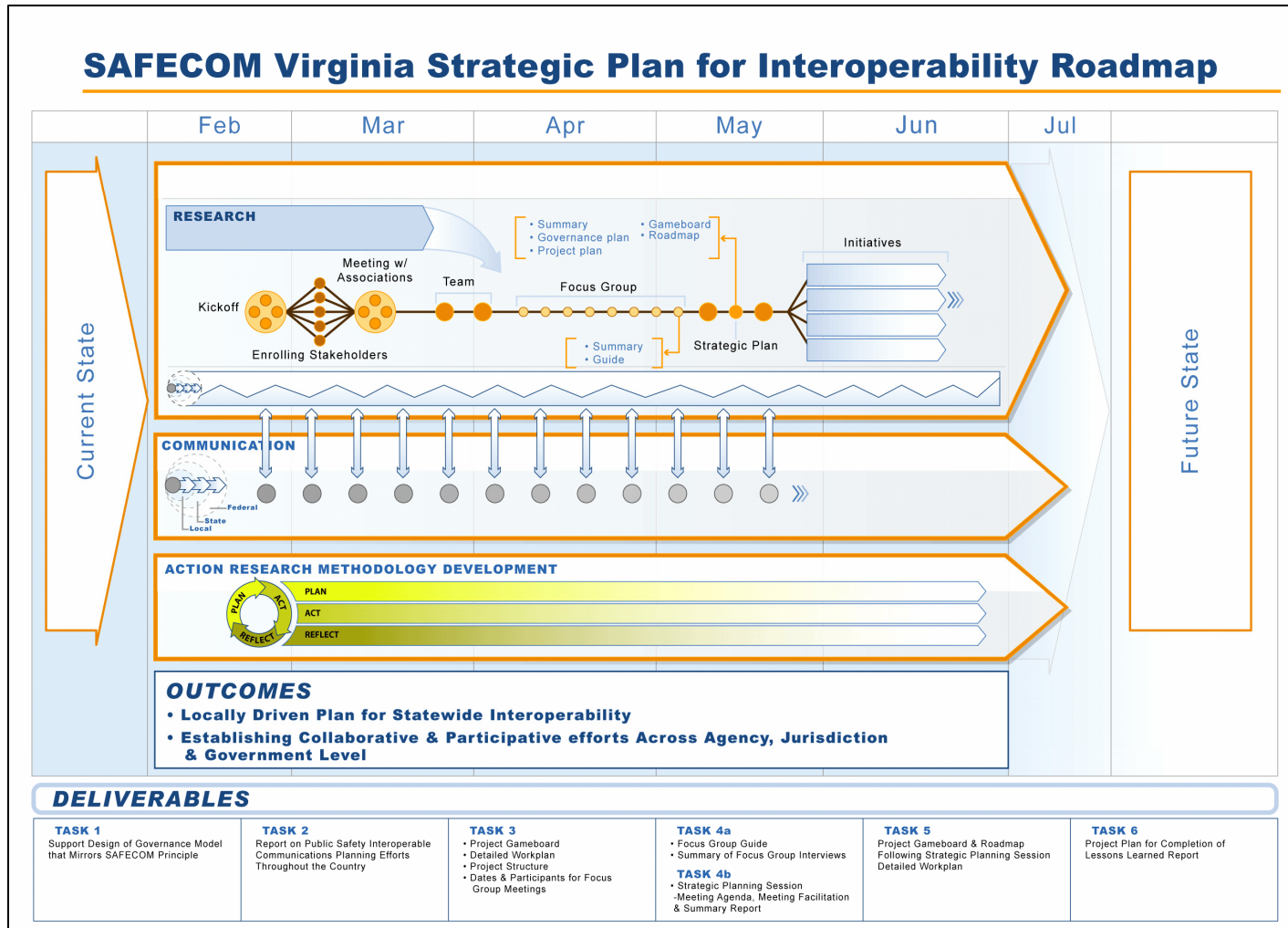
A roadmap is a detailed visual depiction of the state's wireless strategic planning process. It can be useful when communicating to participants, key stakeholders, or a broader audience about the strategic planning process, their role in the process, and the desired outcomes of your state's strategic planning process. Using this roadmap in the focus group interviews ensures that a consistent message is communicated to all participants. Below is a sample version of the roadmap that was used in Virginia.

Sample Virginia Roadmap (Version I)

**Virginia ROADMAP**



Sample Virginia Roadmap (Version II)





## **Appendix G: 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 the project plan. The following key terms are provided to enhance your project planning process from the inception to closure.

### **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 resource requirements. Activities have defined beginnings and endings. The terms "activity" and "task" are frequently used interchangeably, but activity is preferred and is used in this book.

**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 more narrowly 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 a 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.

The same dictionary defines the noun "schedule" as "a timed plan for a procedure or project" and the verb "schedule" as "to appoint or plan for a certain time or date."

### **Additional resources on project management**

1. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute, 2000).
2. *Project Management for Dummies*, Stanley E. Portny, (John Wiley & Sons, 2001).
3. *Project Planning and Scheduling*, Gregory Haugan, (Management Concepts, 2002).
4. *Make Things Happen!: Readymade Tools for Project Improvement*, Steve Smith, (Kogan Page, 1997).

## Phase IV – Identify Roles and Responsibilities – Resources

Phase 4 provides guidance on developing and assigning the roles and responsibilities of your project team. The following resources and templates are mentioned in Phase 4 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 consolidation or redistribution. The items listed below have been pulled into 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 among the team of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- **Roles Clarification Exercise** – This guidance provides a suggested exercise for achieving shared understanding among the team's roles and responsibilities during the kickoff meeting.
- **Example Weekly Status Report** – This report is a regularly scheduled outreach tool that will communicate the project team's weekly progress to your stakeholders.

