

REMS Express

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Six-Step Planning Process for Institutions of Higher Education

Providing for the safety and security of a campus and community is complex. The setting and types of people on campus varies on an hourly and daily basis, students live in both on- and off-campus housing, and some institutions of higher education (IHE) have classrooms throughout different regions. For a higher education emergency operations plan (EOP) to be effective, it must integrate its strategy for the IHE's main campus, satellites, and individual teaching and learning settings with that for the local community and city.

For this reason, it is essential that no one person work alone when writing an EOP for their IHE. Not only is the sole-developer approach stressful and tiresome, it also is ineffective because it leaves out an opportunity to receive critical input from campus, city, and community partners. This includes campus departments, facilities managers, first responders, public health officials, mental health personnel, and additional community partners who should be involved throughout the entire planning process. The higher education environment is dynamic, unique, and ever-changing. For that reason, the planning process should be flexible, adaptable, and inclusive of appropriate stakeholders. The result will be a high-quality EOP.

The *Federal Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE Guide)* outlines a six-step planning process that conveys a practical and efficient way to develop an EOP. This *REMS Express* edition provides a practitioner's perspective on the *IHE Guide's* recommended six-step planning process. IHEs may find this process useful when they are developing a new EOP, performing a comprehensive review of existing plans, or evaluating specific sections of their IHE's EOP on a periodic basis.

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The REMS TA Center supports schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency operations plans. For additional information about school and higher education emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov>.



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Since campuses are different in size and complexity, the collaborative planning team may vary according to available personnel and resources.

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STEP 1: FORM A COLLABORATIVE PLANNING TEAM

Think for a moment about a large event on your campus that requires several months of coordinated and detailed planning among many campus departments and first responders. For many IHEs, commencement is such an event. Generally, planning for it would involve the following:

- identification of a core planning team to plan the event;
- formation of a common framework;
- assignment of roles and responsibilities; and
- development of a regular schedule of meetings to adequately plan the event.

The development of an EOP involves a very similar process and should include input from many of the same groups and individuals. EOP planning teams should be small enough to promote good working relationships, but large enough to fully represent the campus and community. Many campuses even include a student government representative and/or a parent representative from an IHE parents' association in their planning process.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Once appropriate members have been considered, the *IHE Guide* recommends that EOP planning team members work together to understand the situation on campus. This can be accomplished by

- identifying specific threats and hazards;
- assessing risks; and
- prioritizing the threats and hazards that are identified in your collaborative emergency planning process.

Many resources are available to support the planning team in this step. A good initial action for the team is to review institutional data, which should include campus and community crime statistics, risk management information

on historical events, and past insurance exposures that have impacted the campus. Equally important, local (county and city) and state emergency management and other public safety agencies can provide a broader perspective on historical threats and hazards that have impacted the county or region. A city or county hazard mitigation plan will provide current and historical threat and hazard data for the local area, including your campus. This information can be extremely useful to planning teams during the hazard identification process. Also available are many assessment tools, including site assessments, culture and climate assessments, threat assessments, and capacity assessments.

STEP 3: DETERMINE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Once the planning team has listed the threats and hazards that will be included in the EOP, goals and objectives should be developed for each threat and hazard. This method may be unique in comparison to what some members of the planning team are accustomed to using. However, it is a proven community emergency planning approach that is crucial to success.

As used in the planning context, *goals* are broad statements that define what personnel are to achieve. The *IHE Guide* recommends that planning teams develop at least three goals for each threat or hazard to clarify what should happen *before*, *during*, and *after* each of them.

Objectives are specific, measureable actions that help to achieve the goals. In some cases, multiple objectives may support a single goal.

Once objectives are defined for all the prioritized threats and hazards, some activities or functions may be observed that apply to more than one threat or hazard. Several of the more common cross-cutting emergency functions that are used in the higher education setting include evacuation, medical care, shelter-in-place, and accounting for all persons, a function that involves accounting for the presence and well-being of all students, faculty, and staff. For more information on these emergency functions, which are referred to as "functional annexes" in the *IHE Guide*, visit the REMS TA Center website at <http://rems.ed.gov/IHEFuncAnnex.aspx>.

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Function: Evacuation

(Due to a fire, hazardous materials spill in the school, active shooter situation, roof failure, etc.)

GOAL	BEFORE Establish Evacuation Routes & Assembly Areas	GOAL	DURING Evacuate the School Immediately	GOAL	AFTER Reestablish Learning Environment
	OBJECTIVES Identify primary and secondary evacuation routes Identify primary and secondary assembly areas Post evacuation maps in all rooms Train all students and staff		OBJECTIVES Notify all persons to evacuate All persons evacuate immediately Gather at assembly area Account for all persons		OBJECTIVES Return to classrooms Debrief, evaluate, and adjust protocols

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STEP 4: PLAN DEVELOPMENT FOR IDENTIFYING COURSES OF ACTION

IHEs can use scenario-based planning to envision all the ways a potential emergency could unfold and then plan accordingly by developing *courses of action*. During the actual plan development phase, courses of action are established to help accomplish the goals and objectives that the planning team identified in Step 3 of the planning process. Courses of action commonly address the questions of what, who, when, where, why, and how for each threat, hazard, and function identified by the planning team. The courses of action should read as a specific set of steps or instructions that groups and individuals will follow to accomplish the defined goals and objective(s). Generally, such steps would be

- depict the scenario;
- determine the amount of time available to respond;
- identify decision points; and
- develop courses of action.

