



NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT Tabletop Exercise Toolkit

**Facilitator Guide
Heat Wave, Response Phase**

Version 1.0





HEAT WAVE RESPONSE SCENARIO

Congratulations, you have been identified as the facilitator for the upcoming tabletop exercise. Whether this is your first time as a facilitator or you have experience, please use this document to help guide you through this process. Thank you for taking on this important role on behalf of the organization.

Before you continue, make sure you are familiar with the scope and objectives set by the organizers and planning team for the tabletop exercise. If those have not yet been identified, please refer to the organizer's guide for assistance. It can be found under Tools and Resources on the Private Sector Partner Portal (www.privatesector.nyc).

This scenario, based on a fictional heat wave impacting New York City that affects your primary facility and employees, is designed to test your initial response to an advanced notice incident. At the start of the incident, participants must deal with initial reactions, as well as incomplete information and uncertainty about safety conditions. As the scenario continues, the focus shifts to business continuity concerns.

This facilitator guide contains the text that will appear on the PowerPoint. Certain slides also include questions that you may use to encourage discussion. The questions are categorized based on the business continuity function to which they pertain as a way to help you steer discussion to areas relevant to your participants and exercise objectives. Not all of these questions will be relevant to your organization or to the particular participants. Additionally, in some cases, you may want to re-word the questions to prompt the participants to identify the problems that the questions address.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Introduction

This facilitator manual contains some background about tabletop exercises, suggestions for how to run a successful tabletop exercise, as well as the current exercise scenario with possible questions to encourage discussion, and notes detailing the purpose of certain slides.

Background

What is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise is a facilitated discussion of a plan in an informal, low stress environment. It is like a problem-solving or brainstorming session where participants share capabilities and solve problems as a group based on their organization's existing plans and the determined objectives of the exercise.

The success of a tabletop exercise is determined by feedback from participants and the impact the feedback has on the evaluation and revision of policies, plans, and procedures.

What a Tabletop Exercise is Not.

A tabletop exercise is neither the tool through which you make a plan nor the place for training and discussion about a plan. A prior step to holding a tabletop exercise is often a workshop to train and discuss a plan. This toolkit is meant to be used once your organization has a plan in place and is ready to evaluate it.

Why Run a Tabletop Exercise?

Tabletop exercises build organizational capacity, help organizations evaluate their business continuity plans and identify strengths and areas for improvement. These exercises provide training and awareness to staff who have an opportunity to rehearse their roles and responsibilities during an incident. Plus, they are low-cost and low-stakes.

How Long is a Tabletop Exercise?

A tabletop exercise usually lasts from one to four hours, but it can vary depending on the incident. Discussion times are open-ended, and participants are encouraged to take their time in arriving at in-depth decisions without time pressure. When the time is up, the activity is concluded.

There is never a perfect moment to run a tabletop exercise for everyone, but try to do so at a time that doesn't compete for everyone's attention.

Facilitating a Tabletop Exercise

The facilitator has a number of responsibilities, including:

- Introducing the narrative
- Encouraging problem solving
- Controlling the pace and flow of the exercise
- Stimulating discussion and drawing answers and solutions from the group (rather than supplying them)

Setting the Stage

The opening remarks and activities influence the whole exercise experience. Participants need to know what to expect, and to feel comfortable being participants. Consider including the following elements at the start of your exercise:

- Begin by sincerely welcoming participants and putting them at ease.
- Brief the participants about what will happen. This should include a clear explanation of the exercise's purpose and objectives, agenda, ground rules, and procedures.
- Start the exercise by reading the first two slides of background information.
- Try breaking the ice by beginning with a general question directed at one or two high-ranking individuals or to the group as a whole. Later, other questions can be addressed to other individuals.

Ways to Involve All Participants

It is important that everyone participates and that no one person dominates the discussion. Tips for involving all of the participants are summarized below:

- Give extra encouragement to those who are a little tentative.
- Recognize that junior staff might be hesitant to comment in front of senior management.
- Avoid the temptation to jump in with the right solutions when participants are struggling. This can hamper discussion. Instead, try to draw out answers from participants. They will be more likely to participate if they feel people are listening intently and sympathetically.
- Model and encourage the behaviors you want from participants.
- Make eye contact with participants.
- Acknowledge comments in a positive manner.