## Appendix H: Kickoff Meeting Template

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following template provides an agenda and focus questions for the project leader to use in the initial project team meeting. As a result, the team should be aligned with their respective roles and responsibilities and energized about their future efforts. This meeting is intended to be a forum in which the role clarification exercise can be conducted. 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 for the Virginia Strategic Planning process.

### Outcomes:

- Shared agreement on:
  - Planning process objectives,
  - Core project team membership,
  - Planning process timeline,
  - Gameboard methodology, and
  - Project team members' 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 Insert State**
  - What did we hear in our conversations with sample group of stakeholders?
  - What did we find out about our state through our research?
- **Discussion of Vision for Interoperability in the Future**
  - What does the best case scenario for interoperability look like?
  - 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 Step 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.
  - Closing.
- **Closing Remarks**

## **Appendix I: Role Clarification Exercise**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The Role Clarification Exercise is a recommend tool that is useful in clarifying individuals' ownership in the outcomes of the strategic planning process. This can be the used a focal point of a single meeting or incorporated into the kickoff meeting. However, we caution against trying to achieve more than shared alignment, ownership of the high-level project outcomes, and individuals' 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 – then 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 group's mission.

## Facilitation Notes

Once the top three things have been identified, have individuals move around the room examining what other groups said. Add or offer upgrades to other functional area initiatives.

Come back together as a large group and review each flip chart. 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 can/will commit to delivering on the expectations outlined.

The next layer of thinking is: 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 session should probably cover no more than defining and agreeing to the high-level initiatives. Expecting the group to think through the next layer and truly commit to action is possible, but may lend to shallow thinking and unsustainable approaches to problem solving and critical thinking (I can offer more detail on this assumption in person.)



## Appendix J: Example Weekly Status Report

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following weekly status report provides an example for you to have as a suggested format for sharing weekly communications. This format provides a quick yet effective way to provide project updates to key stakeholders. The suggested elements of the report include:

- **Areas of Attention** – This section provides an area in which you can call out specific items that you want your readers to know. This could range from key highlights and accomplishments of the week to any needs and challenges that your 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 reporting period. This could include a reflection from the road picked up while 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 another focus group to cover the south central area of Virginia on May 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Outlined research report of existing statewide plans for communications interoperability for public safety.

- Inquired about 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

**\*\*New\*\* May 6, 2004**

**South Central**

May 18, 2004 (Strategic Planning Session)

Richmond

### **Lessons Learned/Observations**

- Leveraging technology, such as a Website, to communicate and share information on this statewide initiative can support the statewide coordinator in answering questions and responding to requests.
- During the data collection phase of the strategic planning for interoperability, 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.
- In an effort to ensure efficiency and collaboration in focus group recruitment, a good practice would be to 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 can be simplified by utilizing the most common geographical breakdown of the state when defining emergency responder perspectives by region.

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

The fifth phase of the methodology discusses the tasks that will help you to be successful in recruiting focus group interview participants and executing the meeting preparations. The following samples and templates are consolidated here as useful references that will help you accomplish the desired outcomes of Phase 5:

- ***Process Document for Identifying Participants*** – This document guides you through the process of identifying practitioner participants. This includes the desired characteristics and leadership qualities that focus group interview participants should possess.
- ***Sample Phone Script*** – Useful phone script 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 the project's efforts around the state through the press.
- ***SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet*** – Provides information on the governing body that provided additional focus group interview contacts when participation was scarce.

## **Appendix K: Virginia Process Document for Identifying Participants**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

Since each state has different types of stakeholders affiliated with the public safety and first responder communities, identifying the right stakeholder will take special consideration when identifying focus group interview participants. Developing criteria to help identify participants is recommended to standardize the invitation process, and it serves the purpose of setting expectations from the project team for participation in the strategic planning process. The criterion can be based on a combination of field experience, an identifiable leadership role in the public safety field, and familiarity with issues relating to interoperable communications, but should not exclude individuals who wish to attend that may or may not meet the description offered. Below is the process design used in Virginia to develop the 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 public safety agencies improve communications interoperability, designed a process to solicit input and obtain consensus from local, regional, and state public safety 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 public safety 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 the recommended strategies.

The strategic planning process concluded in a strategic planning session; the culmination of which 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 and 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 was based on a combination of field experience, an identifiable leadership role in the public safety field, and familiarity with issues relating to interoperable communications, 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 then met with public safety 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 was not strictly adhered to; in fact, it was 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 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 public safety leaders for further recommendations.

## Appendix L: Phone Script Template

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following phone script template can be used when communicating with local agencies to invite them to send a participant to the focus group interviews. The phone conversation will explore the participants' knowledge of the 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 model laid out by SAFECOM, a federal program designed to help combat interoperability issues among first responders, and are seeking practitioners to attend local interview sessions.

SAFECOM and the state's 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 help this issue nationally.

I am calling you because of your established role and expertise as a key stakeholder in the emergency management community. Specifically, we would like to work with you and your organization for input into the identification of potential participants in our focus group interviews.

2) I would then ask if they had received a "Save the Date" email on \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. The "Save the Date" email 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.
- Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups.
- Paying attention to our commonalities as opposed to our differences.

3) Ask them if they will be able to participate in the meeting on \_\_\_\_\_. If they are unable to attend on \_\_\_\_\_, ask them if they have any suggestions for other individuals that might be interested. 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 would happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter when striving for this future state?
- What recommendations do we have to move from our current state to our future state?

