



National Planning System

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Homeland Security

Introduction

Planning is fundamental for our national preparedness. We use planning to engage the whole community in the development of executable strategic, operational, and tactical approaches to meet defined objectives. The National Planning System provides a unified approach and common terminology to plan for all-threats and hazards and across all mission areas of Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.¹ In addition, a shared understanding of the types and levels of planning will enable the whole community to think through potential crises, determine capability requirements and address the collective risk identified during the risk assessment process.

This document contains an overview of the National Planning System and includes:

- The *Planning Architecture*, which describes the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of planning and planning integration; and
- The *Planning Process*, which describes the steps necessary to develop a comprehensive plan, from forming a team to implementing the plan.

The current homeland security environment is complex and involves an increasing number and type of partners who must work together to meet preparedness objectives. The National Planning System enables a consistent approach to planning across multiple organizations, facilitating better collaboration, situational awareness, and unity of effort while remaining flexible and adaptable to changing conditions. The architecture and process contained in the National Planning System integrates elements of the entire National Preparedness System.

Planning Architecture

A plan is a set of intended actions through which one expects to achieve a goal. Communities and organizations use plans to guide action; these plans need review and adjustment to address changes over time.² The National Planning System architecture consists of three levels of planning: strategic, operational, and tactical.

- *Strategic-level* planning sets the context and expectations for operational planning;
- *Operational-level* planning provides the tasks and resources needed to execute the strategy; and
- *Tactical-level* planning shows how to apply resources in order to complete the operational tasks within a given time frame.

All three levels of planning involve the whole community. Through the three levels of the planning processes, planners develop an understanding of threats, hazards, risks, and capabilities, which assist them in the development of plans and planning products, based on mission, purpose, and stakeholder needs. Plans are not limited to emergency response plans. Homeland security strategies, strategic urban development plans, mitigation plans, recovery plans, and incident action plans (IAPs) are examples of plans that support one or more mission area.

¹ Presidential Policy Directive 8: *National Preparedness* describes the Nation's approach to national preparedness. The National Preparedness Goal is the cornerstone for the implementation of PPD-8. Identified within it are the Nation's core capabilities across five mission areas: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.

² Changes over time can include those related to risk, capability, resources, and organizational or political changes.

The architecture is the foundational element of the *Planning to Deliver Capabilities* component of the National Preparedness System. Included in this architecture are the National Planning Frameworks, the Federal Interagency Operational Plans (FIOPs), and other operational plans.

Strategic-Level Planning

Strategic-level planning provides a framework for guiding homeland security activities. This level of planning allows stakeholders the opportunity to focus on the longer term and articulate, monitor, and evaluate efforts to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from all-threats and hazards that might affect a jurisdiction or an organization. Strategic-level planning is also a mechanism for unifying the efforts of multiple organizations or components of an organization in support of a comprehensive and effective approach to homeland security. Elected or appointed officials of a jurisdiction or organization play a critical role by providing the vision and priorities for the planning process. The results of this planning provide a foundation for policy, operational planning, and resource decisions.

Leadership guidance also defines priorities and provides direction for addressing the capability requirements identified through the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)³ process and the State Preparedness Report⁴—two key elements of the National Preparedness System. In addition to jurisdiction or organizational strategic-level planning, stakeholders may choose to focus on a significant issue or mission area (e.g., climate change, cybersecurity, Prevention). These strategies establish the basic conceptual structure—such as governance, priorities, doctrine, and desired end-state—for a particular issue or mission.

Strategic-Level Planning Examples

National Strategies. These plans identify a national vision for a specific threat or hazard. They typically establish national-level goals, objectives, and potential challenges while establishing national priorities to achieve the desired goals. As an example, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy outlines new approaches to coordinate and integrate efforts to prepare communities for fire season and better address the Nation's wildland fire threats.

State Homeland Security Strategy. These plans establish the priorities and processes by which a state will build, sustain, and prepare to deliver the core capabilities identified in the National Preparedness Goal. Leadership intent, policy and legal requirements, and an understanding of risk drive these priorities.

Local Hazard Mitigation Strategy. These plans establish a community's strategy for addressing risk and reducing losses based on local vulnerability analyses and risk assessments, such as the Hazards Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA). These plans describe mitigation goals and objectives and identify existing and necessary capabilities and resources to support the goals.

³ For more information on the THIRA process, please see Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 201: Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Guide (<http://www.fema.gov/threat-and-hazard-identification-and-risk-assessment>).

