

# Intergovernmental Cooperation in Benchmarking a Local Government Continuity-of-Operations Exercise

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**This paper describes intergovernmental cooperation in the conduct of a local government continuity-of-operations exercise by the Public Works Division, Bernalillo County, New Mexico. The commitment of Bernalillo County to cooperation included the implementation of national standards and recommended practice. The commitment was based on principle and not on funding. The planning, training, and exercise cycle is considered part of the ongoing responsibility of the agency and is funded within the Public Works Division's operating budget. All levels of government participated in the exercise. The commitment of other agencies to the local government exercise included external evaluation, review of the After-Action Report and Improvement Plan, the support of continuity of operations, and ongoing cooperation in critical infrastructure protection. The state involvement in the exercise was through the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management as well as the Department of Health. Federal agencies supporting the exercise were the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Office of the U.S. Attorney; the 377th Wing Command, Kirtland Air Force Base; Sandia National Laboratories; and the National Nuclear Security Administration. The exercise was successful. The conduct of the exercise demonstrated that the division was well prepared. Essential functions were relocated and were operational in a period shorter than that identified by federal standard and local target timelines. Local governments such as Bernalillo County are capable as well as committed to intergovernmental cooperation. As a result of commitment and cooperation, a benchmark is offered for continuity-of-operations resilience.**

The Public Works Division of Bernalillo County, New Mexico (BCPWD) initiated and prepared a continuity-of-operations (COOP) plan. The division adopted an intergovernmental approach so that when an emergency caused the COOP plan to be activated, the actions of the division would effectively support other local, state, and federal agencies.

An exercise was designed to test the division's resilience in providing essential functions. The exercise, called Operation Fireplace, involved the participation of a diverse and highly skilled set of representatives of other governmental agencies.

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Operation Fireplace was successfully conducted. During post-exercise discussions, external evaluators commended the exercise as providing a resilience benchmark for local government COOP plans. The purpose of this paper is to document the process and the results of the exercise to benefit agencies at all levels of government. To achieve this purpose, this paper describes the background of the local government initiative, exercise preparation, Operation Fireplace, exercise evaluation, and next steps.

## BACKGROUND

### Public Works Division

Bernalillo County comprises both urban and rural communities in central New Mexico. The city of Albuquerque is located within Bernalillo County. The Bernalillo County Government is responsible for providing services to the unincorporated area of the county.

BCPWD consists of 250 employees. In the National Response Plan, at the level of local government, public works agencies are responsible for the transportation critical infrastructure. BCPWD is responsible for highways and bridges. Additional countywide services that BCPWD provides include fleet fueling and maintenance, facilities maintenance, solid-waste management, water resources, and geographic information system (GIS) support. To provide these and other services, BCPWD is led by the deputy county manager for public works and is organized into five departments.

### Continuity of Operations

The deputy county manager for public works made the decision that the COOP design template would be the joint TCRP and NCHRP transportation security document *Continuity of Operations Planning Guidelines for Transportation Agencies (1)*. The deputy county manager, the department directors, and advisory personnel appointed by the deputy county manager formed the COOP executive team.

### Literature Search

After selection of the COOP design template, a literature search was conducted to provide additional insight into the COOP process and to learn from the experiences of other agencies. In addition to the documents supporting the TCRP and NCHRP COOP plan development

guidance, planning documents within and external to the United States were reviewed. Among the efforts performed external to the United States, the efforts from New Zealand (2, 3) were noteworthy. The documents internal to the United States that supplemented the TCRP and NCHRP guidelines in Bernalillo County practice were developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (4), Florida Atlantic University (5), the Southwest District Office of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (6), and the U.S. Army Civilian Personnel Regionalization (7).

### *Essential Functions*

The executive team drafted the COOP plan. Central to the plan are the identification and prioritization of essential functions. A set of essential functions was prepared and modified after the first year of the exercise. The current set of essential functions, by priority, is as follows:

1. Road and bridge maintenance,
2. Traffic systems maintenance,
3. Storm drainage maintenance,
4. Solid-waste collection and disposal,
5. Communication and information systems,
6. Fleet and equipment maintenance,
7. Facilities maintenance applications,
8. Employee-related decisions,
9. Financial disclosure forms and budget preparation,
10. Infrastructure construction management,
11. Spatial data and imagery and GISs,
12. Payroll,
13. Payment of invoices, and
14. End-of-year activities.