4) Also ask them if, based on the information in the "Save the Date" email, they think that they or someone in their organization are the appropriate person from their organization to attend. It is very possible that they will designate someone else from their organization to attend. It is very important that the person they designate understands the types of issues surrounding the interoperability issue, specifically to this state, and that they have ideas about the barriers and solutions that could be implemented as part of a strategic plan.

5) Tell them they will be receiving some read-ahead information and the details about the hotel prior to the interview.

**\*\* Ask them if they have any other questions & thank them for their time and effort. REMEMBER: The meeting is \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Also, if they ask any questions that you do not know how to answer, just indicate that you will get back to them with an answer or you'll have \_\_\_\_\_ contact them as quickly as possible.**

## **Appendix M: Sample Letter of Invitation**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The sample letter below is an example of the format and wording for the letter used in 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 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, if primary invitee is unavailable, and
- Logistical and possible funding details for the day of the interview.



**Sample Letter of Invitation from Virginia Project**

Good Morning,

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, there is plenty to do concerning communications and interoperability issues. Currently the State of \_\_\_\_\_ is beginning the process to develop 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.

We are working with a number of 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 first 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 first responders. We envision the focus group attendees to have knowledge of wireless communications and hold a formal or informal leadership position in the agency they are representing.

State is working with SAFECOM, a federal initiative that is assisting states and localities with interoperability planning. We would like to invite you to a meeting 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 can attend this meeting to represent your organization as soon as possible. We look forward to ensuring that this planning process is a giant step toward addressing interoperability in the State. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Respectfully,

***Signature***

State Interoperability Coordinator  
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety  
phone  
email

## **Appendix N: Sample Letter of Confirmation** ([click here to return to document](#))

The sample letter below provides a format for the letter used in confirming participants in the focus group interviews. We used a simple e-mail format that allowed participants to efficiently respond.

The elements of the letter include:

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

### **Sample Letter of Confirmation from Virginia Project**

#### **Overview**

Thank you for your interest in attending the Communications Interoperability Focus Group Session to be held on April 7, 2004 from 9am-5pm at the Holiday Inn in Wytheville, VA. The purpose of our day-long session is to gather local perspectives on interoperability among emergency responders in service of designing 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 Virginia's existing level of interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what would happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for interoperable communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter when striving for this future state?

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

In an effort to make your participation in this process as easy as possible, I have pulled together some information you may need to prepare for April 7th.

#### **Directions**

Please visit the web site listed below for directions to the hotel.

<http://go.vicinity.com/sixcont/bidMap.d?BID=WYTVA&brandname=holidayinn>

## Travel and Lodging

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

### **Holiday Inn**

#### **WYTHEVILLE**

1800 East Main Street

PO Box 697

WYTHEVILLE, VA 24382

Toll-Free: 8008427652

Tel: 1-276-2285483

Fax: 1-276-2285417

Check-In Time: 3:00 PM

Check-Out Time: 11:00 AM

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

Per Diem rates are as follows:

Hotel \$55

Dinner \$16

## Questions and Concerns

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

Contact:

State Interoperability Coordinator

Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator

(XXX) XXX-XXX

[email@statecoordinator.gov](mailto:email@statecoordinator.gov)

Lunch will be provided at the session. We will begin promptly at 9am.

I look forward to meeting you and learning more about your perspective on interoperability in Virginia.

**Response Card**

Please cut and paste the response card below into an e-mail message and direct all correspondence to:

**name@email.gov**

<b>Yes, I will attend the interoperability focus group session on _____ in _____, ____.</b>
Name:
Title:
Agency:
E-mail:
Phone:
I will need information on funds available for travel and lodging.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> No

<b>No, I cannot attend the interoperability focus group session on _____ in _____, ____.</b> 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.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> No



## Appendix O: Participant Database Template

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following database template provides a sample format useful for 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	Email	Division/ Dept.	Notes	Invite	Letter	Call	Attend	Travel
01	Southwest	Fire	Jake Jones	Comm. Dir.	703-555-1234	<a href="mailto:Jake@fire.net">Jake@fire.net</a>			8/1	8/8	8/15	Y	N
						-							
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## Appendix P: Sample Letter of Endorsement

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

This example of a letter of endorsement provides a format and useful language for an executive sponsor to endorse your 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: April 14, 2004  
SUBJECT: **Statewide Interoperability Plan**

As you well know, the lack of interoperable wireless communications systems has been an issue plaguing public safety organizations for decades. In many cases, you as a member of such an organization do not have adequate radio spectra (channels or frequencies) or hardware/equipment to perform your 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, emergency response scenarios, terrorist acts, or even in 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 federal program, housed at the Department of Homeland Security, which focuses on public safety communications *driven from the local level*. 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 around the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first part of the strategic planning process. Each focus group will be comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and EMS departments with additional representation from public health, local, and state agencies.

**You have been identified as a local leader in Virginia's community of emergency responders and are invited to attend our first focus group session. This one day event will be held on April 27, 2004 in Richmond, VA at the Sheraton Park South Hotel on Midlothian Turnpike.**

The session running from 9am-5pm (lunch provided) will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

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

Please let us know if you are available to share your perspective on interoperable communications. If you cannot attend, we would appreciate a suggestion of an alternate to attend 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 Virginia.

## Appendix Q: Sample Press Release

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following example of a press release could be leveraged in your state as a means for communicating and marketing the interoperability project's efforts around the state to create a media buzz. Submitting media releases to the local newspapers and trade associations as the interview process is launched serves as a great way to inspire and validate the local and state stakeholders who are participating.

