



# **NYC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

## **Tabletop Exercise Toolkit**

**Facilitator Guide**  
**Coastal Storm, Recovery Phase**

Version 1.0



## COASTAL STORM RECOVERY 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.*

This scenario, based on a fictional coastal storm making landfall in New York City and affecting your primary facility, is designed to test your initial response to a no-notice incident. At the start of the incident, participants must deal with initial reactions, as well incomplete information and uncertainty about safety conditions. As the scenario continues, the focus shifts to business continuity concerns. This scenario does not cover the recovery phase; that will be the subject of a forthcoming scenario.

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.

**NOTE:** *This scenario is best paired with the Coastal Storm Response scenario.*

## 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, stress-free 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 1 to 4 hours, but 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 about 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 (or having someone read) 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 overly 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.

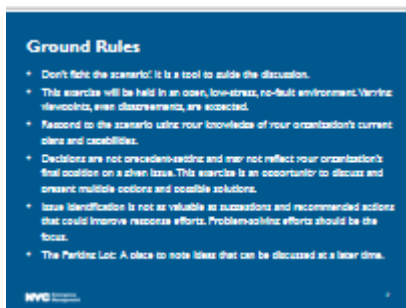
## Scenario Slides & Possible Questions



### 1 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://nyc.gov/emergencymanagement) or email us at [publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov](mailto: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.

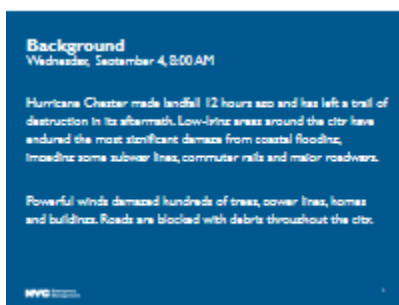
Decisions are not precedent-setting and may not reflect your organization's final position on a given issue. This exercise is an

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.

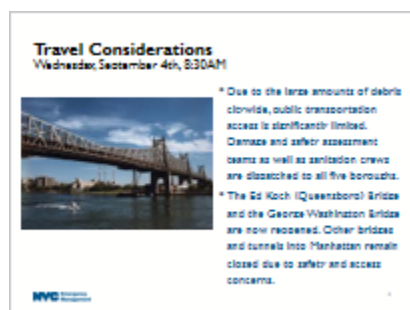


### 3 Background, Wednesday Morning, 8:00 AM

Hurricane Chester made landfall 12 hours ago and has left a trail of destruction in its aftermath. Low-lying areas around the city have endured the most significant damage from coastal flooding, impacting some subway lines, commuter rails and major roadways. Powerful winds damaged hundreds of trees, power lines, homes and buildings. Roads are blocked with debris throughout the city.



## 4 WEDNESDAY



## 5 Travel Considerations, Wednesday Morning, 8:30 AM

Due to the large amounts of debris citywide, public transportation access is significantly limited. Damage and safety assessment teams as well as sanitation crews are dispatched to all five boroughs. The Ed Koch (Queensboro) Bridge and the George Washington Bridge are now reopened. Other bridges and tunnels into Manhattan remain closed due to safety and access concerns.

### *Possible Questions for CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- What critical operations do you need to get back up and running as soon as the storm passes? What operations can be postponed or canceled for a time?
- Does the company have an alternate site facility?
- What information will you want to have in front of you on the next company call? Assuming that you won't have access to your facility on Wednesday, will you be able to get this information?

### *Possible Questions for IT and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- Do you back up your computer data? Will you be able to access the backed-up information?
- What will you be missing and how will it affect your ability to do business?
- How will you run your business if you cannot access your primary facility for several days? Who will you need to call? Will you be able to get in touch with them?

### *Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

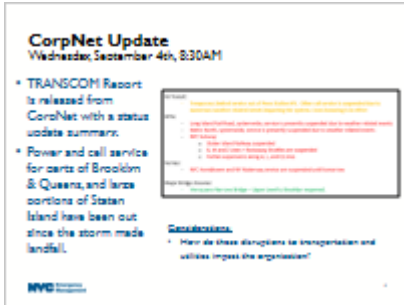
- What will you tell your employees about working for the rest of the day? For tomorrow?
- What will your policy be regarding having employees return to work?
- Do you back up your important documents and store them off-site?

### *Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES, LEGAL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- Insurance adjusters may not be available right away, how will you handle clean-up operations before then? How will you document damage? Will you start work repairing damage? Have you discussed this problem with your insurance agent?

*Possible Questions for PUBLIC RELATIONS and MANAGEMENT*

- Do you need to appoint a spokesperson to talk to the media?



**6 CorpNet Update, Wednesday Morning, 8:30 AM**

TRANSCOM Report is released from CorpNet with a status update summary.

Power and cell service for parts of Brooklyn & Queens, and large portions of Staten Island have been out since the storm made landfall.