The essential functions are consistent with the National Response Plan's emphasis on transportation and also identify other critical infrastructure and activities for which BCPWD is responsible. The set of essential functions at the end of Year 1 in the COOP process led to the formation of operations teams in the planning phase of Year 2.

### *COOP Teams*

The executive team formed operations teams with the responsibility to support the essential functions. Essential Function 8, employee-related decisions, was adopted as the responsibility of the executive team. Essential Functions 9, 12, 13, and 14 were grouped under one operations team and given the title Financial Services. With the exception of Financial Services, an operations team was assigned responsibility for one essential function. The mission of the operations teams is to ensure that the assigned essential function is provided without interruption. An operations team is challenged to overcome external impacts on an essential service that one or more emergencies may cause. Operations teams are also challenged to overcome internal division impacts caused by the denial of access to a facility, a reduction in staff, or both.

In addition to forming operations teams, the executive team recognized that command and control during activation of the COOP plan required the efficient setup of computer capabilities and voice communication. Information and communication are critical con-

necting systems (8). As such, these systems are increasingly relied on for response and recovery operations. This reliance argued persuasively for the allocation of resources and the assignment of authority and responsibility to an advance team. The advance team was formed to establish rapidly computer capabilities and voice communication at the backup sites. The advance team was formed with a clear mission: move first with speed and effect so that the other teams can succeed in their missions.

The executive team also made the decision that all personnel are needed when the COOP plan is activated. Unless social distancing is a requirement, such as during a pandemic, all individuals are expected to relocate and resume the public service that they provide. This requirement is independent of whether or not their service is considered an essential function. As a result, the exercise was also designed to test staff who were not responsible for an essential function.

### *Alternate Sites*

Each operation team drafted a plan to maintain its essential function. The operations team plans were to accommodate both reductions in staff without relocation to an alternate site and the denial of access to the current facility. Although some draft plans included the locations of alternate facilities, the emphasis was on how to maintain the team's essential function. Similarly, the executive team's initial review of the operations team plans focused on function rather than relocation to a remote site. The approach adopted was that any remote site would affect the way in which the essential function was to be maintained. Alternate sites that would most effectively support the essential function were selected.

The team responsible for maintaining an essential function was given responsibility for selecting an alternate site(s) for the purpose of the Year 2 exercise. Alternate sites were selected by the operations teams and reported to the executive team. The executive team commented on but did not override the alternate-site decision of the operations teams.

The expectation was that alternate-site issues would be identified during the Year 2 exercise. Operations teams with related functions or with related stakeholders coordinated the selection of their alternate sites. This approach proved helpful. The exercise identified some problems with alternate sites, from conflicting uses to parking availability. Formal agreements for all but two alternate sites were written after the exercise and were well advised by experience.

An operations team functional analysis was used to identify alternate sites, and the COOP plan exercise guided final site selection and the terms of agreement. In addition, the deputy county manager for public works initiated an executive team effort. A security assessment of the potential use of a single, separate building as an alternate site for all operations teams was initiated. The result of that effort was the effective identification of a second remote site for each operations team.

## **PREPARATION**

COOP is understood to be an ongoing responsibility of BCPWD to meet public expectations. The division also understands this and is committed to intergovernmental cooperation.

## Local Government Responsibility

The understanding of local agency responsibility for COOP is evidenced by the approach to COOP funding. Although the methodology is consistent with national practice to facilitate effective intergovernmental cooperation, the motivation is not to qualify for federal funding. The methodology was adopted on the basis of the principle that cooperation defines the nature of the public. Ensuring that public service continues during an emergency—the premise of COOP efforts—is the responsibility of each agency. The public expects there to be responsible public servants and agencies at each level of government. BCPWD meets that expectation in part by including funding for emergency preparedness as part of its operating budget. Success is not measured by attracting and consuming federal funds. Success is measured by accepting responsibility and developing the capability to work with individuals at all levels of government.

In addition to the approach to the COOP plan, there are two other indicators of the local government's commitment. First, when the decision was made to develop a COOP plan, the Emergency Preparedness Library was created. An office was converted to a library, and a collection of references was gathered to support the COOP plan and provide advice on other emergency preparedness activities. A second action taken during the first year of the COOP plan was the publication of the Family Emergency Preparedness Guide for BCPWD employees. Since the expectations of public service during an emergency were set high, it was important to ensure that staff had the opportunity to plan for the safety and security of their families. The guide was consistent with national and state practices and was written specifically for BCPWD.