### Sample Media Press Release

Commonwealth of Virginia  
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety

March 1<sup>st</sup>, 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 systems has been an issue plaguing public safety 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 is a public safety practitioner-driven program, managed within the Department of Homeland Security, that was established to help local, tribal, state, and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. 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 around the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first part of the strategic planning process. Each focus group will be mainly comprised of informal and formal leaders from



fire, law enforcement, and EMS departments with additional representation from public health, local, and state agencies.

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 interoperability?
- Why do we need to change and what would happen if we don't change?
- What do we want our future system for interoperable communications to look like?
- What problems might we encounter when 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.

## **Appendix R: SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The SAFECOM Executive Committee (EC) is comprised of representatives from local and state public safety and government associations representing key public decision makers as well as contributing federal agencies with significant, vested interest in public safety. The EC serves as the primary steering group for the SAFECOM program and was a valuable resource for the Virginia project team in identifying potential focus group participants and providing overall guidance.

### SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet

#### **SAFECOM Executive Committee Information Sheet Purpose**

The SAFECOM Executive Committee serves as the steering group for the SAFECOM Program and evaluates the guidance and recommendations for SAFECOM as developed by the Advisory Group (AdG). The SAFECOM Executive Committee meets in person or via teleconference on at least a quarterly basis to review overall progress and approve the next set of goals and priorities. Between meetings, the SAFECOM PMO tracks projects and provides information to the Executive Committee through email, conference calls, and other appropriate means.

#### **Mission**

The members of the SAFECOM Executive Committee play a key role in the definition and implementation of the program. They provide substantive advice and guidance to the managing partner, project teams, and the SAFECOM PMO, drawing upon their experience and knowledge of public safety needs and capabilities. The SAFECOM PMO provides subject matter expertise and operational support to the SAFECOM Executive Committee.

The SAFECOM Executive Committee:

- Approves the general direction of SAFECOM, evaluate progress, and approves changes in direction and scope for the overall program,
- Ensures alignment with OMB E-Government and Department of Homeland Security policies,
- Resolves issues requiring policy, procedural, or other business decisions as needed,
- Participates in periodic, pre-scheduled meetings,
- Recommends additional SAFECOM Executive Committee and Advisory Group members,
- Prepares appropriate read-ahead and presentation materials for Executive Committee review,
- Considers guidance and approves recommendations from the Advisory Group, and
- Meets a minimum of once a quarter and more often when necessary.

**Membership**

The SAFECOM Executive Committee consists of a subset of the Advisory Group, including six to eight representatives from public safety and local and state government associations and representatives from interested, contributing federal agencies (i.e. DHS, Department of Justice). From time to time, representatives from other organizations may be invited to participate in one or more of the SAFECOM Executive Committee meetings. In addition, the SAFECOM Executive Committee may schedule additional working sessions to involve a broader representation of interested groups.

Those designated to be SAFECOM Executive Committee members have the knowledge and authority to formulate advice and make decisions on behalf of their constituents. The membership is made up of the following: Association for Public Safety Communications Officials -- International, Inc. (APCO), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science & Technology (S&T), DHS, Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications (FPIC), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Major County Sheriffs' Association (MCSA), Major Cities Chiefs (MCC), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Association of Counties (NACo), National Governors Association (NGA), National League of Cities (NLC), Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (Ex-officio), United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), and Public Safety At Large (2).

## Phase VI – Conduct Focus Group Interviews – Resources

The following resources were mentioned as tools that will help you conduct the focus group interviews in Phase IV:

- ***Strategies for Facilitated Sessions*** – This information provides guidance and useful tips to the facilitator who is conducting the focus group interviews.
- ***“Talking About Interoperability” Graphic*** – This visual is useful in building a common understanding for the definition of interoperability during the focus group interviews.
- ***Sample Gameboard Graphic*** – The gameboard is an additional visual that facilitates the conversation of the focus groups.
- ***Weblink to Introduction to Compendium*** – The document provides guidance on the conversation mapping tool that was used in Virginia.
- ***Weblink to Sample Focus Group Report*** – The sample focus group report presents a standard format in which the focus group results can be systematically shared with the entire stakeholder community.
- ***Sample Thank You Letter*** – This letter provides an example of the note that can be shared with meeting participants at the conclusion of the focus group interview.

## **Appendix S: 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 as far as logistics, considerations, and room 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 allows 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 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 believes that in order to fully understand the impact that the lack of interoperable communications has on the public safety community and 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. Outlined below are some considerations for what a state sponsor should think about when partnering with facilitators to deliver a highly successful focus group interview.

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).

See the table below for a sample session design that organizes one element of the 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

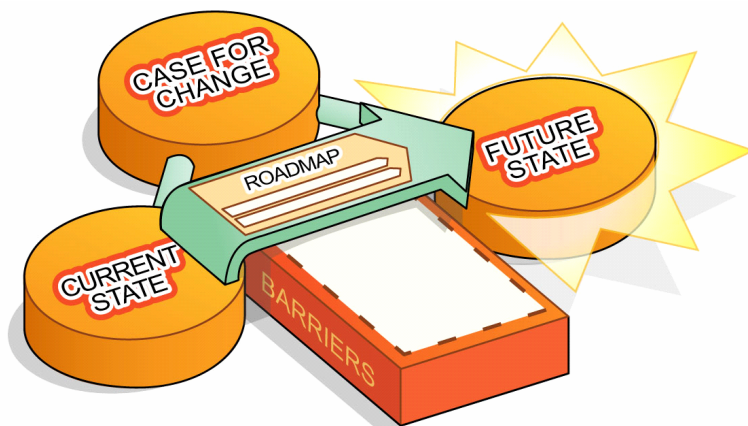
The information captured in the table above can be used by the facilitator to partner and communicate with the sponsor on his/her needs and expectations for delivering a focus group interview that is practitioner-centric.

