U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Office of Grants and Training

**Communications Unit Leader
Core Competencies**

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Introduction

The attached table is intended to identify the critical task/skill-related competencies required by an Incident Command System (ICS) Communications Unit Leader (COML).

This table is derived from a long-standing document *The Task Book for the Position of Communications Unit Leader* developed by the National Wildfire Coordination Group[1] (NWCG) as part of certification and training materials for use within the National Interagency Incident Management System (NIIMS), a predecessor to today's National Incident Management System (NIMS). In developing the table, specific references to the fire service were removed, and text was added to describe additional generic competencies needed for a multi-service COML position.

As with other ICS position task definitions, COML responsibilities cover the range of duties of subordinate positions within the unit, unless delegated. While this range of duties implies competencies across managerial, planning, technical, and operational realms, in incidents of more than a few dozen responders, the Communications Unit would be comprised of other staff in addition to the COML – typically radio operators and communications technicians. The responsibility for critical Communications Unit tasks falls with the COML even though they may be carried out by other, specifically trained unit staff.

The COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. A multi-agency coordination system is a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications. These components are integrated into a common system with responsibility for coordinating and supporting incident management activities. The COML in the ICS must have a good working knowledge of the entire system to include dispatch centers, emergency operations centers, department operations centers, resource coordination centers, and other multi-agency coordination entities activated during a crisis. A good working knowledge of the technical aspects of communications equipment deployment, including system design, radio frequency (RF) coverage, interference and spectrum management issues and procedures is equally important.

Structure

The Core Competencies Table on the following pages is composed of two columns. The left column contains the Task/Skills, modified as appropriate, from the NWCG *Task Book*. The right column contains the competency coordination, management, operations and/or technical competencies requirements needed to perform the associated Task/Skills.

A number of the Task/Skills requirements have the same competency. Where this repetition occurs, the competency is repeated in its entirety with its initial number.

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[1] National Wildland Coordination Group, **Task Book for the Position of Communications Unit Leader**, *PMS311-35/NFES2345*, (United States Department of Agriculture, United States Department of the Interior, National Association of State Foresters, 1999). pp. 5-17.

Communications Unit Leader (COML)	
Core Competencies	
Task/Skills	Competency/Requirements
GENERAL 1. Obtain and assemble information and materials needed for response kit prior to receiving an assignment, including critical items needed for the assignment and items needed for functioning during the first 48 hours. The following items are suggested as basic information and materials: • Appropriate ICS Forms and Logs. • Radio Station Log. • Pads of paper, pencils, pens, and tape. • Flashlight. • Alarm clock. • Portable radio(s) as appropriate for the region. • Radio programming equipment (cloning cable or computer).	1. Employing agency must support development of the COML position, including necessary equipment for incident response.
2. Establish and maintain positive interpersonal and interagency working relationships. • Through briefings, discuss EEO, civil rights, sexual discrimination and other sensitive issues, with assigned personnel. • Create a work environment that provides diversity and equal opportunity for all personnel assigned to the incident. • Provide equal assignment opportunities based on individual skill level. • Monitor and evaluate progress based on expected work standards. • Address individual agency values and policies throughout the tenure of the incident. • Arbitrate differences in agency values and policies that affect the operation in a manner that fosters continuous positive working relationships. • Integrate cultural resource considerations into all management activities.	2. COML must have basic supervisory skills. 3. COML must have knowledge of applicable local, state and Federal labor practices and regulations. 4. COML must have appropriate personnel management skills.
3. Provide for the safety and welfare of assigned personnel during the entire period of supervision. • Recognize potentially hazardous situations. • Inform subordinates of hazards. • Ensure that special precautions are taken when extraordinary hazards exist. • Ensure adequate rest is provided to all unit personnel. • Recognize any special medical needs of all unit	5. COML must have required risk management training and be able to apply appropriate risk management and hazard mitigation processes.

personnel.	
MOBILIZATION 4. Obtain complete information from dispatch upon initial activation. • Incident name. • Incident Order Number and/or Request Number. • Reporting location. • Reporting time. • Transportation arrangements/travel routes. • Contact procedures during travel (telephone/radio).	6. COML must be available during on-call period and able to respond within established agency and regional guidelines.
5. Gather information to assess the incident assignment. This is an ongoing task throughout all phases of the incident.	7. COML must be able to multi-task around a potentially significant workload. 8. COML must have a good working knowledge of the ICS. 9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region.
INCIDENT ACTIVITIES 6. Arrive at incident and check in. Arrive properly equipped at the assigned incident location within acceptable time limits.	1. Employing agency must support development of the COML position, including necessary equipment for incident response. 6. COML must be available during on-call period and able to respond within established agency and regional guidelines.
7. Obtain briefing from supervisor. Examples of briefing items are: • Work space. • Work schedule. • Policies and operating procedures. • Current resource commitments and expectations. • Current situation. • Expected duration of assignment. • Special needs. This list is not all inclusive; COML is responsible for asking adequate questions.	10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure.
8. Receive Incident Action Plan (IAP). Determine support needs to meet the IAP.	11. COML must have a good working knowledge of agencies, geography, resources, topology and politics within the region.
9. Determine requirements for communications to be established and place the initial order. Using information obtained from IAP, section briefings and agency briefings, immediately order (using proper procedures) supplies, materials and equipment necessary to support projected incident size.	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 12. COML must possess a good working knowledge of regional communications procedures and protocols in order to properly inventory and size resource orders.
10. Evaluate needs and order supplies, materials and personnel to keep unit operating. • Order materials and supplies using procedures	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region.

