



# PREPARE

YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR  
A WINTER STORM

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# PLAYBOOK

AMERICA'S  
*PrepareAthon!*  
BE SMART. TAKE PART. PREPARE.

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# America's PrepareAthon! An Introduction

America's PrepareAthon! is a grassroots campaign for action to increase community preparedness and resilience for disasters. The campaign offers free resources for households and organizations to discuss and practice plans and safety measures to improve resilience for specific disasters.

Planning and preparing can make a big difference in being safe and keeping your doors open after a disaster. The ability to maintain or quickly reestablish business operations or organization processes requires a focus on preparedness, advance planning, and relationships with external partners and community leaders.

This *Prepare Your Organization for a Winter Storm Playbook* provides you, as a community leader or employer, with tools and resources to support your preparedness efforts and to help you conduct an America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action.

Everyone has a role to play to prepare for a disaster. All employers and organizations—from local businesses and municipalities to schools, universities, and faith- and community-based organizations—are essential components of the community and can help people and groups to be more prepared.

## GOALS

America's PrepareAthon! has four primary goals. The campaign aims to increase the number of people who:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ | 1. Understand which disasters can happen in their community; |
| ✓ | 2. Know what to do to be safe and mitigate damage;           |
| ✓ | 3. Take action to increase their preparedness; and           |
| ✓ | 4. Participate in community resilience planning.             |



# Introduction: Participate in America's PrepareAthon!

## WHY PARTICIPATE

America's PrepareAthon! enables individuals and organizations to prepare for specific hazards through informative presentations, group discussions and activities, and tabletop exercises. Organizations have tremendous influence on their members and constituents when it comes to preparing for a disaster. For example, when employers encourage employees to be prepared for disasters, employees are 75 percent<sup>1</sup> more likely to take action. And with more than 63 percent<sup>2</sup> of the U.S. population aged 16 or older in the labor force, the workplace is one of the most effective environments for educating and encouraging employees to take steps to be ready for disasters.

Participating in America's PrepareAthon! will benefit your workplace or community organization by helping you to:

- Increase knowledge of safety policies and procedures;
- Build morale and trust by demonstrating a commitment to safety and well-being;
- Enhance organizational coordination and communication on preparedness and continuity of operations;
- Reduce a disaster's effects, including injury and loss of life, property or inventory damage, and financial loss from business disruption; and
- Strengthen relationships with local emergency responders and community leaders to reach a common understanding of community risks, needs, and capabilities.

1. Preparedness in America, August 2014. [www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/94717](http://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/94717).

2. U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, 2013, [www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat03.pdf).

## REGISTER YOUR EVENT AND BE COUNTED

Register your participation to prepare for a winter storm on [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) and join other organizations across the country in an effort to improve our nation's preparedness and resiliency. Registration is quick and easy. Simply select your state, winter storm, your type of participation, and the estimated number of people participating. You can also choose to have your organization's name listed on the America's PrepareAthon! website in recognition of your commitment.



## HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Participating in America's PrepareAthon! is easy and inexpensive. This *Prepare Your Organization for a Winter Storm Playbook* provides some simple steps you can take to increase the preparedness of your organization by holding an America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action. Your organization can participate in several ways:

- Hold discussions and drills to explain workplace plans and policies and to motivate your employees, students, congregants, and volunteers to be better prepared at home.
- Conduct a table-top exercise with leaders and managers to take steps as an organization to increase your readiness.

# Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion



1

One of the most effective ways to share information and motivate people to take steps for personal preparedness is to talk to your people. Add a preparedness discussion to the agenda of your next staff or organizational meeting or arrange a brown bag lunch session. Many individuals within an organization can lead a preparedness discussion, including a manager, employee, teacher, or volunteer. You can cover the basics in 15 minutes; 30 minutes provides time for more discussion. **Get the conversation started!**

## PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION GOALS

As you prepare for your talk, keep the following goals in mind to ensure you facilitate a productive and informative discussion.

- Share the potential impact of winter storms—the majority of injuries and death are from vehicle accidents, carbon monoxide poisoning, and exposure—being outside too long without adequate protection.
- Know the National Weather Service (NWS) terms that are used to describe changing weather conditions. These terms—advisories, watches, and warnings—can be used to determine the timeline and severity of an approaching storm.
- Emphasize the importance of having supplies ready to stay at home for three days without power, water, or heat.
- Outline your organization’s emergency communications plans and policies.
- Sign up for community notifications.