No matter the size of the interview group, expectations should 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 purpose and outcomes, modify, and agree.
  - Check and document participant expectations.
  - Clarify roles and responsibilities of facilitators, participants, and sponsor.

- **Conducting the Interview**
  - Introduce interview model.



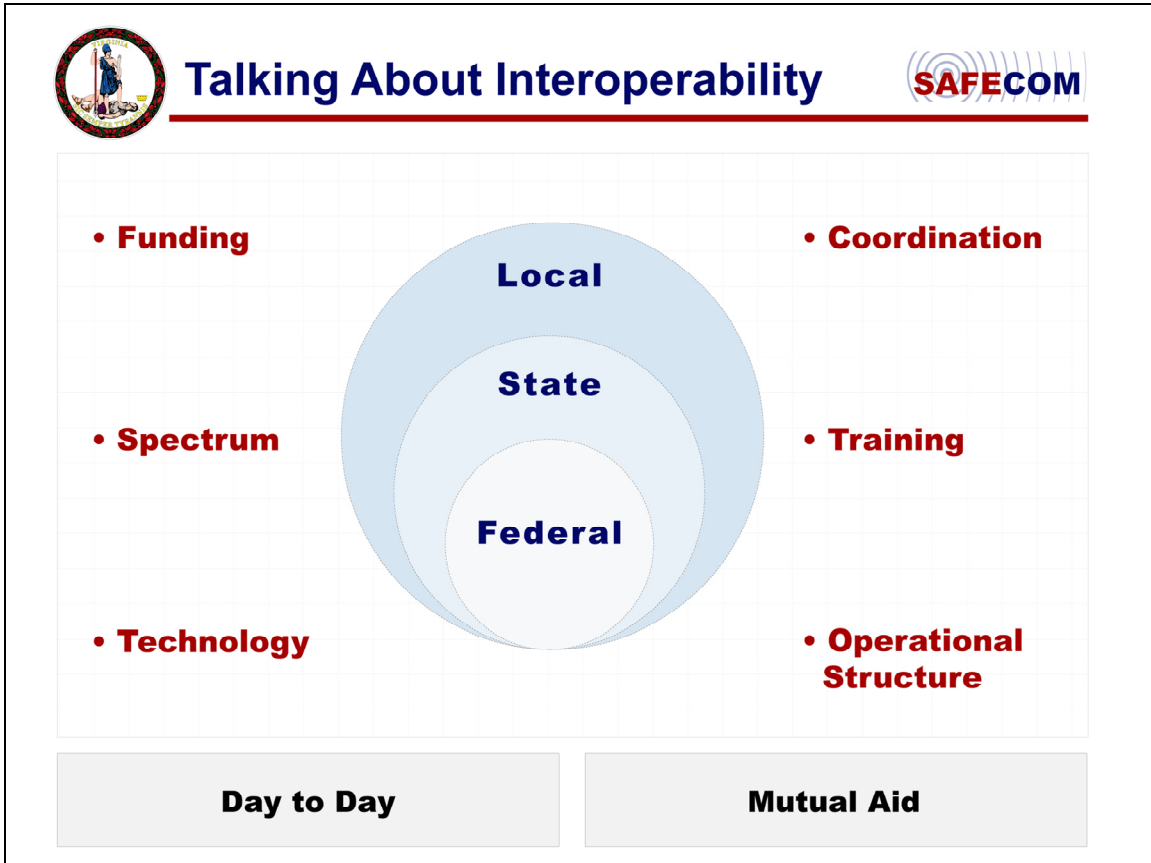
- Encourage participation.
  - Manage behaviors.
  - Ask for case examples and anecdotes.
  - Focus discussions.
  - Minimize interruptions.
  - Surfacing core issues.
  - Clearly explain the intent behind each question before beginning each new conversation.
  - Capture and display output.
  - Validate information captured with the group.
  - Solicit feedback throughout the day (verbal and written).
- **Closing the interview**
  - Summarize results and match against 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 for working with groups.

**Appendix T: “Talking About Interoperability” Graphic**

This visual provides a common perspective in the focus group interviews that assists in building a common understanding for the definition of interoperability.

*“Talking About Interoperability”*





## Appendix U: Sample Gameboard Graphic

The Gameboard is a visual display of the conversations held during each focus group interview. Its five elements – Current State, Future State, Case for Change, Barriers, and Strategic Initiatives – follow the framework of the session as participants share their thoughts on each element. This is an important display to have, because the facilitator can always review, reflect, and refocus with the participants during the course of the conversation in the day long session.

### Sample Gameboard



## ***Appendix V: Introduction to Compendium Weblinks***

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following Weblinks will direct you to detailed information for the tool, called Compendium, which was used to capture the results of the focus group interviews.

### **Links to Introduction to Compendium:**

<http://cognexus.org/execsum.pdf>

and

[www.compendiuminstitute.org](http://www.compendiuminstitute.org)

## **Appendix W: Weblink to Sample Focus Group Report**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

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

### **Link to Sample Focus Group Report:**

<http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov/Library/index.cfm>

## **Appendix X: Sample Thank You Letter**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

This letter provides an example of the note that can be shared with meeting participants at the conclusion of the focus group interview. It is intended to keep stakeholders feeling acknowledged for their effort and engaged in the future development of the strategic initiatives.

### **Sample for Thank You Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ ,

Thank you again for attending the Communications Interoperability Focus Group Session on Wednesday, April 7, 2004. Your input from the state level will be extremely valuable in the development of the statewide public safety wireless interoperability strategic plan. The ideas and concerns identified by the state public safety 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 Commonwealth of Virginia.

