

Guideline 18

Develop and implement a communications plan among fusion center personnel; all law enforcement, public safety, and private sector agencies and entities involved; and the general public.

Communications Plan

Justification

Communication is essential to fusion center operations. Fusion center leadership must be able to communicate with center personnel and representatives, should the need arise. With the inclusion of public safety and private sector partners, communication needs become complex. Public safety and private sector entities may not always be present in the fusion center daily activities but are key partners in its operation. With a variety of communication options, centers should develop levels of communication, backup communication procedures, and emergency contact protocols. Since September 11, there has been a focus on interoperability within the law enforcement community and among first responders (e.g., fire and EMS). It is important to have interoperability between fusion center representatives. If communications systems are not interoperable, the effort will be futile. The general public is also an integral part of the communications plan. They may report information and events to the fusion center, and in the event of a terrorist attack or crime incident, the public must be kept informed of the situation.

Various types of communication include:

- E-mail
- Electronic notification to pagers and cell phones
- Hard line telephone
- Secured line telephone
- Satellite telephone
- Fax machine
- Video teleconferencing
- Handheld radio
- Password-protected Web page for posting information
- Face-to-face
- Alert notification systems
- Wi-Fi
- Mesh networks

Personnel and partners within the fusion center should be aware of the different types of information that may be communicated within the fusion center, including public, sensitive, proprietary, and secret. These different classification types should determine how fusion centers share information. Fusion center personnel should have a clear understanding of what the classifications are and how they apply to information sharing.

When fusion centers develop a communications plan, leadership should anticipate that in the event of a terrorist attack or large-scale emergency, phone lines will quickly be tied up or disabled and phone service lost; therefore, alternate communication means should be included in the communications plan. For example, if landline and all phone voice circuits are jammed, the use of text messaging may be a viable option. Similarly, if power is available and voice circuits are jammed, Internet messaging can be utilized. The communications plan should also include personnel recall procedures and, for those entities that do not supply a full-time member to the fusion centers, liaison call-out procedures.

Fusion centers should identify a public information officer (PIO) to aid in the coordination of public and media inquiries into the fusion center. In the event of a disaster (man-made or natural), a PIO will aid in ensuring that fusion center staff are not hindered from conducting their duties and redirected to answering media queries. A PIO may also perform in a proactive awareness capacity, informing the media and the public of ongoing operations and success stories within the fusion center.

Issues for Consideration

When identifying communications needs, consider:

- Determining how fusion center components will communicate during a disaster.
- Identifying an alternative power source for communications when traditional utilities are unavailable.
- Creating a tier system for communications based on threat level.
- Ensuring the existing communication capabilities between components and entities are interoperable.

- Ensuring that all entities have appropriate communication tools (e.g., video-teleconferencing equipment, pagers, or cell phones with text-messaging capabilities).
- Incorporating current communications plans that are utilized by law enforcement and emergency services (including hospitals, EMS, and fire).
- Obtaining a cache of radios for fusion center personnel to use in emergency situations.
- If the communications plan includes radio communication, meeting with law enforcement to identify a fusion center radio channel (e.g., special events channel or special operations channel).
- Setting aside a phone line only accessible to fusion center personnel and partnering entities for emergency communications.
- Including a section that addresses testing the plan to ensure operability and maintenance of current contact information for fusion center participants.
- Creating redundancy in the communications plan.
- In advance of an emergency, consulting with the local telephone provider about available backup and alternative communications options for the fusion center, including mobile cellular sites.
- Equipping the center with a satellite phone to ensure communication beyond the local radio net when, in an emergency, standard connectivity is lost.

Available Resources on Fusion Center CD

- *State and Local Guide (SLG) 101: Guide for All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning*, Chapter 4, <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/plan/4-ch.pdf>