# 1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

## BEFORE YOUR PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION

1. Ensure management and organizational leadership are on board by sharing the benefits of participating and the minimal time needed.
2. Download and review the *How to Prepare for a Winter Storm* guide and other resources and be sure discussion leaders are familiar with the content.
3. Learn how to sign up for local text alerts and warnings available in your community.
4. Register your event at [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to be counted. You can also download Certificates of Participation for discussion participants.
5. Promote your America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action preparedness discussion. Use your organization's communications platforms, including websites, listservs, newsletters, and social media to invite and remind participants of the discussion and to demonstrate your commitment to safety.

## RESOURCES



In addition to this Playbook, you will need to download the following America's PrepareAthon! resources, all available at [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare):

- *How to Prepare for a Winter Storm*
- *Be Smart: Know Your Alerts and Warnings*

- *Be Smart: Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables*
- *Ready's Family Communication Plan for Parents and Kids*

There are also two short videos to help you set the stage for your discussions:

- *It Started Like Any Other Day*, a four-minute video that focuses on three survivors from three recent disasters
- *When the Sky Turns Gray*, an animated how-to video on winter storm preparedness

## FOLLOW-UP

Ask follow-up questions in future meetings to ensure everyone has learned the important steps to protect themselves before a winter storm and knows the organization's communications plan for winter storms.



## TEST YOUR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLANS

Consider testing your employee notification plan with employees and volunteers to ensure you will be able to communicate with them effectively in case of an emergency—both during and outside of business hours. This could be as simple as sending an email, a text alert, or testing a public address system to ensure leadership can provide critical emergency guidance when needed. Be sure to identify these communications by starting with “THIS IS A TEST” to avoid any confusion.

# 1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

## SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

Talking about disasters and helping others prepare makes everyone safer. In your discussion, note how winter storms with ice, heavy snowfall, and/or extreme cold can immobilize your entire region. Severe winter storms can knock out heat, power, and communications services, sometimes for days at a time leaving people stuck without utilities or other services. Your goal for protection is to assemble emergency supplies so you can stay where you are for up to three days and make plans for how you can minimize driving. The following discussion guide is intended to help you share important information and facts about winter storms during your discussion.

| AGENDA  | DISCUSSION GUIDE  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>SHOW:</b> <i>It Started Like Any Other Day</i> (survivor stories video).</p> <p><b>SHOW:</b> <i>When the Sky Turns Gray</i> (animated video).</p> | <p><i>It Started Like Any Other Day</i> is a four-minute video that communicates the importance of disaster preparedness. It shows survivors from three American communities talking about three different types of disasters: hurricane, tornado, and wildfire.</p> <p><i>When the Sky Turns Gray</i> is a 90-second animated video for winter storms. The video summarizes what you should do before, during, and after a winter storm strikes.</p> <p>Hold a short group discussion, asking participants to share any experiences they have had with winter storms, including surprises and lessons learned.</p> |
| <p><b>DISTRIBUTE:</b> <i>How to Prepare for a Winter Storm</i> guide.</p>   | <p>Explain that the session will go over the key sections of the guide. Discuss the potential impacts of winter storms, the causes of death and injury, and any relevant experiences in your community.</p>   |

It is important to be aware of changing weather conditions to give yourself time to take action. You can monitor National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) Weather Radio or other local news channels for critical information from the National Weather Service (NWS).

### DISCUSS: ALERTS & WARNINGS

Show the group how to download the FEMA app and to sign up for local alerts.

**HANDOUT:** *Be Smart, Know Your Alerts and Warnings.*

It is important to know the terms used to describe changing winter weather conditions and what actions to take. These terms can be used to determine the timeline and severity of an approaching storm. For more information on these terms and the impact associated with them, consult the *How to Prepare for a Winter Storm* guide.

**ADVISORY:** The NWS issues a Winter Weather Advisory when it expects conditions to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous.

**WATCH:** The NWS issues a Winter Storm Watch when severe winter conditions, such as heavy snow and/or ice, may affect your area but the location and timing are still uncertain. A Winter Storm Watch is issued 12 to 36 hours in advance of a potential severe storm.

