

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency

Tennessee T.E.S.T. Program

Tabletop Exercise Scenario Templates

Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide



Introduction to the T.E.S.T. Program Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide

As part of the Governor's School Safety Initiative, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) has created the Tabletop Exercise Scenario Templates (T.E.S.T.) Program. With a commitment to assisting those in our communities prepare for any disaster, we recognize exercising as a valuable preparedness activity.

The Tabletop Exercise Scenario Templates (T.E.S.T.) Program was created as an easy-to-use, complete, and expandable toolkit tailored for specific target audiences with the option of personalization to fit your goals.

This *Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide* is a supplement to the core document, the *Tabletop Exercise Scenario Templates (T.E.S.T.) Program User Guide*, it is recommended that the *User Guide* be reviewed and referenced while planning a tabletop exercise.

This *Tabletop Exercise Facilitator Guide* serves as a manual for the individual conducting the tabletop exercise, the facilitator, and will outline the step to facilitate a successful tabletop exercise. It will help the facilitator lead the exercise participants through the exercise, stay on track with the scenario, and achieve the goals of the exercise. Please feel free to contact the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) Exercise Branch at TEMA.Exercises@tn.gov if additional questions or assistance is required.

This guide is intended for the exercise facilitator and exercise planning team only. This guide and the information within it are not to be given to the exercise participants.

The Role of the Tabletop Exercise Facilitator

The facilitator is the individual tasked with guiding the exercise and ensuring that exercise participant discussion remains focused so that all issues are thoroughly explored during the exercise. They should have in-depth knowledge of the scenario and the Functional Content Areas (FCAs) being tested in order to understand the expected actions of the participants. The success or failure of the exercise can often be traced to the facilitation, so choosing the correct person for the job is important.

Identifying a Facilitator – Build your team with who lead and guide the exercise

The Exercise Planning Team should identify the person best suited to be the facilitator based on a variety of factors. The facilitator need not be a subject-matter expert, but rather possess subject matter knowledge. They should be a careful listener who can ask questions to encourage group discussions and be confident in taking on the role of facilitator.

Other factors to consider are knowledge of broad emergency procedures and processes, prior facilitation experience, and comfort with speaking to a group. The facilitator should be comfortable with balancing the discussions by drawing out participants who are not active in the exercise, as well as limiting participants who would otherwise dominate the discussions. They must remain objective during the facilitation and should not be a key decision-making member of the organizations participating. TEMA can assist with determining a suitable facilitator if needed.

Facilitator Training – Facilitators should seek additional information to familiarize themselves with the role

Facilitators can choose to learn more about exercise fundamentals by taking free online Independent Study courses [IS-120: An Introduction to Exercises](#) and [IS-130: How to be an Exercise Evaluator](#) offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Emergency Management Institute (training.fema.gov/is).



Facilitator Expectations – *What is expected of the facilitator*

The primary expectations for the facilitator include:

- Read and understand this guide prior to conducting the tabletop exercise.
- Thoroughly review the PowerPoint scenario presentation and have awareness of local plans and procedures.
- Be familiar with the FCAs tested by the exercise and ensure that participants are familiar with these prior to the exercise. Be aware of which FCAs are being evaluated.
- Keep discussion on track and geared towards the exercise FCAs while understanding the process that evaluators will use to document discussion points and evaluate the participants.
- Encourage realistic interaction among the groups as would be in a real incident.
- Encourage the participants to share their experiences and ideas so that they can learn from one another, especially encourage more experienced participants to share with less experienced ones.
- Help the group if participants have questions or need clarification of the discussion questions.
- Keep the exercise on schedule while allowing for breaks as needed.

Guidelines for Successfully Facilitating Tabletop Exercises

A successful facilitator will build and maintain a comfortable environment where participants feel free to speak honestly, openly, and respectfully. They should encourage all participants to contribute to the exercise discussion and ensure participants that they are in a no-fault hypothetical situation.

The following are brief guidelines to follow:

- Establish and monitor a basic set of ground rules for participants to follow during discussion to control group dynamics, manage strong personalities, and encourage fair and open dialogue.
- Facilitate discussions by asking pertinent questions rather than offering opinions or solutions and avoid dominating the conversation.
- Keep all discussions focused by bringing the group back on track if the conversation strays from the topic.
- If valid points are made during the exercise that are not relevant to the FCAs, you may want to keep these in mind for later discussion.
- Discourage side conversation and excessive cell phone use.

Time Management – *Successful exercises revolve around the efficient use of time*

The Facilitator is responsible for keeping the tabletop exercise on schedule. Running behind schedule and finishing late will distract from the goals and may detract from the learning experience. Likewise, cutting corners and rushing through the exercise may have equally negative effects and be disruptive to the learning process. Some helpful guidelines to consider are:

- Prepare in advance to be familiar with the materials.
- Designate a timekeeper to watch the clock and periodically notify the facilitator whether the exercise is on schedule. Adjust the pace of discussions accordingly.
- “Park” lengthy discussions in a “Parking Lot” and agree to return to them later (if time permits).
- Manage excessive conversation by asking participants to link their comments to the FCAs.

Preparations: Getting Started on Exercise Day

The facilitator should arrive early enough (we recommend at least one (1) hour before the start of the tabletop exercise) to make sure the room is properly set up and the necessary documents and supplies are available. The facilitator should check that all equipment is in working order.