Controlling and Sustaining the Action

To maintain a high level of interest and to keep everyone involved, the facilitator needs to control and sustain the action. There are several ways to do this.

- Vary the pace. Give messages at different rates, perhaps even giving two at once to increase pace and interest.
- Maintain a balance between talking about a problem to death and moving along so fast that nothing gets settled. Don't hesitate to control the exercise tightly.
- Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Always remember that the tabletop is an opportunity to evaluate your plan in a no-fault environment, and gaps should be expected. People may be sensitive or inexperienced. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, stop the exercise. Reach into your experience as a discussion leader to help participants resolve conflicts and feel comfortable.
- Keep it low-key. Avoid a bad experience by keeping in mind the low-key nature of the tabletop.
- If you spend all of your time on one big problem, maintain interest among participants, and reach consensus, then the tabletop can be considered a success. Push the participants past superficial solutions. A few carefully chosen, open-ended questions can keep the discussion going to a logical conclusion.
- Remember that not everyone will be equally knowledgeable about the plan that is being evaluated.

Note: The point is not to debate or discuss the City's response; the key is to be aware of the response and see how they impact your organization's response.

Using the Possible Questions

The questions that accompany the following scenario slides cover a broad range of plan components that can be evaluated. It is recommended that only the questions relevant to the tabletop exercise's scope and purpose be discussed. Not every question needs to be asked, and each scenario can be used multiple times to test different components of your plan. For example, if the goal is to evaluate the organization's communications strategy, it may not be necessary to ask participants about operating from a backup facility. Use your best judgement when deciding what questions to ask. Facilitator notes are also included on some of the slides to help you better understand the context.

NOTE: Consider pairing this Tabletop Exercise with the Power Outage scenario available on the [Private Sector Partner Portal](#) under *Tools and Resources*.

Scenario Slides & Possible Questions



1 Extreme Heat Tabletop Exercise

Disclaimer: These customizable exercise templates were created for the use of private sector organizations by New York City Emergency Management (NYCEM). NYCEM is not responsible for any changes made to exercise materials by participating organizations. The scenarios presented are fictional and NYCEM cannot guarantee that the City agency actions depicted here will be the City's response for similar incidents. For more information about the resources NYC

Emergency Management have available, please visit us at [NYC.gov/emergencymanagement](https://www.nyc.gov/emergencymanagement) or email us at publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov.



2 Ground Rules

Don't fight the scenario! It is a tool to guide the discussion.

This exercise will be held in an open, low-stress, no-fault environment. Varying viewpoints, even disagreements, are expected.

Respond to the scenario using your knowledge of your organization's current plans and capabilities. Decisions are not precedent-setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue.

This exercise is an opportunity to discuss and present multiple options

and possible solutions. Issue identification is not as valuable as suggestions and recommended actions that could improve response efforts. Problem-solving efforts should be the focus. The Parking Lot: A place to note ideas that can be discussed at a later time.

Facilitator Notes:

- Make sure to explain in basic terms what a tabletop exercise is and how it works.
- Gently explain why the parking lot exists and the importance of keeping the conversation on track.



3 Background, Wednesday Morning, 11:30 AM

The summer weather has been especially brutal lately, with temperatures consistently in the high 80s paired with high levels of humidity. Today is expected to be another scorcher. Local weather forecasters are predicting a sweltering heat wave affecting the Northeast region over the next few days.

Possible Questions for ALL

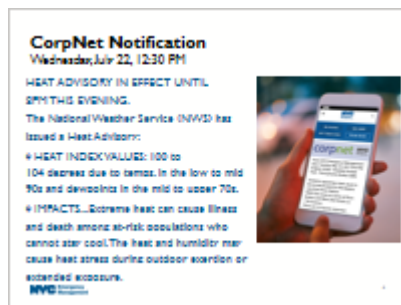
- Realistically, how much weight should be given to this weather report? Do you believe it? Is somebody at your organization responsible for watching the weather and maintaining situational awareness?
- Where does the organization get its information?
- Do you have a plan in place for how to deal with emergency events for which you have advance warning?
- What actions, if any, will you take at this point in preparation for the severe heat?
- Does your organization take any general preparedness measures during the summer even when a heat wave is not threatening New York?
- Who at your organization is responsible for triggering a response to severe heat? If that person is on vacation or unavailable, who else can start the response?