**WARNING:** The NWS issues a Winter Storm Warning when 4 or more inches of snow or sleet are expected in the next 12 hours, or 6 or more inches in 24 hours, or ¼ inch or more of ice accumulation is expected.

# 1 | Prepare Your People: Hold a Preparedness Discussion

| AGENDA   | DISCUSSION GUIDE (continued)   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>DISCUSS: DANGERS OF CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING</b><br/>If possible, show the group what a CO monitor looks like.</p>   | <p>Carbon monoxide-related deaths are highest during colder months due in part to an increased indoor use of gas-powered furnaces and alternative heating and cooking sources during power outages. Sources that produce carbon monoxide include portable generators, propane, and gas-powered stoves and grills, and charcoal briquettes.</p> <p>Pass a CO monitor around the room and ask the group how many people have CO monitors in their home.</p>                              |
| <p><b>DISCUSS: EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLANS</b><br/>Review the plan for your organization if you have one.</p> <p><b>HANDOUT:</b> <i>Ready's Family Communication Plan for Parents and Kids.</i></p> | <p>Every family should have a plan for how to communicate with each other during and after a winter storm.</p> <p>Encourage people to identify an out-of-state contact, such as a friend or relative, to notify when they are safe. In some cases it may be easiest to use social media and post an "I'm OK" message to many friends at once.</p> <p>Text, do not talk. Text messages can often get around network disruptions when a phone call might not be able to get through.</p> |
| <p><b>EXPLAIN: IMPORTANCE OF STORING CRITICAL DOCUMENTS</b></p> <p><b>HANDOUT:</b> <i>Be Smart, Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables.</i></p>   | <p>Explain that you should have access to insurance policies, financial records, medication information, and other household records so that after the disaster you can begin the recovery process.</p> <p>Encourage everyone to take the time now to gather and protect their critical information and documents.</p>   |

## EMERGENCY SUPPLIES HANDOUT

Distribute *Building a Home Emergency Supply Kit* checklist from the *How to Prepare for a Winter Storm* guide (or ask the group to turn to this page). If possible, have basic supply kit contents on a table for people to see or to use as visual aids during your discussion.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ | <p><b>GOAL FOR PROTECTION</b> is to gather basic supplies you will need to stay where you are during a winter storm for up to three days.</p>  |
| ✓ | <p>Emphasize the necessity for everyone to have some basic supplies on hand to survive for at least three days if an emergency occurs.</p>   |
| ✓ | <p>Show how building a supply kit is easy and inexpensive, noting that many items may already be in the home or can be found at your local grocery store, pharmacy, or hardware store.</p> |
| ✓ | <p>Highlight that kits should include items such as non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights, and batteries.</p>                               |
| ✓ | <p>Be sure to consider if there are specialty items you need, such as prescription medications, an extra pair of glasses, infant formula and diapers, and pet food.</p>                    |
| ✓ | <p>Discuss the need to minimize travel during a winter storm. If travel is absolutely necessary, keep a disaster supply kit in your vehicle.</p>   |

# Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise



2

A tabletop exercise is a facilitated discussion about what your organization would do in response to a disaster. The exercise leads participants through a simulated disaster scenario and prompts them to examine their plans, policies, and procedures without disrupting the workplace environment. It allows for a facilitated discussion of roles, procedures, and responsibilities in the context of a simulated emergency scenario.

The goals for the exercise are as follows:

1. To assess your organization's ability to respond using your current plans, policies, capabilities, and resources; and
2. To help identify improvements that could make the difference in keeping your people safe and doors open after a disaster.

For organizations that do not currently do this type of planning, conducting this exercise as part of your America's PrepareAthon! Day of Action can be an important next step in improving your organization's preparedness and resiliency.

This Playbook provides guidance on how to hold a tabletop exercise to help your organization assess and improve its ability to maintain or reestablish operations when affected by a winter storm. Many individuals within your organization can lead this effort: a senior leader, an employee, a facility manager, a human resources manager, or a program manager. Use this Playbook, *How to Prepare for a Winter Storm*, and the companion slidedeck available on [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) to help you.

