



# What to Expect – A Guide to the Tabletop Exercise (TTX)

## OVERVIEW

The [insert name of exercise] Tabletop Exercise (TTX) is a discussion-based, low-stress exercise. Players will be presented with a guided, hypothetical scenario in an informal setting, and will identify critical tasks and answer questions relevant to each module presented.

The exercise will allow players to assess their organization's emergency plans, procedures, and policies while identifying roles and responsibilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needed resources in case of an [insert emergency type].

## EXERCISE GUIDELINES

- This exercise will be held in an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, are expected.
- Participate based on your knowledge of current plans and capabilities (i.e., you may use only existing assets) and insights derived from your training.
- Decisions are not precedent-setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This exercise is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options and possible solutions.
- Issue identification is not as valuable as suggestions and recommended actions that could improve preparedness and response efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus.
- The resources, written material, and scenario updates given serve as the basis for discussion.

## PARTICIPANTS

- **Player:** Actively participates in the exercise by contributing to discussions and/or performing their regular roles and responsibilities.
- **Observer:** Does not actively participate in exercise play, but rather watches it and may provide feedback at the end.
- **Facilitator:** Provides situation updates and moderates discussions.
- **Evaluator:** Observes exercise play and player discussions and provide feedback regarding the ability to meet exercise objectives.

## EXERCISE STRUCTURE

This exercise will be an interactive, facilitated discussion broken up into modules. Each module begins with a scenario update that summarizes key events occurring within that time period. After the updates, players review the situation and engage in group discussions of appropriate response issues. Players will then engage in a facilitated discussion in which a spokesperson from each group will present a synopsis of the group's actions based on the scenario.

## EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

The exercise objectives aim to improve players' understanding of the planning and response concepts, focus on identifying and assessing problems and solutions, and encourage enhanced coordination, communication, and understanding of roles and responsibilities.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each module will have associated discussion questions intended to help facilitate discussions amongst participants. The discussion questions will focus on issues related to the associated module and help identify any critical issues, decisions, requirements, or questions that should be addressed at this time.

## **KEY TASKS**

In each module, in addition to the discussion questions, there will be key tasks identified. The key tasks are designed to help facilitate and guide exercise play. Key tasks are actions participants are expected to complete during that module based on the information provided in the scenario.

## **EXERCISE EVALUATION**

Evaluation of this exercise is based on the exercise objectives and critical tasks, which are documented in the Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs). Additionally, players will be asked to complete participant feedback forms. These documents, coupled with facilitator observations and notes, will be used to evaluate the exercise and compile the After-Action Report (AAR)/Improvement Plan (IP).

## **TABLETOP EXERCISE: RELATED DOCUMENTS**

### Situation Manual (SitMan)

The situation manual provides participants with all the necessary tools for their roles in the exercise. Some exercise material is intended for the exclusive use of exercise planners, facilitators, and evaluators, but players may view other materials that are necessary to their performance. All exercise participants may view the SitMan.

### Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG)

The EEG provides a consistent tool to guide exercise observation and data collection. Just like exercise objectives and core capabilities, EEGs list capability targets and critical tasks. The EEG provides a guide for performance rating of each objective and capability target chosen.

### Participant Handout

The participant handout document provides an overview of the exercise content. It includes the agenda, guidelines, roles, and module information.

### Participant Feedback Form

This form is given following the end of the exercise. It gives participants a chance to provide observations, comments, and input that will give invaluable insight that will better prepare their organizations and communities against the threats and hazards they may face.

### After-Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP)

The After-Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP) culminates data captured from the hotwash, Exercise Evaluation Guide(s) (EEG(s)), and participant feedback to identify strengths and areas of improvement for the purpose of providing feedback to participating organizations. Additionally, the captured data is critical in developing an improvement plan in order to strengthen organizational plans, policies, procedures, and overall response capabilities. It is important to note that observations on strengths and areas of improvement do not focus on the individual participant, but rather are at the organizational and systematic level.