

This publication is part of the *xTREME toolkit* (eXtreme events Toolkit for Rural Emergency Management Enhancement) which is available online www.resilientresearch.ca as part of a project titled “Ontario Rural Municipal Emergency Management and Critical Infrastructure: Enhancing Planning and Preparedness Capacities for Climate Change Resilience”

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Tabletop Exercise (TTX) Overview

The tabletop exercise (TTX) developed through this project is a pre-assembled simulation package directed towards community emergency management coordinators and other municipal level practitioners involved in emergency management planning (e.g. fire chiefs). A table top exercise (TTX) is a discussion-based exercise and evaluation used to familiarize players with, or develop new plans, policies, agreements, and procedures. A TTX focuses on strategic, policy-oriented issues. This TTX is based on a climate change-informed scenario of a flash flood that follows a prolonged period of drought where damage is caused to critical infrastructure. Given that the most onerous part of undertaking a TTX is putting together the simulation package, this suite of documents provides practitioners a customizable set of tools to run a TTX emergency exercise. The TTX is designed to be used by a wide range of rural communities (very small to large) and incorporates some of the rural challenges we have identified during the empirical research phases. The scenario is applicable or customizable to a wide range of locations across the province of Ontario.

There are numerous benefits to a municipality for conducting a table top exercise. These benefits are:

- Reveal planning weaknesses and gaps
- Improve coordination, collaboration, and communications
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Sets the conditions for critical thought and information sharing
- Meet Ontario Regulation 380/04 – *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*
- Understand the community complexity
- Shared understanding of community capabilities and needs
- Fostering relationships with community leaders that facilitate more effective prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities
- Build and maintain partnerships
- Greater empowerment and integration of resources from across the community
- Leverage and strengthen social infrastructure, networks and assets
- Increase individual and collective preparedness
- Greater resiliency at the municipal, community and provincial level

The *Instructional Guide for Exercise Directors/Facilitators* has been developed for community exercise directors and their planning team to assist them in the preparation, conduct, and evaluation of table top exercises. The TTX instructional guide (and associated appendices) is based upon the Province of Ontario's Guidelines for the Development of an Exercise Program, and U.S. Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), and is organized into two parts:

- Part One: Design, Develop and Conduct the TTX
- Part Two: Evaluation and Corrective Action Planning

Part One outlines how to design, develop, and conduct a TTX and provides information on what a tabletop exercise is, the benefits of a TTX, how to prepare an exercise plan, how to design the TTX for your community, and provides information on exercise logistics, conducting the TTX and exercise facilitation. The Exercise Plan contains all of the necessary information that participants need to know before and during a TTX. There are a number of criteria to consider when designing a community-wide table top exercise. The instructional guide contains eight (8) essential elements to be addressed in the design phase:

1. Assess needs
2. Define the scope
3. Write a statement of purpose
4. Define objectives
5. Compose a narrative
6. Write major detailed events
7. List expected actions
8. Prepare messages

The guide provides information on announcing the TTX to the participants, exercise logistics, conducting the TTX, and exercise facilitation.

Part Two provides information about TTX evaluation and corrective action planning. This step enables a community to understand what its capabilities and capacities are, as well as determine what corrective action must be undertaken to improve the emergency readiness of the community. The section is organized into eight exercise evaluation steps:

1. Plan and organize the evaluation
2. Observe the exercise and collect data
3. Analyze the data
4. Develop the After-Action Report
5. Conduct an After-Action Meeting
6. Identify corrective actions to be implemented
7. Finalize the After-Action Report/Corrective Action Plan
8. Track implementation

The *Instructional Guide for Exercise Directors/Facilitators* includes five appendices.

Appendix 1: Sample Exercise Plan

Many exercise planning teams prepare an Exercise Plan or a Situation Manual for all exercise participants, and often provide it to them in advance of the exercise. The Exercise Plan in this

package contains all of the necessary information that participants need to know before and during a TTX.

Appendix 2: Sample Exercise Conduct Power Point Slides

When conducting the TTX, the facilitator/exercise director may wish to prepare a power point presentation to assist with the delivery of the exercise. This package contains a pre-assembled power point presentation (in both .PPT and .PDF formats) that can be easily customized by the facilitator. The power point presentation is meant to help guide the exercise players through the exercise (from beginning to end). Included in this instructional guide is a suggested format on how to structure the power point presentation for best results.

Appendix 3: Sample Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG)

The Exercise Evaluation Guide (EEG) is a supporting document that assists facilitators in developing evaluation tools. The EEG is a fillable form that allows facilitators to insert exercise objectives, organize capability targets based on plans and assessments, assign associated critical tasks, and provide participants a space to make observational notes and rate final core capabilities based on a ratings definitions (e.g. performed without challenges; performed with some challenges; performed with major challenges; unable to be performed) provided at the end of the document.

Appendix 4: Sample Participant Survey

The TTX package contains a sample participant survey designed to be completed at the end of the hot wash (immediate "after-action" discussions and evaluations of the TTX performance). The survey is organized into three parts. Part one collects general information about the participant. Part two allows the participant to rate (on a scale of 1 to 5) their overall assessment of the exercise relative to the statements provided. Part three allows participants to indicate (in their own words) what strengths they observed during the exercise, and what areas of improvement are needed, along with any recommendations on how the exercise or future exercises could be improved or enhanced.

Appendix 5: Sample After-Action Report (AAR) & Corrective Action Plan (CAP)

The After-Action Report (AAR) & Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is a tool used to provide feedback to participating organizations on their performance during an exercise. The AAR/CAP:

- Provides a snapshot of the exercise
- Summarizes what happened during the exercise
- Analyzes core capabilities
- Analyzes the performance of essential tasks
- Analyzes demonstrated capacity to accomplish overall mission outcomes
- Highlights strengths
- Identifies areas needing improvement and provides recommendations based on analysis

This appendix also contains information on conducting after-action meetings to discuss the corrective action plan resulting from the exercise. The document is organized with a space to provide an exercise overview, objectives, and a chart to layout the corrective action plan. The document also contains an appendix B that allows facilitators to track participating organizations (municipality, province, NGO/CBO, private sector).

To access and download the xTREME events TTX documents (free of charge) please see our website www.resilientresearch.ca and click on 'research publications'.

Please contact the project manager Bryce Gunson at bgunson@wlu.ca or 519-756-8228 Ext. 5405 or the principal investigator Dr. Brenda Murphy bmurphy@wlu.ca with any questions. Our website www.resilientresearch.ca also contains further information on this project, and our other research projects.