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What is the organization concerned about at this point?
- What impact will this have on the organization and employees?
- Is there a designated process for coordinating the organization’s preparation?
- Does the organization have a Business Continuity or Continuity of Operations Plan?
- Can you physically prepare your facility for severe heat with little warning? Do you know which equipment needs to be protected and how it can be protected?

Facilitator Notes:

- Managers must simultaneously consider their own concerns as well as how to direct and lead their employees during emergencies.
- Participants should consider where they are getting information from. Some expected sources include notification systems, news outlets, social media, and upper management. Are these sources, vetted and how does information get passed along in your organization?



4 CorpNet Notification, Wednesday Afternoon, 12:30 PM

HEAT ADVISORY IN EFFECT UNTIL 8PM THIS EVENING.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a Heat Advisory:

- * HEAT INDEX VALUES: 100 to 104 degrees due to temps. in the low to mid 90s and dewpoints in the mid to upper 70s.
- * IMPACTS...Extreme heat can cause illness and death among at-risk populations who cannot stay cool. The heat and humidity may cause heat stress during outdoor exertion or extended exposure.

Facilitator Notes:

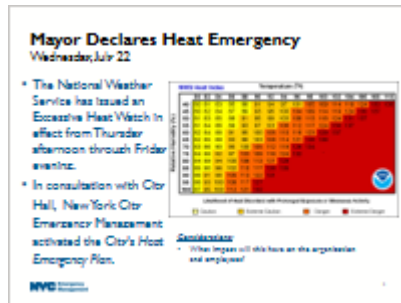
- The CorpNet program is managed by NYC Emergency Management and provides business partners with timely, accurate information about emergencies to enhance awareness and aid decision making, should their businesses be affected. Businesses can enroll at PrivateSector.NYC.

Possible Questions for SECURITY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Are any employees signed up for CorpNet?
- Which employees are considered essential to maintain critical functions?
- What are your organization’s dependencies? What or who do you rely on to complete your critical operations? What are they doing to prepare for the approaching severe heat?

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT and FACILITIES

- Will any of your operations be affected by extreme heat or power failures?
- Would you be able to contact your vendors from outside of your facility?
- What operations might you need to cancel or postpone?



5 Mayor Declares Heat Emergency, Wednesday July 22

The National Weather Service has issued an Excessive Heat Watch in effect from Thursday afternoon through Friday evening. In consultation with City Hall, New York City Emergency Management activated the City's *Heat Emergency Plan*.

Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- How does the NWS forecast change your posture regarding the severe heat?
- Who is on your crisis management or response team? Do you have such a team? Would these people be able to come to the office during the severe heat? If not, could they fulfill their obligations from a remote location?
- If members of your response team are entirely unable to work, who will fill in for them?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Should you send a message to all your employees? What should this message say?
- Does the organization anticipate any issues with staffing? What types of staffing-related issues could the organization experience?

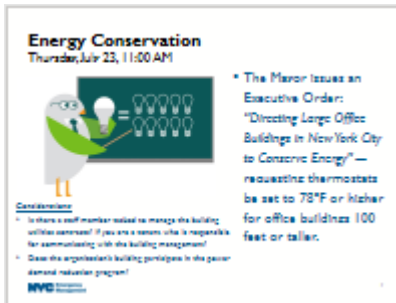


6 ARE YOU READY?

Stay in a cool place as much as possible. Use air conditioning at home or go to a place that has air conditioning. Check on vulnerable friends, family members and neighbors. NYC Cooling Relief areas will be available across parks, playgrounds & neighborhoods during periods of extreme heat: nyc.gov/parks/coolitnyc. Drink fluids: particularly water --- even if you do not feel thirsty!

Facilitator Notes:

- *Notify NYC* is the City of New York's official source for information about emergency events and important City services. Alerts from Notify NYC comes directly from NYC Emergency Management's 24/7 Watch Command, which monitors emergency activity in NYC and the metropolitan area. Participants can sign up at NYC.gov/notifynyc, download the app or follow @NotifyNYC.



7 Energy Conservation, Thursday Morning, 11:00 AM

The Mayor issues an Executive Order: "*Directing Large Office Buildings in New York City to Conserve Energy*" --- requesting thermostats be set to 78°F or higher for office buildings 100 feet or taller.