The value of this strategic planning approach to the state centers on the importance of a statewide perspective on saving lives. The coordination critical to this effort will leverage a collaborative strategy that can enable the state to work more efficiently and effectively. Finally, 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  
Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator

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

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

- **Compendium Maps** – The following 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** – The sample provides the results from the data analysis in Virginia, which was used for discussion in the strategic planning session.

## Appendix Y: Compendium Map

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

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 helping you in conducting the strategic planning session. The strategic planning session brings together key decision and policymakers that are integral to the success of the 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 should attend your strategic planning session.
- **Weblink 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.

## **Appendix Z: Sample Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following letter provides sample text that can be presented to the participants invited to attend the strategic planning session. As you were going through the regional focus group interviews, you probably came across or identified several participants who would represent the regions. You should also consider inviting participants whose positions or authority ensure that the necessary level of state support is behind this effort.

### **Letter of Invitation: Strategic Planning Session**

#### **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Strategic Planning Participants

FROM: State Leader

DATE: April 14, 2004

SUBJECT: **Statewide Interoperability Plan**

As you well know, the lack of interoperable wireless communications systems has been an issue plaguing public safety organizations for decades. In many cases, you, as a member of such an organization, do not have adequate radio spectra (channels or frequencies) or hardware/equipment to perform your 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, emergency response scenarios, terrorist acts, or even in 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 federal program, housed at the Department of Homeland Security, which focuses on public safety communications *driven from the local level*. 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 around the state to capture local feedback on interoperability as the first part of our strategic planning process. Each focus group is comprised of informal and formal leaders from fire, law



enforcement, and EMS departments with additional representation from public health, local, and state agencies.

We are now in position to leverage the knowledge and perspectives gathered from Virginia's emergency responder community. On May 18, 2004 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, all driven by the expertise of the local emergency responders.

**You have been identified as a leader in Virginia's community of emergency responders and are invited to attend our strategic planning session. This one day event will be held on May 18, 2004 in Richmond, VA at the Sheraton Park South Hotel on Midlothian Turnpike.**

The session running from 9am-5pm (lunch provided) will consist of large and small group discussions driven by four core questions:

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

Please let us know if you are available to share your perspective on interoperable communications. If you cannot attend, we would appreciate a suggestion of an alternate to attend 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 Virginia.

## **Appendix AA: 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 to provide you with a sense of the mix between local and state government officials. While the exact mix may not be replicated in your state, 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**

Alexandria Police Department  
 VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
 Henrico Police Department  
 Department of Game and Inland Fisheries  
 Virginia State Police  
 DHS – SAFECOM  
 Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)  
 VA National Guard  
 Virginia Department of Emergency Management  
 Hampton Roads Planning District Commission  
 Department of Criminal Justice Services  
 VA Office of Public Safety  
 VA Department of Health/Office of EMS  
 Capitol Police  
 Chesterfield County  
 Alexandria Fire Department  
 Department of Justice – National Institute of Justice  
 Southwest VA EMS Council  
 VA Information Technologies Agency  
 Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center  
 York County Department of Fire and Life Safety  
 VDOT - Safety Service Patrol  
 Charlottesville Police Department  
 Roanoke Fire Department  
 Commonwealth Preparedness  
 Communications Systems Department of Information Technology (DIT)  
 VA Department of Forestry  
 Axiom Communications Group  
 VA Department of Health  
 Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police  
 VA Department of Health NW Regional Hospital Coordinator  
 Department of Game and Inland Fisheries  
 Planning and Information Systems  
 STARS  
 DIT, Radio Services Center  
 VA Department of Fire Programs

## **Appendix AB: Weblink 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 address the interoperability issues facing your state's public safety community. The group's collective agreement on what is most important to act on first can 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 streams identified and/or secured to support communications initiatives.

### **Weblink to strategic planning session report:**

*At the time of this publishing, the strategic planning session report was not yet available on the web. Please visit the Virginia Interoperability homepage in the future at <http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov/> to find the complete report.*

## Phase IX – Develop Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan – Resources

The following items are resources mentioned in Phase IX as useful tools for developing your 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 first responders and state leaders to address interoperability issues. This appendix presents the Weblink to the entire strategic plan and its structural layout.
- ***SAFECOM Governance Charter*** – The SAFECOM governance charter is a sample structure that could be used in your state for managing the strategic initiatives.
- ***SAFECOM Governance Model*** – The SAFECOM governance model visually depicts the governance that will serve, manage, and achieve a locally-driven initiative.
- ***Virginia Governance Charter***– The Virginia Governance charter is a sample structure that could be used in your state for managing the strategic initiatives.

## **Appendix AC: Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability for Virginia provides you one example for how the data, feedback, and technical expertise of interested first responders and state leaders can be documented into a focused plan for addressing interoperability issues. It is critical to include the following elements into the 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, and
- A proposed organizational leadership and governance structure focused on managing the initiatives and next steps.

### **Weblink to Virginia's Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability:**

*At the time of this publishing, the strategic plan was not yet available on the web. Please visit the Virginia Interoperability homepage in the future at <http://www.interoperability.publicsafety.virginia.gov/> for the complete plan.*

### **Core Structural Layout of the Virginia Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability**

#### **Table of Contents**

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Mission and Vision Statements
- Barriers and Opportunities
- Strategic Initiatives
- PMO Structure
- Recommended Next Steps
- Conclusion
- Appendices
  - Contact information for key people/agencies
  - Focus group summaries
  - Budget guidelines
  - Suggested resources

## Executive Summary

Brief, high-level summary discussion of document contents, including introduction, current barriers and opportunities, strategic initiatives, and PMO structure.