⁴ Mandated by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 for all states/territories receiving Federal preparedness assistance, the State Preparedness Report is an annual capability assessment completed by states and territories.

Operational-Level Planning

Operational-level planning is influenced by the objectives and priorities identified through strategic-level planning and an understanding of the risks that affect an organization or jurisdiction. Operational plans describe roles and responsibilities, tasks, integration requirements, actions, and other expectations of an organization or jurisdiction during actual or potential incidents. These plans may also address the delivery of capabilities in support of steady-state activities (e.g., risk management plans, physical security plans). Operational plans may include the coordination and integration of activities and resources from other departments, agencies, and organizations within a jurisdiction and across the whole community.

Operational plans can apply to all-threats and hazards and contain both the governing authorities and actions expected by particular organizations. Elaboration on specific issues and requirements for a given threat or hazard will typically reside in an annex, appendix, or supplemental plans, as needed (e.g., a Biological Incident Annex to a State Emergency Operations Plan). In addition, functional annexes contain implementation actions, roles, and responsibilities that are specific to a function (e.g., public information and warning). Operational-level planning products should be flexible, adaptable, integrated with other plans, and based on the best available risk assessments.⁵

Operational-Level Planning Examples

Federal Interagency Operational Plans. The FIOPs describe the Federal Government's concept of operations for each mission area, including how the Federal Government supports local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area plans. Federal interagency plans may also exist to address risks for a particular region, sector, or function.

Department and Agency Operational Plans. Department and agency operational plans are deliberate plans that fulfill the department or agency's responsibilities. Each department or agency determines whether its components need to develop additional operational plan(s).

Local, State, Tribal, Territorial, and Insular Area Mitigation Plans. Mitigation plans developed at the local, state, tribal, territorial, and insular area government levels identify the natural hazards that affect a geographical area or individual jurisdiction. These plans identify policies and actions that an organization can implement over the long term to reduce risk and future losses.⁶

State Emergency Operations Plans. Emergency Operations Plans are plans for managing a wide variety of potential threats and hazards. These plans detail who is responsible for carrying out specific actions; identify personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available; and outline how actions will be coordinated.

Pre-disaster Recovery Plans. Businesses, communities, and governments develop pre-disaster recovery plans to establish priorities, set roles and expectations, and coordinate resources to assist the timely restoration, strengthening, and revitalization of assets and services following a disaster.

⁵ See CPG 101 for additional information about the structure and content of operational plans; http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/divisions/npd/CPG_101_V2.pdf.

⁶ For more information, visit <http://www.fema.gov/multi-hazard-mitigation-planning>.

Nongovernmental and Private Sector Organization Plans. Nongovernmental and private sector plans describe how an organization will respond to disasters and emergencies (e.g., shelter-in-place plans, business continuity plans). Ready Business, an extension of the Ready campaign, provides guidance for the development, implementation, and sustainment of all-threats and hazards plans for businesses.⁷

Individual and Family Plans. Individuals and families need to engage in planning processes as well. Individuals and families should identify threats and hazards that have occurred or could occur in their area and plan for the unique actions needed for each. These plans can include how to get to a safe place, how to contact one another, and how the family reunites following a disaster.⁸

Tactical-Level Planning

Tactical plans focus on managing resources such as personnel and equipment that play a direct role in an incident or event. Pre-incident tactical planning, based upon existing operational plans, provides the opportunity to pre-identify personnel, equipment, and other execution needs. Tactical plans often outline the detailed actions necessary to accomplish goals identified in an operational plan. An example of this type of planning occurs for special events or venues, wherein planners determine resource assignments, routes, and staging for potential incidents in advance. Planning teams then fill identified gaps through various means, such as mutual aid. Tactical plans can integrate the capabilities and resources of multiple stakeholders.

Real-time tactical planning occurs in the short-term or immediate operational period and takes into account the circumstances of an actual incident, risk, or threat. One example of tactical planning in real-time is the development of an IAP to support response activities. The incident action planning process is time-constrained and happens as an incident unfolds to execute specific actions and to direct resources. The IAP may include a comprehensive listing of the actions, resources, and support needed to accomplish each incident objective over a single operational period.

Tactical-Level Planning Examples

Event Plans. Organizations and jurisdictions develop pre-incident event plans to prepare for a variety of tactical activities to address a potential threat or actual incident.

Incident Action Plans. Incident managers develop IAPs in real-time to provide overall priorities, objectives, strategies, and tactics for the management of an incident.