The threshold for this measure of success is high: comprehensive support of other agency requests for assistance. Participation in an interagency exercise defined the first-year BCPWD exercise and is planned for the third-year BCPWD exercise in the current 3-year plan. The 3-year plan may refine agency-specific plans, in addition to refining interagency efforts, and from the experience of BCPWD should do so.

Cooperation with and the support of other agencies extend beyond emergency exercises and response. Two requests for assistance followed quickly on the successful completion of Operation Fireplace. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security invited BCPWD to support the U.S. Secret Service and other agencies in advancing the Safe Schools program in New Mexico. BCPWD committed the requested resources to help improve high school security. The New Mexico Department of Public Education separately invited BCPWD to help provide advice on school bus security at the State Conference on Pupil Transportation. Consistent with the role and responsibility of local government, BCPWD was pleased to comply with the request.

## Intergovernmental Cooperation

BCPWD understanding of intergovernmental cooperation is evidenced by the actions that it has taken. The actions are organized below in relation to each phase of the annual COOP planning, training, and exercise cycle.

### *Planning*

**National Standard and Recommended Practice** In addition to implementing the TCRP and NCHRP COOP plan development

guidance, BCPWD implemented the Homeland Security Exercise Evaluation Program (HSEEP) for the planning and conduct of Operation Fireplace (9). The primary HSEEP contribution to the exercise was the content of the Evaluator Notebook ("Package" in HSEEP).

**Local Implementation** BCPWD prepared a notebook for each exercise evaluator and observer. The content of the notebook was consistent with standard national practice, which permitted the direct comparison of Operation Fireplace with other exercises and which helped to ensure a longitudinal analysis of BCPWD exercise results. The content of the Exercise Notebook included the Exercise Plan (a version for distribution to staff and an evaluator version for official use only), Controller/Evaluator Handbook, the Master Scenario Events List, and the Evaluation Plan. The emphasis in the Evaluation Plan was the activity log, as will be discussed below. An orientation meeting was held with all external evaluators to ensure that they were familiar with the COOP plan and to ensure consistency in the logging of activities during the exercise.

### *Training*

**Homeland Security Courses** All BCPWD employees are expected to work during an emergency. Therefore, all employees are required to complete successfully the basic Incident Command System (ICS) and National Incident Management System (NIMS) courses offered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The courses are available online. However, BCPWD has employees whose primary language is one other than English or who have limited access to and use of computers. BCPWD developed the same courses for verbal instruction and verbally tested the employees to demonstrate their proficiency.

**Training Content and Approach** The training subject matter was selected to help BCPWD personnel understand COOP and to work with other agencies during an emergency. COOP training was conducted with materials prepared by and for BCPWD personnel. The executive team developed COOP plan outreach bulletins and distributed them to all employees through the division chain of command. The Year 2 outreach bulletin series addressed the following topics: getting started (what COOP means and why it is important), putting first things first (identifying and protecting essential functions), "who is here to help?" (the roles and responsibilities of BCPWD personnel during COOP plan activation), and "how ready are we?" (why unannounced drills are important in public service). Supervisors discussed the bulletins in work groups so that all employees understood the content, independent of their ability to read English.

To prepare BCPWD personnel to work with individuals from other agencies, introductory ICS and NIMS courses were required for all personnel. The majority of staff took advantage of the online training supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Two different approaches to training for staff with limited computer access or limited computer skills were taken. The first approach was for executive team members to lecture on the same subject matter as that in the online training course and then have the personnel attending the lecture complete a print version of the online test. Administrative support staff entered the test responses. This addressed the needs of individuals whose primary learning style is verbal rather than written. The second approach was directed toward those individuals who require a more individualized learning

environment to gain and retain information. For this approach, a small group training option was developed. Small groups were conducted with two or more members of the executive team, who provided the training to approximately six staff members, all of whom sat around a table. The same ICS and NIMS content used in the online training and in the lecture was presented and discussed in the small group setting. In some instances, the language structure of the national training program was simplified, and examples that relate directly to the ongoing work responsibilities of the staff being trained were given.

Whether it was through outreach bulletins or training options, all employees were involved. The content addressed immediate needs and longer-term involvement with other agencies during an emergency. The training content and approach emphasized one message: we are in this together.