## Introduction

This section will provide all of the necessary background information to readers, including:

- Background information explaining the need for interoperability initiatives in general (much of this can be culled from previous deliverables and existing 'boilerplate'),
- A summary of the process thus far,
- A brief description of interoperability at the present: parties involved, initiatives in progress, milestones achieved (a subsequent section will discuss barriers and opportunities, so this section should just provide the casual reader with enough information to understand where the report is going), and
- A brief description of the goal of this document.

It may be appropriate to begin this section with a letter from the Governor or another high-ranking official underscoring the importance of the interoperability initiatives.

## Mission/Vision

### Mission –

Our mission is to improve the safety of the public in the Commonwealth of Virginia through enhanced data and voice communications interoperability between local, state, and federal agencies.

Additional considerations:

- Define public safety and
- Add timeframes.

### Vision –

Agencies, at the local, state, and federal levels, will be able to communicate at optimal efficiency, in real time, and across disciplines and jurisdictions to respond more effectively in their public safety-related day-to-day operations and major emergency situations.

## Barriers and Opportunities

Now that the mission and vision have been laid out, this section should identify any general barriers and/or opportunities stemming from the current state.

Currently, there are several obstacles (i.e. problems in the current state) that stakeholders will need to overcome. In addition, there are numerous efforts already underway at all levels that either can provide assistance (e.g. available funding at the federal or state level) or serve as models (e.g. localities or regions that have already begun to address interoperability issues and realize results) going forward.

Barriers and opportunities that are specific to individual strategic initiatives can be addressed in this section.

## Strategic Initiatives

Short and long term initiatives should be listed briefly. The rest of the section should address each individual initiative. The in-depth initiative section may include:

- Imperatives for the initiative,
- Goals,
- Tactics to achieve strategies,
- Strategy-specific barriers and opportunities,
- Timetables (if appropriate), and
- Performance metrics/benchmarks (if appropriate).

Currently, the short and long term initiatives are:

### Short Term Initiatives:

1. Create a method to extract lessons learned from disaster exercises and actual incidents.
2. Develop and distribute a set of public safety communications requirements which include the federal interoperability grant guidance.
  - To assist with obtaining funding
  - To inform purchasing decisions
  - To outline interoperability lifecycles
3. Leverage existing resources and systems.
  - Educate public safety responders on availability and proper use of existing technology resources and
  - Mandate and monitor the use of existing systems (i.e. SIRS and other mutual aid channels).
4. The Commonwealth Interoperability Coordinator's Office will assist with the communications and outreach to localities concerning STARS.

**Long Term Initiatives:**

1. Develop desired outcomes for interoperability based on stakeholder input and leverage earmarked funds to localities to achieve the outcomes.
2. Create regional interoperability work groups who have direct representation on the state-level interoperability working group.
  - Extension of the governance model; governed by an executive working group and
  - Liaison between and amongst the local, state, and regional representatives.
3. Establish an information and outreach strategy to educate public safety responders, policymakers, and the public on interoperability in Virginia.
  - Mutual aid channels that are already in existence: NPSPAC and
  - STARS: what is the benefit to locals, what value is added in meeting the needs of the state and local first responders?
4. Develop and utilize cooperative purchasing agreements.
  - Allow for price breaks at the local level and
  - Move from a vendor-driven market to a public safety-driven market.
5. Develop and adopt plain language protocols (clear text) for all public safety responders in the Commonwealth.

**PMO Structure**

This section will provide some insight as to how the strategic initiatives will be accomplished – in particular, how they will be coordinated and overseen.

**Recommended Next Steps**

This section should include a list of proposed actions that will help start implementation off on the right foot. These steps might include:

- Appointment and convening of personnel/working groups/task forces,
- Meetings, and
- Development of timetables/agendas/implementation plans.

**Conclusion**

This section should tie the report together in a summary paragraph or two.

**Appendices**

While the content of the appendices has not been finalized, it may include:

- Brief summary information (including contacts) for key interoperability initiative participants and relevant agencies,



- Focus group summaries (either entire focus group write-ups or summary of key points),
- Budget guidelines for strategic goals, and
- Suggested resources (equivalent to a links section – could include suggested reading, links to relevant websites, etc.).

## **Appendix AD: Weblink to the SAFECOM Governance Charter**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

A proposed organizational leadership and governance structure focused on managing the initiatives and next steps.

### **Weblink to SAFECOM Governance Charter:**

*At the time of this publishing, the SAFECOM Governance Charter was not yet available on the web. Please visit the SAFECOM Program homepage to find the complete charter at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov/index.cfm>.*

## **Appendix AE: Virginia Governance Model**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following figure depicts the Virginia governance model along with the mission and practitioner-driven philosophy. This model describes the interaction among the Virginia program, the Executive Committee, the Advisory Group, and chartered Project Action Teams.

### **Virginia Governance Model**

## **Appendix AF: Virginia Governance Charter**

[\(click here to return to document\)](#)

The following charter provides details into the organization and decision making capabilities of the governing body that will carry out the initiatives stated in the Virginia Strategic Plan for Statewide Communications Interoperability.

### **Virginia Governance Charter**

## ***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 locally elected and appointed officials and public safety officials. In this guide, these types of officials are referred to collectively as "public officials." Public officials include elected and appointed officials at every level of government who work to serve the public in a variety of roles, such as 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. It is hoped that this guide will serve as a catalyst for public officials to begin additional continuing dialogues with public officials in their localities, regions, and states to develop collaborative solutions.

#### **Link to National NTFI's "Why Can't We Talk" Publication**

<http://www.agileprogram.org/ntfi/justnet.html>

## ***Glossary of Terms***

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

**Buy-in:** The process of getting stakeholders and others involved in the planning process to commit to the cause.

**Case for Change:** A description of the reasons why change must be made.

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

**Communications interoperability:** The ability of public 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.

**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.

**First 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.

**First responder communities:** First 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, in an ideal situation. A conversation surrounding the future state will help to set initiatives to work towards.

**Gameboard:** A gameboard is 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 understand their business dynamics as they are and helps them make a shift to where they want to be.

**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, such as foundations. 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 the radio communications system.

**Initiatives:** A new measure or course of action to embark on new ventures.

**Interoperability:** As stated in the National Taskforce on Interoperability (NTFI) "interoperability is the ability of public safety agencies to talk to one another via radio communication systems -- to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized."

**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 first responders which includes transportation, public health, and forestry.

**Roadmap:** A roadmap is 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.

**Statewide Interoperable Communications:** The ability for first and supplemental responders to communicate efficiently and effectively, in real time, across jurisdictions and disciplines.

**Supplemental responders:** Responders who provide support to first responders during incidents requiring special assistance. Supplemental responders include:

- Emergency Management: Public protection, central command and control of public safety 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.

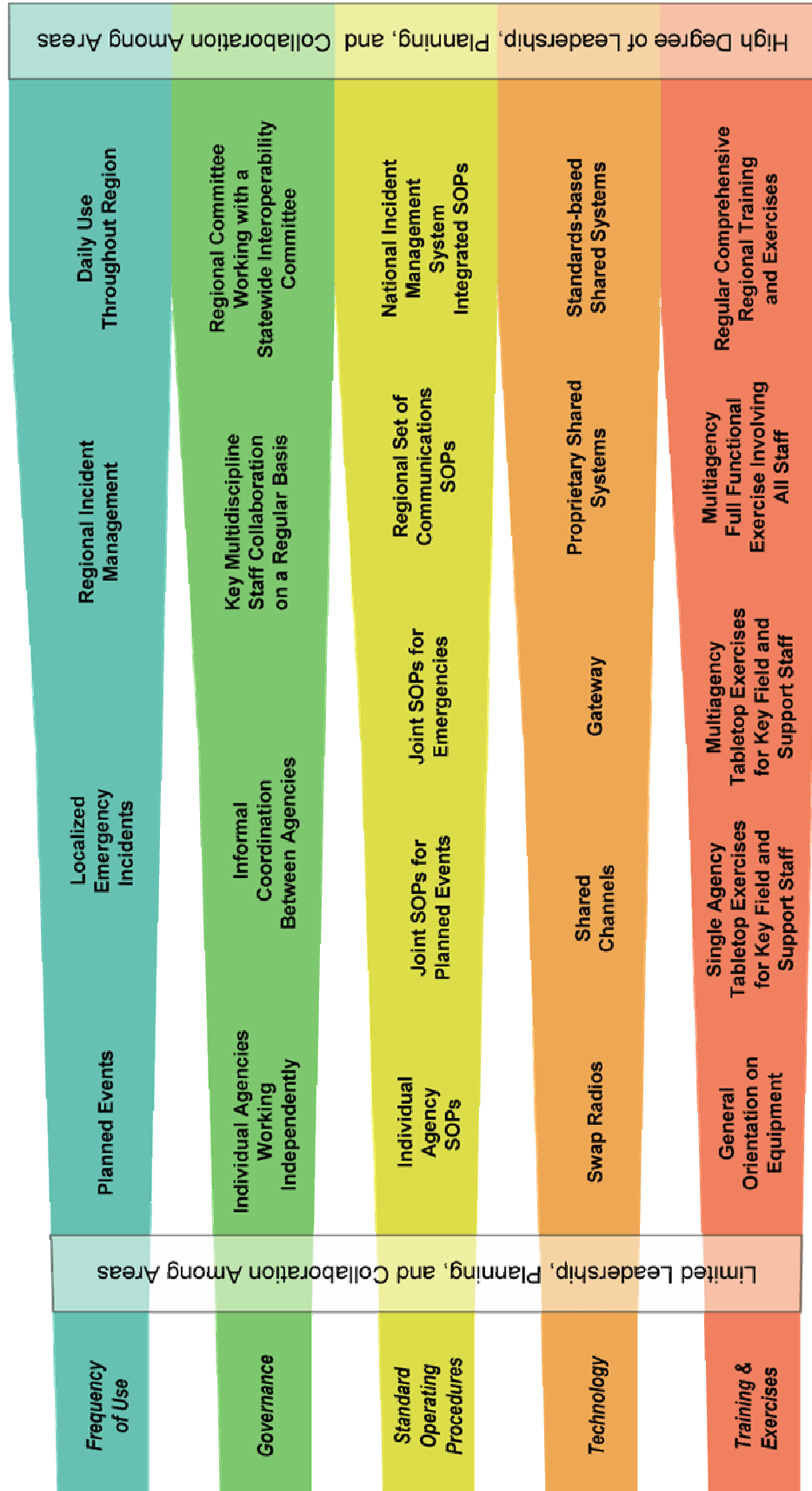
**Vet:** The process of reviewing information or documents with key stakeholders to get their support for the content and presentation style.





Homeland Security

# Interoperability Continuum



Limited Leadership, Planning, and Collaboration Among Areas

High Degree of Leadership, Planning, and Collaboration Among Areas





**Homeland  
Security**



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](http://www.safecomprogram.gov) or call 1-866-969-SAFE