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### EXERCISE OVERVIEW

To simulate an actual event, the *Prepare Your Organization* tabletop exercise begins with an initial scenario description and proceeds with three scenario updates. Each phase of the scenario includes discussion questions to allow participants to focus on problem solving as a leadership team in a low-stress, consequence-free environment. This exercise is not meant to assess individual performance, but rather, it is an opportunity to identify and resolve problems, improve workplace safety, and bolster your organization's continuity of operations.

### EXERCISE OBJECTIVES

These tabletop exercises are designed to help your organization identify strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

**FACILITIES:** Structural maintenance considerations; insulation for pipes; back-up power supplies; heating; snow removal; safety of sidewalk and walkways; supplies for staying on-site; accessibility considerations; and emergency repairs.

#### HUMAN RESOURCES

**POLICIES:** Employee notification and alerts;

early release/telework policies; flexible work schedules; payroll and insurance policies; employee insurance policies; employee/family reunification procedures; employees trained in first-aid with access to medical supplies; and capacity to ensure accessibility for individuals with disabilities or access and functional needs.

#### CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANS:

Plans to operate at an alternate location; access to important data; roles and responsibilities; insurance policies; supplier and customer relationship management; and plans and processes to resume operations.

#### EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

**PLANS:** Ability to provide critical information and updates during the emergency through multiple notification systems; guidance on how to protect critical assets; plans to provide first aid; and protocols for communicating with local first responders and critical infrastructure providers.



### TIME COMMITMENT

The tabletop exercise should last approximately 2–3 hours, depending on the amount of discussion and needed breaks. This includes time for introductions, an overview of the process, the exercise, and a debriefing. While this may seem like a lot of time, especially for busy managers, the investment will pay dividends both in a real emergency or disaster and also in improving day-to-day operations.

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### GETTING STARTED

Once your organization's leadership agrees to hold a tabletop exercise, the following steps will lead you through the planning process and help your organization get the most value from the exercise.

#### SELECT A LEAD PLANNER

1

The lead planner has primary responsibility for executing the exercise, to include working with leadership to select participants, customizing the scenario description and questions to fit your community and your organization, and planning logistics. The lead planner serves as the primary point of contact for participants who have questions about the exercise and materials.

#### SELECT THE FACILITATOR

2

The facilitator leads the exercise discussion, provides scenario updates, and prompts participants to interact. A facilitator who understands the scope of your organization's operations may have greater success in stimulating a productive discussion.

#### IDENTIFY WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

3

To examine your organization's operations during the tabletop exercise, you need to include representatives from across your enterprise. Consider key decision makers and subject matter experts from all departments, including senior leadership, facilities management, communications and public affairs, information technology (IT) services, corporate security, human resources, and legal. You also may wish to include third-party vendors such as phone, IT, data back-up, food, and other critical services.

For the exercise discussion to be as spontaneous and realistic as possible, it is important not to share the scenario or discussion questions with invited participants or observers in advance of the exercise.



## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### GETTING STARTED (continued)

#### DETERMINE ROLES

4

There are different roles for “players” in an exercise as outlined below. The lead planner decides who should attend and to which role he or she is assigned.

**PARTICIPANT:** Someone with decision-making authority (or a designated proxy), who has authority over a component of operations (e.g., Human Resources Manager). Participants should sit at the table, answer questions, and make decisions during the exercise.

**OBSERVER:** Someone who benefits from attending the exercise because his or her role in the organization may include implementing identified recommendations. To keep the number of speakers manageable, observers do not participate in the exercise, but are encouraged to take notes and provide feedback at the end.

**NOTE-TAKER:** Someone who can record the discussion during the exercise and summarize the main points as a follow-up report. You may even want to have the main points recorded on a white board. Encourage participants and observers to take notes during the exercise for the debriefing following the end of the exercise.

#### PLAN THE LOGISTICS

5

The lead planner should address the logistics ahead of time to make sure the exercise goes smoothly.

**LOCATION:** The room should be large enough for all participants and observers. Set up the room so that everyone can see and hear each other. If participants do not know one another, consider having table tents or name badges with names and departments identified.

**INVITATIONS:** Send invitations to participants with an explanation of what a tabletop exercise is and what role they will play. You should consider sending a save-the-date as soon as the exercise date is determined, followed by a more detailed invitation once the lead planner establishes the objectives, agenda, and logistics (e.g., event location).

**EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS:** Print enough copies of any materials (e.g., agenda, PowerPoint presentation, and an evaluation form) in advance for all attendees. Collect any other materials you would like to have in the room for easy reference during the exercise, such as existing policies or other manuals. If you are using white boards, make sure you have the easels and markers on hand.

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise



### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: INITIAL SCENARIO

Read the Scenario aloud.

Sunday, 5:00 p.m.: The National Weather Service (NWS) detects a cold front moving toward **[your community]**. Weather officials urge citizens to prepare for a large storm that will likely begin in the next 24 hours. A winter storm warning is issued by the NWS for **[your community]** as well as all surrounding areas within 100 miles. The NWS predicts light snow that will likely mix with or change to sleet or freezing rain with significant

icing possible by tomorrow afternoon. Ice accumulation will likely be between 1/2 and 1 inch, with highest icing potential near downtown **[your community]**. The public is advised to expect widespread power outages, damaged trees, and treacherous road conditions because of the ice storm. Local schools are beginning to announce closures for Monday.

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: INITIAL SCENARIO QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20-25 minutes)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> Who in the organization is responsible for monitoring or would likely hear or receive a bulletin or alert from the National Weather Service or other alerting authority? How would they receive this information?</p>  | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Do they know the meaning of a warning (as compared to a watch) and what guidance should be issued? Would power be needed to receive this information?</p>   |
| <p><b>2</b> What information are you sharing with your <b>[employees/parents/students/volunteers/ congregants]</b> at this time? What are the current process and communications platform(s) used to notify them of potential threats or hazards, including those who are out of the building?</p> | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Who decides when and how to share information about severe weather? What communication platforms do you use regularly (e.g., email, messenger, smart phone, push-to-talk, radio, loudspeaker, written)? Are these systems dependent on community sources of power? Have you made adequate accommodations for notifying anyone with a communication access need?</p>   |
| <p><b>3</b> When you hear that a Winter Storm Warning has been issued, what are your immediate concerns?</p>   | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Are there operational components of your organization that would be affected by a winter storm (e.g., outdoor operations and activities, delivery drivers)?</p>   |
| <p><b>4</b> Based on the forecast, it seems likely that your facility(ies) will experience significant winter weather over the next 24+ hours. What decisions need to be made at this time, and who needs to make them?</p>  | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> What is the protocol for closing early during a winter storm? Who can make those decisions (name, position/role)? Would you operate at an alternative site during a winter storm? Is there anything you can do at this time to protect your facility(ies) from damage? Does any of your infrastructure or operations need to be shut down before the premises can be vacated? Who knows how to do this?</p> |

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #1

Read the Scenario Update aloud.

Monday, 1:00 p.m.: Precipitation begins as wet snow for several hours, changes to freezing drizzle, and then freezing rain. Ice up to 1 inch thick accumulates on roads, sidewalks, trees, power lines, and houses. Wind gusts up to 40 miles per hour are reported in the area. Authorities are attempting to clear the major roadways, but the dangerous conditions make it nearly impossible to keep even the largest vehicles on the

road. Nearly all roads are impassable. Emergency response vehicles are unable to respond to calls for assistance. Heavy accumulation of ice and wet snow causes dozens of trees to fall, taking down power lines. Power outages are widespread. Your school district has extended closures until Thursday; all local government buildings are closed.

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #1 QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 10-15 minutes)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> What are your immediate actions and priorities in the first 10-15 minutes?</p>   | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Who is in charge? How will leaders communicate with each other and with <b>[employees/parents/students/volunteers/congregants]</b> during a winter storm?</p>   |
| <p><b>2</b> What and how is your organization communicating about the winter storm <b>[employees/parents/students/volunteers/congregants]</b> at this time?</p>  | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Do you have an alternate plan for communications if traditional systems are damaged or the power is out due to downed power lines?</p>  |
| <p><b>3</b> What expectations do you have regarding <b>[employees/students/volunteers]</b> attendance under these circumstances? Are you prepared to operate with a limited number of <b>[employees/volunteers]</b>?</p> | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Do you have policies in place to support employees working remotely? What employees are essential for you to have at your facilities during a winter storm? Do you have mandatory reporting policies?</p> |

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #2

Read the Scenario Update aloud.