The following items should be provided by the lead planner:

- List of participants and their affiliations
- Seating arrangements for participants with name tents (optional)
- Participant feedback forms to give each participant
- Exercise evaluation tool to give each evaluator
- Fact sheets (optional) and applicable policies, procedures, and plans for reference
- Appropriate audio/visual equipment, including a projector and microphones as necessary, and meeting supplies (notepads, writing utensils, etc.)

Facilitation of the Tabletop Exercise

Scenario – *The facilitator will need to be familiar with the scenario for an effective exercise*

The Exercise Planning Team should have prepared PowerPoint presentation, editing and revising it to fit the identified goals and objectives. This presentation will present the scenario to orient the participants with the exercise rules, purpose, and the situational guidance. The purpose of the scenario is to state how a simulated event unfolds to lead exercise participants towards discussion points of the functional content areas.

On exercise day, the PowerPoint scenario should be complete with introduction slides, modules and injects, and discussion questions for the Facilitator in the “notes” section of the presentation. Visual aids such as maps and images should have also been added to enrich the presentation.

Exercise Schedule – *Stick to a pre-determined schedule to appropriately and efficiently use time*

Please adjust the schedule as it best fits the finalized scenario and your expectations for the exercise participants.

Module	Time (Mins.)	Description
Welcome	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions, housekeeping, agenda, purpose and scope, roles and responsibilities, FCAs, and scene set-up.
Exercise: Module 1	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of first module: Initial Notification
Exercise: Module 2	35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of second module: Response (<i>two slides</i>)
Exercise: Module 3	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of third module: Short-Term Recovery
Exercise: Module 4	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of fourth module: Long-Term Recovery
Hotwash	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group discussion on exercise success • Review FCAs to see if they were addressed • Complete/Collect participant feedback forms

Opening Remarks – Kickoff the exercise by welcoming participants and officially start the exercise

The opening remarks should be delivered while on the title slide of the presentation. Officially begin the exercise and move into the presentation. The facilitator should feel free to add information in the notes section of the PowerPoint presentation.

Welcome Slide – Familiarize the participants with each other and the facility hosting the exercise

Introductions

The facilitator should welcome everyone and introduce themselves to the participants. At this point, the facilitator should ask everyone in the room to give a brief introduction as well.

Housekeeping Items

Identify the locations of important places in the building like the restrooms, emergency exits, refreshments, and other places that may be needed by the participants during the course of the tabletop exercise. Discuss sign-in sheets, feedback forms, and inform participants to be considerate in their cell phone usage. It is also suggested that participants be asked to place cell phone on vibrate and set radios to a minimal volume.

Exercise Detail Slides – Familiarize the participants with the plan for the exercise and exercise perimeters

This includes going over the agenda, stating the purpose and scope for the exercise, defining the exercise roles and expectations for each role, the guidelines for the exercise, and reviewing the FCAs that will be assessed.

Exercise Modules – Present the core content of the presentation and guide conversation

Reveal the information in each module using the PowerPoint presentation. Let participants know if additional details or reference documents can be found around the room. Following the reveal of new scenario information, ask the participants what actions they would take at this time.

The facilitator should balance the discussions by drawing out participants who are not actively participating in the exercise, as well as limiting participants who would otherwise dominate the discussions.

Facilitator Discussion Questions – Refer to these questions in the notes section to help guide the conversation

There are several questions in the notes section in the presentation that contain facilitator questions for the facilitator only to view. These should not be made visible to the participants during the exercise. It is recommended to print the slide for the facilitator to reference these notes. These questions should serve as guidance for facilitating conversation towards addressing the FCAs.

Let the participants begin discussion on their own without being prompted by the facilitator questions. If participants are comfortable in starting and engaging in their own conversation, there is no need to start or interrupt the discussion. Reference the questions and if it appears that the group needs assistance in getting discussion going or addressing important points, then it is recommended to prompt the group with the facilitator questions. Applicable facilitator questions should be addressed by participants before moving on to the next module.

Ending the Exercise

Hotwash - Conduct a conversation directly following the exercise to gain immediate feedback

The facilitator should lead a hot wash immediately following the exercise modules. Use this time to let participants discuss questions and identify strengths and concerns from the exercise. FCAs should be reviewed to determine if critical functions were performed and met. Notes should be taken during this discussion, and participants and observers should be asked to fill out feedback forms following the hot wash.

Some questions to consider during this period include:

- How will your organization evaluate your procedures and plans based on this exercise?
- What went right and what can be improved on at each phase of the incident management?
- Are any additional roles/responsibilities required to respond to this incident that you hadn't considered?
- What was the most important take-away from the exercise in terms of managing this type of incident?

Attendance Reminder - Remind participants to sign-in

Remind participants to ensure that their attendance has been reflected on the sign-in sheet.

State of Tennessee Resources - Share the resources that may help participants in making improvements

Review the resources that is provided by the State of Tennessee or as added by your organization's Exercise Planning Team.

Close Out the Exercise - Officially end the exercise and thank the participants

Thank participants for their contributions to the exercise. Ask the lead planner and exercise host to make any final remarks. Following this, a debriefing with the planners, facilitator, and evaluators should take place to discuss next steps.

Need Assistance?

The State of Tennessee offers many resources and a vast array of assistance in preparing for, mitigating the effects of, protecting against, preventing, and recovering from crisis and emergencies.

TEMA and other State partners are always available to provide assistance. Please reach out to the TEMA Exercise Branch at TEMA.Exercises@tn.gov and we will work to answer your inquiry or route you to the correct subject matter expert.

Thank you for your part in making Tennessee's disaster resilient!