### *Exercise*

**Developing a 3-Year Plan** A 3-year plan was designed. An exercise would conclude each year's planning and training and would move BCPWD forward to the next year's effort. Intergovernmental cooperation was a defining characteristic of the exercises. In Year 1, BCPWD participated in a tabletop exercise sponsored by the Federal Executive Board, with substantial leadership in New Mexico provided by the Office of the U.S. Attorney. The tabletop exercise allowed the BCPWD executive team to refine the COOP plan and essential functions before the formation of operations teams. This exercise led to the Year 2 exercise and Operation Fireplace.

**Intergovernmental Support** An important contribution of other governmental agencies was to provide advice on the 3-year exercise plan. The New Mexico U.S. Attorney (NMUSA) played a key role in the BCPWD planning, training, and exercise cycle. The NMUSA recommended and enabled the Year 1 BCPWD tabletop exercise link to the Federal Executive Board exercise. At the invitation of the NMUSA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was engaged in the Year 2 exercise. A supervisory special agent nationally recognized for exercise design reviewed the BCPWD COOP Year 2 plan. The FBI review led to exercise process improvements. One change resulting from FBI review was to encourage operation team leaders to contribute to the design of the exercise. Each operation team leader drafted a hypothetical event that would affect the essential function for which he or she was responsible. This injection into the drill allowed the operation team leaders to check the readiness of their teams. This change had the desired effect of greater involvement by team leaders. This change also provided the COOP executive team with insight into the one question that each operations team leader wanted to have answered about his or her own team's performance during an emergency.

Each participating governmental organization reviewed the COOP plan and exercise. External evaluators met with the exercise controller and planners to discuss the COOP plan and the Evaluator Notebook. There were individual and group meetings. The meetings provided the exercise planners with ways to improve the exercise and provided the external evaluators with background on the operations teams and the objectives and performance measures for the drill.

The BCPWD COOP plan background allowed the evaluators to match their interests and skills to the COOP operations teams.

External evaluators self-selected the team that they would observe on the drill day. When there were two or more evaluators for a team, the evaluators determined who would present injects during the drill, who would distribute individual evaluation forms immediately after the drill, and who would lead the team discussion before the all-team meeting ("hot wash") of exercise planners, evaluators, observers, and participants immediately after the exercise to identify the initial responses to the exercise.

## **OPERATION FIREPLACE**

### **Overview**

Operation Fireplace was designed as a drill. Consistent with U.S. Department of Homeland Security conventions, it was a functional, operations-based exercise. The exercise was planned over a 6-month period. It was scheduled to take place during 1 day over a nearly 7-h period (0645 to 1300 h).

Each operations team selected the COOP plan relocation sites on the basis of what the team considered to be the location that would best be able to support its essential function. There were 11 proposed relocation sites located throughout Bernalillo County.

The mission of the exercise was to activate the COOP plan, deny access to the primary facility, and assess the ability to recover essential functions and provide ongoing public service. Four objectives were identified: (a) evaluate the capability to provide essential functions when the COOP plan is activated, (b) assess the ability to establish and maintain internal and external communications during an emergency, (c) exercise the capability to deploy to alternative work sites, and (d) demonstrate the implementation of succession plans and the delegation of authority.

### **Participants**

There were 275 participants in Operation Fireplace. In addition to the 250 BCPWD employees, there were three individuals on the exercise planning team, 17 evaluators, and five observers.

Three external evaluators were from local government. Two individuals were from the Bernalillo County Office of Emergency Management. A security consultant represented the Terrorist Early Warning Network, sponsored in the midregion of New Mexico by the Albuquerque Police Department.

The State of New Mexico provided five external evaluators. Three individuals were from the New Mexico State Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, two from the Response and Recovery Bureau, and the emergency preparedness manager. Two evaluators, the interoperability communications coordinator and division director for epidemiology and response, were from the New Mexico State Department of Health.

Nine external evaluators were from federal agencies. Federal evaluators included a protective security advisor, Office of Infrastructure Protection, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; the intelligence officer of the Office of the U.S. Attorney for New Mexico; a supervisory special agent from the FBI; a security specialist with the National Nuclear Security Administration; and the base commander's representative from Emergency Planning and Operations, 377th Wing Command, Kirtland Air Force Base. Four of the federal evaluators were from Sandia National Laboratories:

two emergency planners and two individuals from Security Risk Assessment.