Tuesday, 8:00 a.m.: As the day begins, 1 inch of ice remains underneath the snow covering. Several major roads have been cleared, but most secondary roads remain impassable. Most businesses remain closed, including many gas stations, banks, and grocery stores. Many cell towers were damaged during the storm and

phone service remains spotty. **[Your local utility]** is still overwhelmed; so much of the infrastructure—power lines and poles—is damaged that they estimate it may take a week or more to completely restore power to all affected areas. You are not able to access your facility to determine if there has been any damage.

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #2 QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20-25 minutes)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1</b> Based on this updated information, how have your concerns changed? Do you have any new concerns?</p>  |  |
| <p><b>2</b> What information are you sharing with <b>[employees/parents/students/volunteers/congregants]</b>? How are you communicating about the status of your facility(ies)?</p>   | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> Do you have an alternate plan for communications if traditional systems are damaged or you lose power? Are your on-site communications systems redundant?</p>  |
| <p><b>3</b> Do you have a process in place to account for all your <b>[employees/students/volunteers/congregants]</b>? If people cannot be located or contacted, what—if any—processes do you have to account for them?</p> | <p><b>PROMPT:</b> How do you know who is working on-site and who is working from home during the storm? How is that information communicated to those who need it?</p>   |
| <p><b>4</b> Is/are your facility(ies) able to continue to operate in any capacity?</p>  | <p><b>NOTE:</b> If the organization has multiple locations, allow participants to assume that at least some locations are functional at some level. Ask them to discuss what portion of their operations can continue.</p> |

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #3

Read the Scenario Update aloud.

Saturday, 8:00 a.m.: Across the area, ice and snow are beginning to melt. Temperatures have remained in the 40s for the past several days. Utility crews from across the country are working around the clock to restore electricity to the area but there was so much damage, they estimate it could take an additional week or more

to fully restore power. Many schools remain closed and many streets are still littered with debris. You are finally able to check on your facility and find serious water damage to your lower level from flooding due to frozen pipes. Your storage area for records has flooded, as well as the area your IT and communications hardware is housed.

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #3 QUESTIONS

(suggested time: 20-25 minutes)

1

Now that you know the extent of the damage to your facility, do you have options that allow you to continue operations?

**PROMPT:** How long can you continue to operate without access to your primary facility? Are your **[employees/volunteers]** prepared to telework for an extended period of time?

**PROMPT FOR K-12 AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER**

**EDUCATION:** Do you have agreements in place with other similar facilities to allow you to continue classes in a shared place? How are you communicating with parents and students regarding the status of classes? What are your expectations for students who cannot attend classes because your school(s) is/are closed?

**PROMPT FOR HOUSES OF WORSHIP:** What decisions are being made about resuming the worship schedule? What information is being communicated to congregants at this time?

2

Can you access copies of your vital documents, such as insurance papers, financial information, key documents, and records?

**PROMPT:** Do you have the resources/coverage in place to cover disaster related expenses?

3

How are you communicating with **[employees/volunteers]** regarding their work status? What are your expectations for **[employees/volunteers]** who cannot work, either because your facility(ies) is/are closed or because they have suffered personal losses?

**PROMPT:** How are these expectations communicated? Will employees be paid for time they cannot work due to the aftermath of the winter storm? How will they be paid?

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### WINTER STORM EXERCISE: SCENARIO UPDATE #3 QUESTIONS (continued)

4

What are the critical services your **[employees/volunteers]** rely upon to be at work (e.g., power, transit, schools/day care)?

**PROMPT:** What can you do if these critical services are not restored for some time, even if your facility(ies) is/ are open? Do you have contact information for critical infrastructure providers in your area, such as communications and utilities? Do you know how to find out when those services are restored?

5

What is the long-term impact of this winter storm on your **[facility/organization]**? Are there any steps you can take now that may lessen the impact of an event like this?

6

What can you do to support the community as it recovers? How can you improve your network and relationships to be better connected to the community to prepare for future events?



## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### FACILITATOR GUIDE - EXERCISE STRUCTURE

#### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

(suggested time:  
10 minutes)

1

Begin the exercise by introducing yourself and provide a short overview of the exercise objectives and process. Emphasize that the purpose of the exercise is to identify strengths and weaknesses of current plans, policies, and procedures to strengthen the organization's resilience to disruptive events. Explain the roles of the facilitator, participants, observers, and note-takers.