established by the section chief. • Maintain quantities of supplies and materials at a level to prevent shortage of any basic needed items. • Ensure adequate personnel to support the communications unit, technicians, Radio Operators, etc.	11. COML must have a good working knowledge of agencies, geography, resources, topology and politics within the region. 12. COML must possess a good working knowledge of regional communications procedures and protocols in order to properly inventory and size resource orders.
11. Organize and supervise unit. • Brief and keep subordinates informed and updated. • Establish unit time frames and schedules. • Assign and monitor work assignments. • Review and approve time. • Develop team work. • Provide counseling and discipline as needed. • Follow established procedures for reporting inappropriate actions involving contractors, military or other personnel. • Brief relief personnel.	2. COML must have basic supervisory skills. 4. COML must have appropriate personnel management skills. 7. COML must be able to multi-task around a potentially significant workload. 8. COML must have a good working knowledge of the ICS. 13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.
12. Participate in incident planning meetings as the technical expert for communications needs. • Determine the feasibility of providing the required communications support. • Provide operational and technical information on communications equipment available for the incident. • Provide operational and technical information on communications equipment capabilities and restrictions.	14. COML must have a good working knowledge of communications resources available within the region, as well as outside of the region (other regions, State, Federal, etc). This knowledge must include general operational and technical specifics for these resources.
13. Design communications systems to meet incident operational needs. • Determine additional resource needs and order necessary equipment and personnel. • Prepare Incident Radio Communications Plan, ICS Form 205. • Request any additional communications vendor services; e.g., telephone, satcom, microwave and identify costs associated with equipment. • Coordinate, through the chain of command, the locations for equipment to be installed; e.g., repeaters, telephone lines, etc. • Provide communications support for external and internal data operations. • Order frequencies following the proper procedures.	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure. 15. COML must have basic radio and telephone engineering knowledge and RF design skills needed to do coverage, interference mitigation and system designs required for incident communications. 16. COML must have a good understanding of frequency coordination processes, including how to rapidly obtain Station Temporary Authorizations from the FCC, and to work with four FCC-designated Public Safety Frequency Coordinators to identify new resources and mitigate interference problems.
14. Install communications equipment. • Obtain equipment from supply unit.	17. COML must be competent at equipment installation for the types of communications equipment

- Install and test all components of the communications equipment to ensure the incident's systems are operational, for example: - Command repeater - Logistics repeater - Links (radio and wire-based) - Remotes - Aircraft and other special needs - Develop installation priorities, while adhering to safety standards regarding communications needs of tactical personnel; i.e., operations before logistics. - Clone or program radios.	normally encountered in the region, including radio programming. 18. In addition to having required risk management training and being able to apply appropriate risk management and hazard mitigation processes, COML must be aware of applicable Occupational Safety & Health Administration Radio Frequency exposure rules and standards.
15. Assign communications equipment. - Identify kinds and numbers of communications equipment to be distributed to specific units according to the communications plan. - Provide resources and unit leaders with appropriate equipment based on the communications plan. - Provide basic training as needed on equipment being fielded. - Maintain equipment inventory to provide accountability.	19. COML must be able to communicate effectively, efficiently and at the appropriate level with a wide variety of people outside of the Communications Unit in order to quickly accomplish training in the field.
16. Establish Incident Communications Center (ICC). - Coordinate location of ICC with Facilities Unit Leader. - Locate ICC close to the incident command post and away from high traffic areas and noise. - Locate ICC away from radio frequency and electronic noise. - Verify Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) of communications personnel and establish assignments based on incident requirements. Set schedules around operations requirements. - Obtain necessary supplies for ICC to function properly.	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 11. COML must have a good working knowledge of agencies, geography, resources, topology and politics within the region. 12. COML must possess a good working knowledge of regional communications procedures and protocols in order to properly inventory and size resource orders. 13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.
17. Manage operations of the ICC. - Document radio/telephone activities on appropriate forms. - Set up filing system for ICC documentation. - Direct radio/telephone traffic to proper destinations. - Establish notification procedures for emergency messages. - Identify system problems, both technical and operational, and determine appropriate solutions. - Follow established routing procedures for messages.	All of the above competencies/requirements must be appropriately applied to manage the ICC.