## Planned and Actual Events

The Operation Fireplace Master Scenario Events List listed the planned events. Each exercise inject was noted and the time that it was scheduled was indicated. The exercise controller, planners, evaluators, and observers gathered for a final briefing at 0615 h. Each person was given a photo identification badge that was color coded to his or her role in the exercise.

At 0630 h, two Bernalillo County sheriff's deputies blocked entry to the main BCPWD complex. No BCPWD personnel were allowed access to the site.

At 0640 h, the deputy county manager for public works activated the COOP plan. Contact protocols were activated. The evaluators left for the relocation site of the team that they were to assess.

At 1400 h, Operation Fireplace was scheduled to conclude. Immediately after the conclusion of the exercise, each individual completed an exercise evaluation, and each team held a 30-min exercise discussion led by an external evaluator. A hot wash was scheduled for all evaluators and COOP team leaders at the reopened BCPWD facility.

The controller was advised by three external evaluators that the exercise could end early. The basis for the recommendation to end the exercise early was that all exercise objectives had been successfully met ahead of schedule, responses to the exercise injects had been made, and more time would be allowed for the hot wash.

At 1300 h, the controller ended the exercise and individual and team evaluations began.

## Evaluation

The evaluation of Operation Fireplace is presented in three sections. The first is the measurement of resilience based on the master activity log compiled from the activity logs maintained during the exercise. The second section presents comments provided by external evaluators and survey responses by BCPWD participants. The third section presents an evaluation overview.

### *Resilience*

The evaluation of Operation Fireplace was built on the observations made by the external evaluators. Local, state, and federal evaluators were asked to maintain an activity log for the team that they observed. The logs were used to identify actions and measure the times of the responses. The activities that were logged and confirmed were graphed.

With the graph, a resilience triangle is formed by the point of loss of function and the recovery of function over time (*t<sub>o</sub>*). A "resilience triangle" is formed by the initial drop in the level of operation, the lowest point in the drop in operation, and the time of full recovery. The desirable response to a drill or emergency that results in activation of the COOP plan is reducing the level of the drop in operations and reducing the time to recovery. To the extent that the recovery time is reduced, the COOP plan or an essential function within the plan is resilient. The resilience graph provides an objective means

of assessing performance, supporting the activity log, and assessing the participants in the drill.

**Specific Efficiencies** The master activity log presents several indications that the BCPWD COOP plan can be readily implemented during an emergency. Some of the teams demonstrated exceptional capabilities. The following are among the noteworthy accomplishments:

- Advance team. The advance team was operational 25 min from the time of activation of the COOP plan.
- Spatial data and imagery. The movement of GIS operations to a backup system was complete and reported to the executive team within 6 min.
- Road and bridge maintenance. An unplanned move to a second relocation site was completed, and the team was operational within 1 h.

Although these and other teams maintained their essential functions under adverse conditions, the drill objectives emphasize BCPWD as a whole.

**COOP Plan Resilience** Two resilience graphs are presented for Operation Fireplace. The two graphs are concerned with BCPWD achieving full operability. "Full operability" refers to the observation by external evaluators that a basic level of service was established for each of the essential functions. This observation does not mean the absence of problems or phone and computer issues. It does mean that the teams were able to conduct business and to serve the public effectively.

Figure 1 is based on COOP plan activation. It shows the amount of time that it took for the executive team, the advance team, and the operations teams to be fully operational in relation to the activation of the COOP plan at 0645 h. The resilience triangle shows the complete recovery time, in which at activation no essential functions were operational before the regular workday for most personnel.

The time from activation to recovery was approximately 2 h. This response is a significant improvement over both the federal guideline for the time to recovery of essential functions (12 h) and the BCPWD target time to recovery (7 h).

Some but not all personnel found out about the drill date before activation of the COOP plan. One way to correct for the prepositioning of equipment by some personnel is to use the master activity log to identify the last request for technical support by the operations teams. By using this method to assess performance conservatively, the recovery time from the time of activation of the plan would be estimated to be 4 h, which is still significantly less than the federal standard and the local target times.

Meeting the needs of the public is a primary motivation for emergency preparedness in general and COOP plans in particular. Figure 2 presents the recovery time on the basis of the service at the beginning of the regular work day: 0800 h. Because some individuals' normal work schedule begins before the start of the regular workday, there was an existing level of service that built quickly to full operability over the next 1.5 h.