Ask participants to introduce themselves, state their role within the organization and in the tabletop exercise. After introductions, remind everyone to share responsibility for making the exercise useful and productive. Review the agenda, ground rules, and logistics information.

#### EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION

(suggested time:  
1.5 - 2 hours)

2

Once you have provided the overview, begin by introducing the scenario and answering the questions. Read the scenario aloud, and provide a handout of the scenario, if desired. To simulate a real event, the scenario unfolds through updates. Each update includes an additional set of questions for participants.

It is important to take the hypothetical scenario seriously and for each participant to imagine as realistically as possible what he or she would be thinking, feeling, and doing from both a professional and a personal perspective. The discussion should address the specifics of your organization—your workforce, your facilities, and your policies. To provide context, reference actual events that have occurred in your area or in your state.

#### DEBRIEFING AND NEXT STEPS

(suggested time:  
20 minutes)

3

Once you have concluded the exercise, it is critical to debrief and establish follow-up plans. A debriefing is simply a review of the exercise and an opportunity to identify next steps. Keep this summary simple by asking for input to create a list of the areas identified as major strengths and areas for improvement. Suggested prompts:

- What weaknesses in your organization's emergency plans did this exercise expose?
- What unanticipated issues arose during the exercise?
- What gaps were identified?
- What are the high-priority issues that should be addressed?
- What are new ideas and recommendations for improvement?
- Were the exercise objectives met?

End the session by thanking everyone for their participation and their honest feedback. Explain leadership's commitment to using the exercise as a building block to greater organizational safety and resilience in ongoing management planning and in meetings with staff.

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### FACILITATOR GUIDE – TIPS FOR FACILITATING A PRODUCTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

This guide is designed to help you facilitate a discussion about what your organization would do in response to a winter storm. The facilitator should review all the materials in the Playbook and all the referenced materials, including the links for additional resources, in advance of the exercise. Adequate preparation by the facilitator is the best way to ensure a successful and productive exercise. After reviewing the materials:

|   |  |
|---|--|
|    | Review the objectives and ensure exercise discussions will meet all objectives.  |
|    | Customize the scenario and/or questions so that they are specific to your organization, your facility(ies), and the services you provide. If the days or times provided affect how your organization would respond to the event, consider different times and days as you discuss the scenario. Review the scenario and follow-up questions and add any additional questions or issues specific to your organization’s workforce, organizational structure, or facilities. |
|    | Review the information at <a href="http://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs">www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs</a> and consider the needs of individuals in your organization with disabilities or access and functional needs.  |
|  | Review the list of participants and make sure you know their role in the organization.   |
|  | Ensure all logistics are taken care of, including: seating for all participants and observers, nametags or table tents, and handouts.  |
|  | Discuss the exercise with the note-taker(s) so that they are prepared for the topics to be addressed in the discussion.  |
|  | Ensure the room has been properly set up so that all participants, observers, and note-takers have adequate visibility of the screen and can hear the discussions.   |
|  | Ask open-ended questions, using the words “what,” “when,” “where,” “how,” and “why.” If necessary, direct questions to specific participants or areas of the organization.   |
|  | Encourage conversation and give extra encouragement to those who may be hesitant to participate in the conversation.   |

## 2 | Prepare Your Organization: Hold a Tabletop Exercise

### FACILITATOR GUIDE – TIPS FOR FACILITATING A PRODUCTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

(continued)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ | Elicit suggestions for how to improve issues that arise during the exercise discussion.  |
| ✓ | Involve all participants. Do not let one or two participants monopolize the discussions.   |
| ✓ | Assist the group by summarizing a point, restating a key discussion point, and asking specific individuals to comment.   |
| ✓ | Avoid the temptation to jump in with the solutions when participants are struggling and, instead, try to draw out the answers from them. Participants are more likely to contribute if they feel that people are listening intently and sympathetically.   |
| ✓ | Watch for signs of frustration or conflict. Remember that the exercise is not a test, but an opportunity to identify areas for improvement. If you see mounting frustration or conflict, pause the exercise and suggest a break.   |
| ✓ | Ensure you complete all the scenario updates to meet the exercise objectives. Monitor the time per module. If the discussion is relevant and meaningful, consider continuing the discussion past the agenda time, and make up time in the next module. Moving too quickly may not allow solutions to come forward. Conversely, moving along so slowly that nothing of substance is decided defeats the purpose of the exercise.  |
| ✓ | Ensure that discussion remains within the scope of the given discussion area. Sometimes the conversation may begin to drift to topics more appropriate for discussion in later periods of the exercise, or the conversation may get stuck on a problem area that will need to be resolved later. To keep the discussion moving, use a “parking lot” technique to record difficult issues that can be discussed more fully later. |