18. Coordinate frequencies, activities, and resources with Communications Coordinators (COMCs). • Contact COMCs and notify them of incident frequency assignments. • Identify communications equipment and personnel that are excess to incident needs and demobilize if appropriate. • Identify resources as to type/qualifications, quantity, and location.	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure. 15. COML must have basic radio and telephone engineering knowledge and RF design skills needed to do coverage, interference mitigation and system designs required for incident communications. 16. COML must have a good understanding of frequency coordination processes, including how to rapidly obtain Station Temporary Authorizations from the FCC, and to work with four FCC-designated Public Safety Frequency Coordinators to identify new resources and mitigate interference problems.
19. Notify appropriate local, county, regional, State and Federal agencies on adjacent incident(s) of system design and frequency allocations.	9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 15. COML must have basic radio and telephone engineering knowledge and RF design skills needed to do coverage, interference mitigation and system designs required for incident communications. 16. COML must have a good understanding of frequency coordination processes, including how to rapidly obtain Station Temporary Authorizations from the FCC, and to work with four FCC-designated Public Safety Frequency Coordinators to identify new resources and mitigate interference problems.
20. Initiate and maintain accurate records of all communications equipment. • Initiate and maintain accountability system for issuing hand-held radio resources. • Document geographic locations of equipment and transfer this information to local maps (latitude/longitude, legal). • Keep records for local and national resources to ensure return to proper locations.	10. COML must have excellent organizational skills. 13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.
21. Perform operational tests of communications systems throughout the duration of the incident. • Identify and take necessary action to accomplish minor field repair or place orders for replacement of equipment. • Plan for battery replacement. • Act decisively to minimize interruptions in system operation.	7. COML must be able to multi-task around a potentially significant workload. 11. COML must have a good working knowledge of agencies, geography, resources, topology and politics within the region. 15. COML must have basic radio and telephone engineering knowledge and RF design skills needed to do coverage, interference mitigation and system designs required for incident

	communications.
22. Interact and coordinate with appropriate unit leaders and operations personnel. • Coordinate with operations regarding system coverage and needs. • Coordinate with first responders and public safety support organizations regarding needed support (e.g., medical unit for medical evacuation plan). • Coordinate with special units (air operations, EOD, SWAT, etc) for special frequency needs. • Participate in planning meetings and briefings.	4. COML must have appropriate personnel management skills. 5. COML must have required risk management training and be able to apply appropriate risk management and hazard mitigation processes. 8. COML must have a good working knowledge of the ICS. 19. COML must be able to communicate effectively, efficiently and at the appropriate level with a wide variety of people outside of the Communications Unit in order to quickly accomplish training in the field.
23. Identify for release, excess unit resources. Coordinate with unit managers and provide a list of excess personnel and facilities. List will include: • Who or what is excess. • Time and date of excess. • The list will be reviewed daily for accuracy. • Follow the established demobilization process, including notification to COMCs.	8. COML must have a good working knowledge of the ICS. 9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure. 11. COML must have a good working knowledge of agencies, geography, resources, topology and politics within the region. 13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.
24. Maintain ICS Unit Log. Unit Log will be kept current, legible, and will document all major activities, which may include: • Equipment locations. • Medical evacuations. • Personnel changes.	10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure.
25. Evaluate performance of subordinates as required by agency policy and/or permitted by agreement. • Discuss performance evaluations with individual(s). • Maintain accuracy and fairness. • List training if needed or desired.	2. COML must have basic supervisory skills. 3. COML must have knowledge of applicable local, state and Federal labor practices and regulations. 4. COML must have appropriate personnel management skills. 13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.
DEMOBILIZATION 26. Demobilization and check out. • Submit all required information to the Documentation Unit Leader. • Receive demobilization instructions from work supervisor. • Brief subordinate staff on demobilization	8. COML must have a good working knowledge of the ICS. 9. COML must have a good working knowledge of the Multi-agency Coordination System applicable to the region. 10. COML must have excellent organization and planning skills and be able to apply them while under significant job pressure.

procedures and responsibilities. • Ensure that incident and agency demobilization procedures are followed. • Complete required ICS form(s) and turn in to the appropriate person. • Ensure that personnel in the unit are demobilized correctly. • Document lost equipment on agency specific forms.	13. COML must have a good working knowledge of Joint Powers Agreements, Memorandums of Agreement/Understanding, and related governance documents for the region.