

Lesson Overview

Tests, training, and exercises are critical to ensuring that:

- Vital systems work.
- Personnel have the skills and knowledge they need to implement the COOP, if necessary.
- The plan works as intended.

This lesson will cover the reasons to test, train, and exercise. The lesson will also cover the types of tests, training, and exercises that are commonly used in COOP planning.

Objectives of the COOP Test, Training, and Exercise Program (TT&E)

FPC-65 requires all agencies to test, train, and exercise their COOP plans to assess, demonstrate, and improve the agencies' ability to execute their COOP plans. Among the objectives of the COOP TT&E program are to:

- Assess and validate COOP plans, policies, and procedures.
 - Ensure that agency personnel are familiar with COOP procedures.
 - Ensure that COOP personnel are sufficiently trained to carry out essential functions in a COOP situation.
 - Test and validate equipment to ensure both internal and external interoperability.
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Why Test?

Testing is an important part of COOP readiness. By testing, agency personnel can tell if the policies and procedures work as they should, when they should. Testing is critical for:

- Alert, notification, and activation procedures.
- Communications systems.
- Vital records and databases.
- Information technology systems.
- Major systems at the alternate facility (e.g., power, water).
- Reconstitution procedures.

Other aspects of the COOP plan may also require testing based on the agency.

COOP Testing Requirements

FPC-65 requires testing of certain aspects of the COOP plan. The agency test program must include:

- Quarterly testing of alert, notification, and activation procedures.
 - Semiannual testing of plans for the recovery of vital classified and unclassified records and critical information systems, services, and data.
 - Quarterly testing of communications capabilities.
 - Annual testing of primary and backup infrastructure systems and services at alternate operating facilities (e.g., power).
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COOP Training Requirements

Training familiarizes agency personnel with the essential functions that they may have to perform in a COOP situation. FPC-65 requires **annual**:

- COOP awareness briefings for the entire workforce.
- Team training for COOP personnel.
- Team training for agency personnel assigned to activate, support, and sustain COOP operations.

The training required by FPC-65 is **minimal**. When determining training needs, consider the policies and procedures that require implementation and the tasks to be performed as part of continuing essential functions. Develop and conduct training based on the actual training needs.

Types of Training

Before the COOP plan can be exercised, personnel must be trained so that they know what their responsibilities are and have the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out their responsibilities.

Types of Training: Orientations

Orientations are usually the first type of training conducted. They are typically presented as briefings. Orientations are a good way to:

- Introduce the general concepts of the COOP plan.
 - Announce staff assignments, roles, and responsibilities.
 - Present general procedures.
 - Describe how the COOP plan will be tested and exercised and within what timeframes.
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Types of Training: Hands-on Training

After familiarizing personnel with basic policies and procedures, hands-on training can:

- Provide practice in specialized skills (e.g., notification procedures).
 - Allow for practice of newly acquired skills.
 - Help maintain proficiency at infrequently used skills.
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Exercises

Exercises serve to assess, validate, or identify problems for later correction, specific aspects of COOP plans, procedures, systems, and facilities.

The Goal of Exercises

The goal of exercising your agency's COOP plan is to prepare for a real incident involving COOP activation.

The broad goals of exercises are to:

- Discover planning weaknesses.
 - Reveal resource gaps.
 - Improve coordination.
 - Practice using the communication network.
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities.
 - Improve individual performance.
 - Improve readiness for a real incident.
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Types of Exercises

After personnel are trained, you will be able to test the plan through exercises. There are several types of exercises that are commonly used to test COOP plans:

- Tabletop exercises
 - Functional exercises
 - Full-scale exercises
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Tabletop Exercises

A tabletop exercise is a simulation activity in which a scenario is presented and participants in the exercise respond as if the scenario was really happening.

The scenario for a tabletop exercise can be presented orally by the exercise controller, in written text, or by audio or video means.

In a tabletop exercise, new information is presented as the situation unfolds, making the participants reconsider their previous decisions and plan their next actions based on the new information.

Typically, a tabletop exercise takes about 2 hours, including the postexercise debriefing.

When To Use Tabletop Exercises

Tabletop exercises are particularly useful to:

- Enable decisionmakers to walk through an incident and make decisions similar to those in an actual incident.
- Provide a forum for discussion of plans, policies, and procedures in a low-stress, low-risk environment.
- Resolve questions of coordination and responsibility.

It is particularly helpful to conduct tabletop exercises on new or newly revised plans before more wide-scale, higher-risk exercises are conducted.

Advanced Exercises

Other types of exercises are more advanced and include:

- **Functional Exercises.** Functional exercises simulate a function (e.g., alert, notification) within a real incident. Functional exercises test a single part of COOP activation to be tested independently of other responders.
- **Full-Scale Exercises.** Full-scale exercises test the agency's total response capability for COOP situations. These exercises are as close to reality as possible, with personnel being deployed and systems and equipment being implemented.

A solid, progressive exercise program takes time and careful planning—up to 18 months or more in the case of a full-scale exercise. Be sure to devote the time necessary to developing appropriate exercises to test your COOP plan.

What if Data Show Poor Performance?

Let the measurements speak for themselves. Show personnel how they are doing. Ask for, and offer explanations and work as a team to identify the "why" behind the poor performance.

Record performance accurately in after-action reports. Plan to address the "why" in future training, exercises, and/or other interventions.

Develop a Multi-Year TT&E Plan

FPC-65 requires that all Executive agencies develop a Multi-Year Test, Training, and Exercise Plan that addresses:

- COOP TT&E requirements.
- Resources to support TT&E activities.
- The COOP TT&E planning calendar.

The Multi-Year TT&E Plan will be described in more detail in a later lesson.