### FOLLOW-UP IS CRITICAL

After the exercise, be sure to follow through with addressing the gaps and recommended improvements identified by participants in a timely fashion. Your organization’s leadership should create a plan that lists what items need to be addressed, who is responsible for executing those tasks, and when resolution is expected. Develop or update your organization’s emergency operating plan and test it at least annually. The investment to prepare and to routinely review policies, plans, and communications will strengthen your organization and build resilience to the challenges and events that may lie ahead.

# Maintain Momentum Year-Round: More Ways to Prepare



3

In addition to holding a preparedness discussion and a tabletop exercise for a winter storm, prepare and plan for other hazards you might face. Visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) for risk information and preparedness resources on other hazards. The following resources can help keep your preparedness momentum moving all year long.

- The Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication training program draws from lessons learned during public health emergencies and incorporates best practices from the fields of risk and crisis communication. For course materials, visit <http://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/>.
- The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) are used by emergency managers to provide a standard vocabulary and process to manage emergencies. It is a valuable management tool for any organization. Free training is available online at <https://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.aspx>.
- Practice the Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan of your business or organization, or visit [www.fema.gov/continuity-operations](http://www.fema.gov/continuity-operations) to learn about the importance of having a continuity of operations plan.
- The American Red Cross Ready Rating program is a free, self-guided program designed to help businesses, organizations, and schools become better prepared for emergencies. Members complete a three-point self-assessment of their level of preparedness and have access to tools, tips, and best practices to help improve their level of preparedness. Visit [www.readyrating.org](http://www.readyrating.org).
- A Workplace Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program can help prepare employees to help others before professional responders arrive. For more information on Workplace CERT, visit [www.fema.gov/community-emergency-response-teams](http://www.fema.gov/community-emergency-response-teams).

## 3 | Maintain Momentum Year-Round: More Ways to Prepare

### RESOURCES TO ASSIST WITH FOLLOW-UP PLANNING

- The American Red Cross can provide on-site first aid trainings. For more information, go to [www.redcross.org/take-a-class](http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class).
- To learn about Federal financial assistance after a disaster, visit [www.fema.gov/help-after-disaster](http://www.fema.gov/help-after-disaster).
- To help individuals who may express discomfort or anxiety with dealing with disasters, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Technical Assistance Center provides a host of relevant materials available at [www.samhsa.gov/dtac/](http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/).
- The disaster distress helpline is a resource for people who want help coping with overwhelming stress from a disaster. It's free. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 or TTY for Deaf/Hearing Impaired: 1-800-846-8517.
- For Institutions of Higher Education, download the Action Guide for Emergency Management at Institutions of Higher Education at [http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_ActionGuide.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/docs/REMS_ActionGuide.pdf).
- Visit the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education for information on emergency operations plans (EOPs) and emergency management planning efforts at [www.rems.ed.gov](http://www.rems.ed.gov).

### OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

In addition to preparing your organization, it is important to understand your local and tribal community emergency operations plans and to work with other organizations in your community or tribe. Opportunities to participate in whole community planning include the following:

- Contact your State, Local and/or Tribal Emergency Manager to identify emergency management resources in your area. For contact information, visit: [www.fema.gov/state-offices-and-agencies-emergency-management](http://www.fema.gov/state-offices-and-agencies-emergency-management) or [www.fema.gov/fema-tribal-affairs](http://www.fema.gov/fema-tribal-affairs).
- Learn about Public-Private Partnerships: [www.fema.gov/public-private-partnerships](http://www.fema.gov/public-private-partnerships).
- Participate in local or tribal organizations that make your community a safer and more prepared place to live and do business, such as your local Citizen Corps Council, hazard mitigation planning team, or local and tribal Community Emergency Management Team (CERT). Citizen Corps Councils include representatives from all sectors of the community. This whole community membership helps to ensure the community perspective is reflected in local emergency management practices: [www.ready.gov/citizen-corps](http://www.ready.gov/citizen-corps).