Pre-positioning Plans. Organizations produce pre-positioning plans to provide resource management expectations in anticipation of response and recovery needs for an imminent or ongoing event.

The three levels of planning typically fall into two categories: deliberate planning and incident action planning. Deliberate planning involves developing strategic, operational, and tactical plans to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from a jurisdiction's threats or hazards. Incident action planning occurs in a time-constrained

⁷ For more information, please visit <http://www.ready.gov/business>.

⁸ For more information, please visit <http://www.ready.gov>.

environment to develop or rapidly adapt operational and tactical plans in response to an imminent or ongoing incident. Figure 1 illustrates how these planning levels and categories relate to each other.



Figure 1: National Planning System Architecture

Integration of Planning Efforts

The process of coordinating and integrating plans across multiple organizations facilitates unity of effort through a common understanding of relevant capabilities, relationships, objectives, and resource requirements. The use of the National Planning System promotes a unified approach to planning through vertical and horizontal integration of plans across the whole community.

Vertical integration is the incorporation of planning across various scales within a specific function. For example, representatives from state and Federal Emergency Support Functions and other disciplines should coordinate to ensure common planning expectations for their functions (e.g., law enforcement, emergency management, public health) or particular capabilities (e.g., critical transportation planning). This integration allows an organization to include all aspects of an activity in their planning efforts.

Horizontal integration refers to the incorporation of planning across various functions, mission areas, organizations, and jurisdictions—allowing supporting partners to develop plans that meet their internal needs or legal requirements. Taken together, vertical and horizontal planning helps ensure coordination of incident management expectations across the various functions and capabilities required for all-threats and hazards.

The National Planning System emphasizes the need for planners to work together to determine how to plan for risks, how to coordinate operational structures, and how to share resources effectively. Mutual aid across the whole community is an important principle within national

preparedness and requires that stakeholders have a common understanding of the resources and services available from other organizations. Organizations may share planning resources through mutual aid, both for steady-state efforts and during an incident or event (e.g., one jurisdiction providing a Planning Section Chief to another). It is important that whole community stakeholders have a common understanding of the procedures for accessing and integrating other planning resources.

Integrated Planning Example – Natural Disaster

Planning for natural disasters provides an example of how family, household, community, private sector, local, state, and Federal plans integrate into a planning system. This example demonstrates the need for a coordinated/integrated National Planning System.

Household/Family Plans. These plans should include steps on how the family will communicate during disasters and how to ensure all family members will be located, reunited, and protected. These plans are dependent on local emergency planners to provide information on types of natural disasters the area is prone to and steps to take to evacuate or shelter-in-place.

Local and Community Emergency Plans. These plans typically identify types of natural disasters the area is prone to and steps a community will take to communicate with, evacuate, and/or shelter-in-place the public. However, these plans may be dependent on private sector support (e.g., media, local retail businesses), nongovernmental organization sector (e.g., local religious organizations), and state and Federal agencies during response to significant disasters.

Private Sector/Business Plans. These plans need to include steps on how to protect workers during a disaster and how the business will continue during and after the disaster. The plans also need to identify what resources and services the organization depends upon local responders to provide and whether local responders are dependent upon any of its services and products (e.g., gas stations).

Nongovernmental Organization Plans. These plans are similar to private-sector plans but may provide unique services for the local community (e.g., shelter). These plans need to align with local and other government plans.

State Emergency Operations Plans. These plans outline how states organize their resources and services and the steps local governments can take to request services, as well as how to address conflicts for resources.

National Planning Frameworks. These plans identify specific roles and responsibilities, coordinating structures, and practices for managing incidents that range from those managed locally to larger-scale incidents, including catastrophic natural disasters.

The system of plans developed by all levels of government, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals is an integrated way for whole community partners to understand each other’s capabilities and the means to obtain additional resources from fellow stakeholders. By providing a common understanding of terms and approach to planning, the National Planning System supports vertical integration across the various levels of government and horizontal integration across the whole community and across the five mission areas.

Planning Process

Knowing which plans are necessary—and in what order to develop or revise plans—is key to the success of planning activities. Planning activities involve two parts: 1) ensuring support of applicable parties, and 2) conducting a common planning process.