The public interaction resilience graph is particularly promising. The resilience triangle is narrow and shallow in terms of the ability of BCPWD to interact with the public during the activation of the

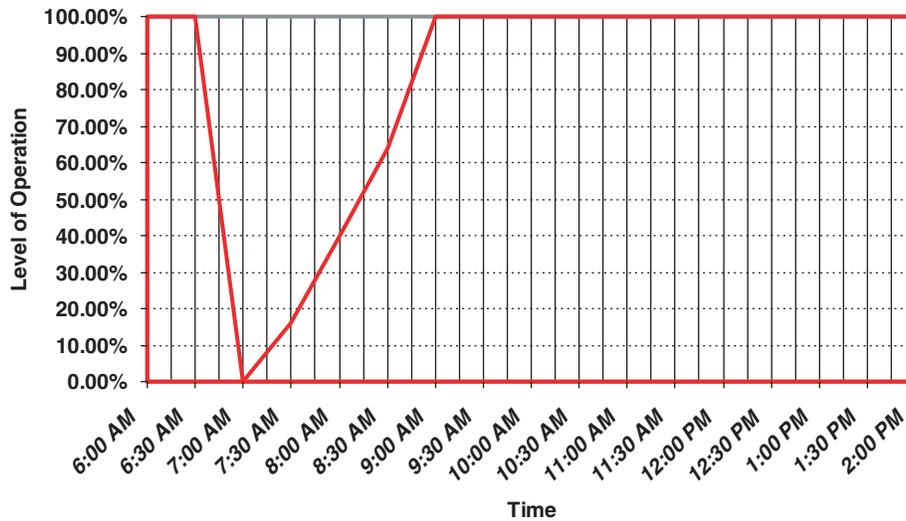


FIGURE 1 Time from COOP plan activation to full operability.

COOP plan. The exercise demonstrated that BCPWD is prepared to respond with speed and effect in ensuring that essential public services are maintained. During an emergency, this resilience will reduce the cost and suffering that results when government is unprepared and unable to respond.

*External Evaluator Comments*

External evaluators commented on the performance of BCPWD as well as the performance of individual teams. The comments were structured to identify areas for commendation and areas for improvement.

External evaluator comments on the overall performance of BCPWD were included in the draft After-Action Report (AAR). External evaluators reviewed the draft AAR, and their comments in the final report are summarized as follows.

The performance of BCPWD during the exercise exceeded expectations. BCPWD effectively responded both to the initial challenge and to changing conditions during the drill.

**Division Commendations** The primary commendations are noted below:

- No other community in New Mexico could have performed this well.
- No local government in our nation could have performed better.
- The exercise was valuable to the rest of the county.
- The test plan was excellent.
- There was terrific COOP awareness, testing, and involvement.
- By 0845 h, personnel were accounted for and operations were up and running—outstanding.
- The COOP plan is very detailed.

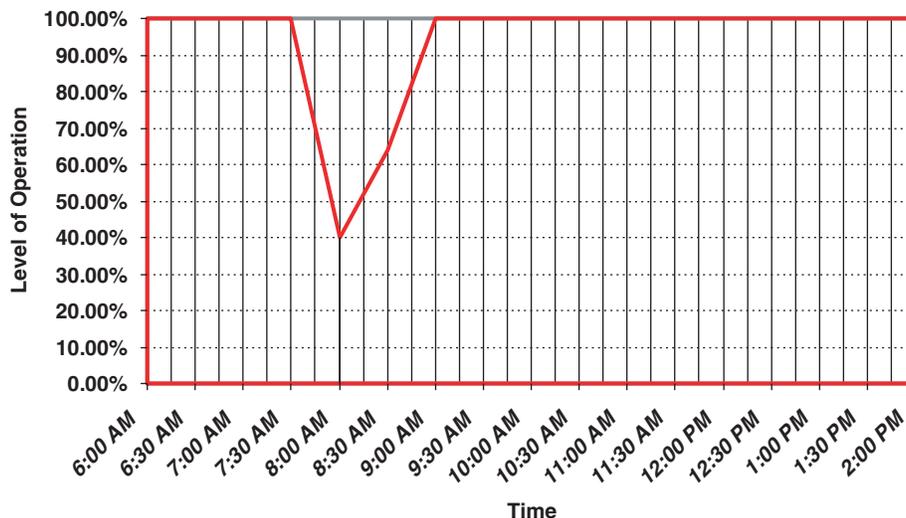


FIGURE 2 Time from beginning of workday (0800 h) to full operability.