Once the planning team has identified all the different ways an emergency could unfold, it should find a way to visually depict the flow. Although this may seem like a difficult task at the onset, a variety of simple formats are effective. For example, the team can chart the process electronically using a flow chart, and during onsite meetings using a whiteboard, or using a “sticky note” method to provide a broader view of the courses of action available, which could then be matched to the objectives.

STEP 5: PREPARE, REVIEW, AND APPROVE THE PLAN

This critical step in the planning process involves formatting the plan, writing the plan, approving the plan, and sharing the plan. Obviously, the outcome should be a plan that others will want to adopt, train on, and utilize during an emergency situation. For this reason, the EOP must be formatted in a way that makes it easy to read, understand, and integrate. The *IHE Guide* recommends that IHEs organize their EOP by three major sections:

- [A Basic Plan section](#), which provides an overview and addresses the overarching activities the IHE should undertake—regardless of the function, threat, or hazard;
- [A Functional Annexes section](#), which outlines the goals, objectives, and courses of action for multiple threats and hazards; and
- [A Threat- and Hazard-Specific Annexes section](#), which defines goals, objectives, and courses of action for specific threats and hazards.

This format is similar to existing IHE plan formats; however, some of the terminology, goals, objectives, and specific function-based annexes may vary.

On each IHE campus, the process used to obtain appropriate administrative approvals once the plan is complete will likely vary. However, the process used to share the plan should be similar. A completed EOP should be distributed to campus or building administrators, community partners, mental and

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public health officials, and other stakeholders who may have a role or responsibility in the plan. Be sure to document the names of appropriate individuals or agencies that receive a copy of the EOP, and make sure the plan, or certain confidential portions of the plan, is not distributed to unauthorized individuals.

The plan must be accessible to everyone involved in the planning process, which requires providing it in alternate formats and alternative languages in compliance with federal laws, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and Section 508 of the *Rehabilitation Act*. Sunshine laws (those that require governmental entities to hold meetings that are open to the public) in some states also may require open accessibility. In other works, everyone and anyone should be able to access information within the EOP for free.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN THE PLAN

For the final step in the six-step planning process, the *IHE Guide* recommends that teams focus on training stakeholders, exercising the plan, reviewing the plan, revising the plan, and maintaining the plan. Just as you would not attempt to cook an exotic meal for the first time during a large family gathering without having extensively reviewed the recipe and purchased the required ingredients, you should never implement a new EOP without first becoming very familiar with its contents. Everyone who has a role or responsibility in the plan should be familiar with what actions they need to take before, during, and after an emergency. Several training components are available for this purpose, including the following:

- holding a yearly meeting to educate all parties on the plan;
- visiting evacuation sites (fire assembly areas, staging areas, etc.) with appropriate stakeholders; and
- posting key information (using posters, podium cards, flip charts, etc.) throughout campus buildings on how to respond to various emergencies.

The old adage of “practice makes perfect” holds true, especially in emergency planning. Exercising the plan is a very important step as it ensures that individuals who have a role or responsibility receive an opportunity to practice their part. IHEs should also consider and involve students who live in

off-campus housing in the planning process. An ideal way the planning team can approach the exercise process strategically is to develop an exercise plan that describes

- the scenarios that will be tested;
- the types of exercises that will be utilized in the process (drill, tabletop, functional, and/or a full-scale); and
- the exercise timeline (multi-year period).

Using this method will allow for a building-block approach that will stimulate continued improvement and ensure more consistency in the overall exercise process. It is always important to remember that planning is a process and not a product. After the plan is tested via an exercise, information gleaned from it should be added to the plan to promote a continuous cycle of improvement.

In addition, the planning team should initiate a strategy to update and revise the plan on a yearly basis. Other situations, such as a real emergency where lessons are learned on campus or from other campuses, may provide for unplanned updates and/or improvements to the EOP. Whatever conditions prompt the plan updates, the most current EOP versions that result should be distributed to campus departments, first responders, and appropriate community partners in an expeditious manner.

Where to Find Additional Information on the Six-Step Planning Process

The TA Center website features an [at-a-glance version of the IHE Guide](#), along with more details to consider for each step of the planning process. Click on each step below to access additional information.

[Step 1: Form a Collaborative Planning Team](#)

[Step 2: Understand the Situation](#)

[Step 3: Determine Goals and Objectives](#)

[Step 4: Plan Development \(Identifying Courses of Action\)](#)

[Step 5: Prepare, Review, and Approve the Plan](#)

[Step 6: Implement and Maintain the Plan](#)

Where to Find Additional Resources

Additional information on emergency planning guidance for IHEs, a downloadable copy of the *IHE Guide*, fact sheets, EOP development tools, and other resources can be found on the TA Center website at <http://rems.ed.gov>.



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