Before beginning the planning process, organizations should establish their planning architecture. This entails identifying the desired combination of strategic-, operational-, and tactical-level planning based on direction from community and organizational leaders and by using the results of risk assessment. Community and organizational leaders should be included at the beginning of the planning process to capture their understanding of the policy environment and planning priorities while also ensuring their support of the planning process. These decisions about the planning architecture and other influence from community and organizational leaders provide the basis for stakeholders to adapt their planning process. If planning time is constrained, stakeholders and teams can compress planning steps or conduct some steps simultaneously to accelerate the process based on identified planning gaps. This section provides a summary of each step in the planning process (see Figure 2). For a more detailed discussion of the planning process, please refer to CPG 101.⁹



Figure 2: The Planning Process

Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team. The whole community approach to planning produces an informed, shared understanding of risks, needs, and capabilities; an increase in capabilities through the empowerment of whole community members; and, in the end, a more secure and resilient Nation. The most realistic and complete plans are prepared by a diverse and integrated planning team. Obtaining a clear understanding of leadership intent and their participation in the planning effort ensures the necessary level of support and involvement needed from all partners.

Step 2: Understand the Situation. Planning is fundamentally a method to manage risk.¹⁰ Risk management is a process by which stakeholders define context; identify and assess risks; and analyze, decide, implement, and evaluate courses of action for managing those risks to build, sustain, and deliver the necessary capabilities. By understanding the risk landscape, planning teams can make better decisions regarding the management of risk and the development of capabilities. The THIRA process—including the capability estimation component—is one method for understanding the risk landscape and making informed decisions.

Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives. The planning team uses previously identified requirements to establish priorities, goals, and objectives. Priorities indicate a desired end-state, often based on the vision communicated by senior officials. Goals are broad, general statements that indicate the intended methods for achieving the mission, meeting priorities, and specifying desired results. Objectives are more specific and identifiable actions carried out during the

⁹ For more information, please visit <http://www.fema.gov/plan>.

¹⁰ Risk is the potential for an unwanted impact resulting from a threat or hazard, as determined by its likelihood and associated consequences.

operation. Clear definition of priorities, goals, and objectives enables unity of effort and consistency of purpose among the multiple groups and activities involved in executing the plan.

Step 4: Plan Development. When developing the plan, the planning team should first develop and analyze possible solutions, or courses of action, for achieving the goals and objectives identified in Step 3. The planning team then assesses a variety of criteria (e.g., the acceptability, adequacy, assumed risk, feasibility, flexibility, cost, benefit) of each course of action against the goals and objectives. Based on this comparison, planners can select the preferred courses of action to continue the planning process. Senior officials approve course of action decisions during plan development as appropriate.

Step 5: Plan Preparation, Review, and Approval. Step 5 turns the stakeholder-developed courses of action under Step 4 into a plan. The planning team develops a rough draft of the plan, including appendices and annexes and revises them as necessary, adding tables, charts, graphics, and other content. The team prepares a final draft and circulates it for comment to organizations responsible for implementing the plan. The team should check the written plan for conformity to applicable legal requirements and standards and for its usefulness in practice. Once the team validates the plan, usually through an exercise or actual event, the appropriate parties sign and distribute it (as specified by applicable law) to appropriate stakeholders.

Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance. Plan refinement may be triggered through the identification of corrective actions from an exercise or actual incident; routine scheduled maintenance (e.g., annually, biannually); changes in risk posture; or changes in law, policy, or doctrine. Planning teams should establish a recurring process for reviewing and revising the plan. Organizations use training events, exercises, and real-world incidents to assess the effectiveness of plans.

Conclusion

The National Planning System provides a common approach to planning consistent with widely accepted planning principles and processes while also encouraging collaboration and integrated planning among stakeholders. As the National Planning System matures, it will remain flexible and adapt to the needs of all stakeholders. The Federal Government will collect stakeholder feedback, best practices, and lessons learned that drive revisions to the National Planning System and its supporting elements through a variety of means, including technical assistance interactions, online feedback submission, and focused data collection efforts.

The elements of the National Planning System may require periodic updates to incorporate new executive guidance, statutory and procedural changes, and lessons learned from exercises and actual incidents. The National Planning Frameworks and the FIOPs will undergo a review and update every five (5) years. The review and maintenance process of the FIOPs may include developing incident-specific and classified annexes, which include the delivery schedule for federally coordinated assets and resources, as appropriate.

The Nation faces complex and evolving threats and hazards. The implementation of the National Planning System, with supporting standardized tools, guidance, education, training, and other resources will effectively enhance the Nation's ability to manage and address our security and resilience against these challenges.