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Is there a staff member tasked to manage the building utilities contracts? If you are a tenant, who is responsible for communicating with the building management?
- Does the organization's building participate in the power demand reduction program?
- What are considerations for staffing under the new Executive Order? Are these comfortable working conditions for employees?



8 Heat Is Rising, Thursday Afternoon, 1:00 PM

Afternoon temperatures have now reached 95° and the NWS forecasts that the heat index tomorrow will reach 105°, with a prediction of 106° the following day. A supply vendor cancels a daily shipment of products after experiencing delays in delivery transport.

Possible Questions for SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- What disruptions could the organization anticipate based on this prediction?
- How will the organization’s vendors be impacted, if at all?
- Does a contingency plan exist for vendor cancellations?
- Do you know if your suppliers and vendors (including telephone service, internet provider, teleconferencing provider, and other technological support providers) are prepared for emergency situations? Will they be there when you need them? Do you have alternates if one of your providers fails?
- Do you have a vendor/supplier contact list that you can access remotely if you need to use it?
- Are you able to contact these providers in the event of an emergency? At any time of day?

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Do you and your employees have access to business email from off-site?
- Will you have any other responsibilities to your business during the severe heat in the coming days?



9 BEAT THE HEAT

REMEMBER: Anyone overcome by heat should be moved to a cool and shaded location. **Heat stroke is an emergency! In cases of heat stroke call 911.** Know the signs of heat-related illness. Check your local weather so you can be prepared. Find a place to get cool.

Facilitator Notes:

- Participants should consider the preparedness level of their own household. Do they have an emergency plan for family members and pets? Do they have a stay-at-home kit?



10 Soaring Demands, Thursday Afternoon, 6:00 PM

Energy demands remain high, causing widespread power issues affecting critical infrastructure and key resources throughout the Northeast. The facilities manager calls to report that the AC and ventilation system has suddenly lost power.

Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

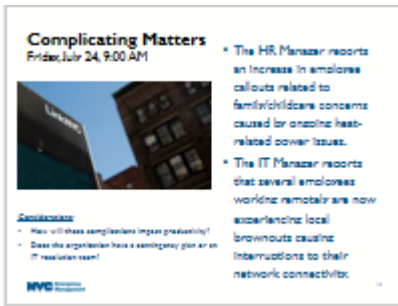
- How does the organization stay informed with the most up-to-date alerts?
- What impact will this have on your employees? Does the organization anticipate any implications on public transit and/or commuting complications?
- Can your organization withstand a utility shutdown? For how long?
- Does your organization have back-up generators? Fuel?
- Is there a plan for ensuring critical services stay up and running during the heat wave? Are your employees cross-trained to maintain critical operations?
- Do you have lines of succession and back-ups designated for important positions?
- What operations can be postponed or canceled for a time?
- What critical operations do you need to get back up and running if the organization experiences a power outage due to impacts on the grid from extreme heat?
- Do you have an alternate work site? How quickly can you make it functional for your organization's needs?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Does your organization have the capability to communicate with staff at this point?
- Can you get in touch with all employees? When you do get in touch with them, what will you tell them?
- Who is responsible for sending out this type of message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all your employees from outside of your facility?
- What will you tell your employees about working for the rest of the day? For tomorrow?
- Who around the table would honestly be able to work on securing the business while ensuring their own households are safe?

Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT and LEGAL

- Should your employees come to work this week?
 - If not, should they use vacation time? Sick time?
 - Will they be compensated if your office is closed?
 - If you do not specifically close your office and your employees come to work voluntarily, are you liable if they get injured?



11 Complicating Matters, Friday Morning, 9:00 AM

The HR Manager reports an increase in employee callouts related to family/childcare concerns caused by ongoing heat-related power issues. The IT Manager reports that several employees working remotely are now experiencing local brownouts causing interruptions to their network connectivity.

Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- How will these complications impact productivity?
- Does the organization have a contingency plan or an IT resolution team?
- Do you have policies in place permitting employees to work from home? If so, will your employees be able to work from home? Have you tested the technology?
- Have employees ever practiced working from home in non-emergency situations to ensure that everything functions properly? Can your network withstand the increased traffic from multiple employees working from home?



12 THANK YOU

For more information about the resources that NYC Emergency Management has available for organizations, please visit us at NYC.gov/emergencymanagement or email us at publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov.