



**Examine the ability of law enforcement, fire and medical services, public health, and other emergency management partners to conduct integrated operational planning, establish an incident command structure, ensure interoperable communications, share information, and maintain a common operating picture during an incident.**

The National Exercise Program (NEP) is a two-year cycle of exercises across the nation that examines and validates capabilities in all preparedness mission areas. The 2019-2020 NEP cycle is guided by nine Principals’ Strategic Priorities, established by the National Security Council and informed by national preparedness data.

## What are Operational Coordination and Communications exercises?

### Exercises aligned to this priority should:

- Assess coordination and interoperable communications across disciplines or multiple jurisdictions
- Validate integrated operational planning, establishment of an incident command structure, information sharing, and maintenance of a common operating picture
- Evaluate coordination across a variety of scenarios, to include use of the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative for active shooter or active violence incidents, as well as natural hazards

### Case Study: Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Series

The **Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Series (JCTAWS)** is a multi-agency effort between FEMA’s National Exercise Division, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The series prepares major metropolitan areas to **respond to a complex coordinated terrorist attack (CCTA) affecting multiple jurisdictions**. Areas of concern include suspicious activity reporting, high-threat response operations, mass casualty care, unified command, and family reunification. JCTAWS includes a variety of exercises based on the needs of sponsors and directly aligns to the strategic priority of Operational Coordination and Communications. For more information, contact [nep@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:nep@fema.dhs.gov).

### Related Core Capabilities

- Operational Coordination
- Operational Communications
- Planning
- Public Information and Warning
- Situational Assessment
- Intelligence and Information Sharing

## Why is this important?

States, territories, tribes, urban areas, and other communities use the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) and Stakeholder Preparedness Review (SPR) to assess their preparedness. FEMA includes the results of the THIRA and SPR, along with several other preparedness indicators, in the annual National Preparedness Report (NPR). Analytic results help shape planning, training, exercise, and other prioritization decisions at all levels.

### Stakeholder Preparedness Review

- More than 80% of states and territories identified Operational Coordination and Operational Communications as **high-priority capabilities** in the 2017 SPR, but **reported proficiency decreases** in both capabilities since 2015



### National Preparedness Report

- The 2017 NPR highlights that **incident responders need further training** on the Incident Command System, and have **difficulty establishing unified command** and coordinating an effective interagency response

### Lessons Learned and Emerging Threats

- During the historic 2017 hurricane season, **over 15,000 state, local, and tribal personnel** supported disaster operations through state-to-state mutual aid. Such large-scale disasters only emphasize the need for nationwide interoperability
- Terrorists continue to refine ways to radicalize individuals, new infectious disease outbreaks can require adapting and supplementing existing approaches, and technology provides new threat vectors and capabilities for adversaries. **Pre-incident integration** among law enforcement, fire and medical services, public health, infrastructure owner-operators, venue or site security, and multiple levels of government is **key to establishing a unified command structure** during complex incidents



## What are the major challenges?

An analysis of 35 real-world and exercise after-action reports (AARs) revealed common challenges:

- Maintaining a common operating picture between emergency responders during responses to complex coordinated terrorist attacks
- Addressing resource availability during large-scale incidents, especially those which span across a wide geographical area
- Utilizing interoperable communications between law enforcement, fire personnel, and other response partners during an incident
- Ensuring communications technologies used to exchange critical, time-sensitive information during an emergency operational response are up to date
- Sustaining consistent communication and information sharing between critical infrastructure operators, private sector partners, and public safety entities during incident response



*Distribution of jurisdictions that submitted AARs for exercises aligning to Operational Coordination and Communications capabilities*

### Case Study: 1 October After-Action Report

FEMA, the Clark County Fire Department, and the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department created an **AAR to evaluate strengths and areas for improvement** for the response to the shooting at the Route 91 Harvest Festival on October 1, 2017. The AAR highlighted the importance of strong cross-agency collaboration to ensure a rapid and effective response. For the full report, please visit: [hsdl.org/?abstract&did=814668](https://hsdl.org/?abstract&did=814668)

## What can I do?

Training and exercises can help all levels of government, the private and nonprofit sectors, and other partners across the whole community be better prepared. The National Exercise Division at FEMA is committed to providing assistance to partners in planning, designing, developing, conducting, and evaluating their own exercises that validate core capabilities.

### Exercise Starter Kits

Exercise Starter Kits are pre-packaged sets of guides and templates to help exercise planners develop tabletop exercises that can be tailored to the specific threats, resources, and operational plans of their community.

### Spotlight Initiative

**Integrated Emergency Management Courses (IEMC)**, offered by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute, place public officials and emergency personnel in simulated, but realistic, crisis situations within a structured learning environment. Each IEMC combines classroom lectures, discussions, small-group planning sessions, and exercise-based training designed around the selected jurisdiction's hazards and emergency plans. The course culminates in a capstone exercise designed to validate participant knowledge while under pressure in a simulated Emergency Operations Center environment. To learn how to apply, visit [training.fema.gov/iemc/selprocess.aspx](https://training.fema.gov/iemc/selprocess.aspx)

### Related Training Courses

Examples of relevant training courses are provided below. Course offerings frequently change; please visit [firstrespondertraining.gov](https://firstrespondertraining.gov) for a full list of training courses and resources.

- AWR-329:** Leveraging Tools for Coordinated Disaster Communications
- E-431:** Understanding the Emergency Management Assistance Compact
- E-948:** Situational Awareness and Common Operating Picture
- G0191:** Emergency Operations Center/Incident Command System Interface
- G0291:** Joint Information System/Center Planning for Tribal, State, and Local Public Information Officers

*FEMA training courses are provided at no cost to first responders.*

Please visit [pretoolkit.fema.gov](https://pretoolkit.fema.gov) for Exercise Starter Kits, training courses, and additional resources.

## Nominate an Exercise to the National Exercise Program

### Benefits of participating in the NEP include:

- Receiving technical assistance and support for your exercises from experienced exercise specialists
- Access to exercise templates, tools, and other resources to help you design, conduct, and evaluate your exercises
- The ability to pursue new exercise ideas and broaden the impact of your exercises to a wider group of stakeholders
- The opportunity to influence national preparedness policy and resource allocation decisions at all levels by contributing exercise findings

### How to Participate in the NEP

1. Visit [fema.gov/nep](https://fema.gov/nep) to learn more about the NEP
2. Download and complete the Exercise Nomination Form
3. Submit your completed Exercise Nomination form to [nep@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:nep@fema.dhs.gov)
4. The FEMA National Exercise Division will respond to discuss your exercise