**Division Improvements** The primary needed improvements are as follows:

- Some drill participants had advance knowledge of the drill date.
- In the COOP plan, the same format should be used for all operations team plans.
- The COOP plan should include a master contact list at the beginning of the document.
- There should be periodic updates from the executive team to the operations teams.
- Succession plan information should include the telephone number(s) of the person(s) who is the second point of contact.
- The server presents the possibility of a single-point failure.
- Printer use needs to be improved at the backup sites.

### *Internal BCPWD Participant Comments*

A postdrill evaluation survey was given to Operation Fireplace participants. The survey had two parts: Part I addressed recommended improvements to the COOP plan, and Part II addressed the drill itself. Seventy-eight completed surveys were returned. The survey questions, mean scores, and most frequent responses are noted below.

**Part I. Recommendations and Action Steps** The postexercise survey asked participants to list the top three COOP issues or areas that need improvement. The most frequent responses to this question are listed below. The number of participants making the same comment or similar comments is listed in parentheses.

- There needs to be better phone access and more land lines and cell phones ( $n = 16$ ).
- There is a need for more tools ( $n = 9$ ).
- There needs to be access to local printers, scanners, and so forth at the backup sites ( $n = 7$ ).
- Multiple backup sites are needed for each operations team ( $n = 6$ ).
- Vehicle access needs to be improved ( $n = 4$ ).

**Part II. Design and Conduct Logistics** The drill participants were asked to evaluate the exercise by scoring three comments on a scale from 1 to 5, in which a score of 5 indicates “strongly agree,” or a high score. The question, three comments, and the mean score for each comment are noted below.

What is your assessment of the drill design and conduct?

1. The drill was well structured (mean score = 4.1).
2. The participants understood their responsibility (mean score = 4.3).
3. The drill was a good test of the COOP plan (mean score = 4.1).

BCPWD participant assessments of the design and conduct of the drill are consistent with those of the external evaluators. Although the areas for improvement are clear, there was a positive assessment of the drill design, preparation, and test of the COOP plan.

### *Evaluation Overview*

The AAR summarized the resilience graphs and the external and internal evaluations. The evaluation summary is described in the following sections.

**Major Strengths** The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- Thorough COOP planning, training, and exercise;
- Resilient essential functions, ensuring the continuity of public service; and
- Benchmark COOP practice for local governments.

BCPWD will build on these strengths by continuing the planning, training, and exercise cycle in conjunction with the Bernalillo County Office of Emergency Management and cooperating agencies.

**Primary Areas for Improvement** Throughout the exercise, several opportunities were identified. The primary areas for improvement are as follows:

- Improved communication from the executive team to the operations teams;
- Improved computer, telephone, and radio availability and access; and
- Improved relocation site selection and formal agreements for access.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **Improvement Plan**

The executive team, operations teams, and other team leaders prepared an Improvement Plan. The recommendations were based on their experiences during the drill, the team discussions led by the external evaluator, and the hot wash involving all team leaders and external evaluators. The improvement plan included the proposed action, the person responsible for the action, and the projected completion date. This format built accountability into the proposed actions.

The first set of actions relate to improvements to the COOP plan. The current COOP plan will be recalled under document control and the copies will be destroyed. The new COOP plan will be distributed. On distribution of the revised COOP plan, Year 3 planning will begin.

### **Benchmark**

Credibility in intergovernmental partnerships is based on experience and performance. BCPWD is committed to being a credible partner and not just a needed partner commemorated by memoranda of understanding.

The benchmark is derived from the activities logged by evaluators from other agencies. The benchmark will be used in future exercises to compare the resilience of BCPWD essential functions. It may also be useful to other local governments in assessing the activation of their COOP plans.

### **Support Cooperative Activities**

Other organizations enabled the successful conduct of Operation Fireplace. BCPWD will assist them as requested so that progress is made together.

Each community is obligated, as it is able and as it is called, to contribute to state and national security. A conclusion from Opera-

tion Fireplace is that local governments are both capable and needed partners in the future of national efforts to improve critical transportation infrastructure protection. Local governments can, by capability, and should, by responsibility, be involved in advising national homeland security initiatives.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Each of the 250 Bernalillo County Public Works Division staff who participated in Operation Fireplace was responsible for the successful drill. During an emergency, each can and will be counted on by the people whom the division serves.

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