**Facilitator Notes:**

- The CorpNet program is managed by NYC Emergency Management and provides business partners with current, accurate information about emergencies to enhance awareness and aid decision making, should their businesses be affected. Businesses can enroll at [PrivateSector.NYC](https://www.privatesector.nyc.gov/).

*Possible Questions for SECURITY and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- How do these disruptions to transportation and utilities impact the organization?
- Are any employees signed up for CorpNet?
- Which of your employees are affected by these outages? Who around the table would be unable to call in because of power or phone outages?



**7 Supporting the Team, Wednesday Morning, 10:00 AM**

The CEO has told the leadership team to offer support to employees that are undergoing hardships caused by the storm.

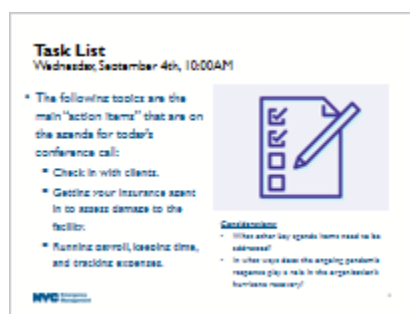
On the company conference call, neither your Human Resources supervisor nor his assistant are present, and no one has been able to contact them.

### *Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, & CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- By what means could impacted employees be supported?
- Can you help employees without power or without necessary services in any way? Should this be part of your role as an employer?
- Does the organization have a mass notification tool? Has it been tested?

### *Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- Will you attempt to get in touch with employees at all after the storm? Who is responsible for sending out a message to employees? Is this person/are these people able to contact all of your employees from outside of your facility?
- Are you worried about the missing employees? How can you try to get in touch with them? Who will be able to fill in for missing employees?
- How will the absence of your two most senior HR staffers affect your ability to run this operation?
- What will your policy be regarding employees who must take off from work for personal reasons? Will they be compensated? If so, how? How long will they be able to stay on leave?



### **8 Task List, Wednesday Morning, 10:00 AM**

The following topics are the main “action items” that are on the agenda for today’s conference call:

- Check in with clients.
- Getting your insurance agent in to assess damage to the facility.
- Running payroll, keeping time, and tracking expenses.

### *Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- What other key agenda items need to be addressed?
- In what ways does the ongoing pandemic response play a role in the organization’s hurricane recovery?
- Do you have a vendor/supplier contact list that you can access remotely if you need to use it?
- Will you have any responsibilities to your business on Wednesday (the day after the storm)?

### *Possible Questions for FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION*

- Are you insured for physical damage to your facility? Are you covered for physical damage to your equipment?
- Are you insured for flood damage?
- Who will meet the insurance agent?
- Are you able to contact your insurance agent from offsite?
- Do you have business interruption insurance? If so, would your coverage apply to this situation?
- How will you interact with your insurance company in the event of a major regional emergency?

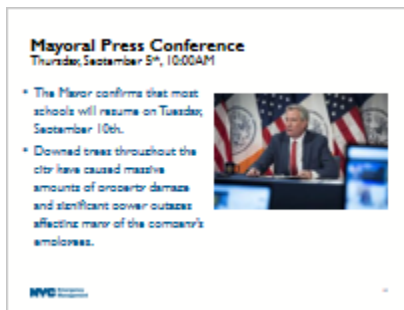
- Do you have copies of your policies off-site?

*Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION*

- How will you manage payroll during this event? Who will track hours worked?
- Will you be able to pay your employees without access to your primary facility?
- Will you be able to carry out other vital accounting and financial functions without access to your primary facility?



**9 THURSDAY**



**10 Mayoral Press Conference, Thursday Morning, 10:00 AM**

The Mayor confirms that most schools will resume on Tuesday, September 10th.

Downed trees throughout the city have caused massive amounts of property damage and significant power outages affecting many of the company's employees.

*Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- How will continued employee absenteeism affect your operations?
- With schools now closed for over a week, how many of your employees will be affected by childcare needs?



**11 About Those Supplies... Thursday Afternoon, 2:00 PM**

Your vendor is finally contacted regarding the large supply shipment that was postponed before the storm. This shipment is vital to maintain business operations.

The vendor apologizes and reports that its warehouse has completely flooded, and its computer systems are damaged. They can probably recover the supplies but not for another two weeks, at the earliest.

### *Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- If your organization does not depend on supply inventory, what other type of vendor contract disruptions could affect critical functions? (i.e. power, ventilation, etc.)
- Do you have the phone numbers for all of your vendors and clients? Can you contact them from offsite?
- Do you have alternate vendors in place in the event that your primary vendors are unable to fulfill their obligations? Do you have contracts with these alternates?



### **12 FRIDAY**



### **13 Status Updates, Friday Afternoon, 1:30 PM**

Human Resources reports that several employees are expressing concerns related to:

- Commuting challenges
- Personal recovery needs
- Requests to work remotely

A handful of employees are temporarily relocated after experiencing the complete destruction of their homes.

### *Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- Does the company provide any assistance to employees that experience such a devastating loss? Any type of compensation or paid time-off?

### *Possible Questions for HUMAN RESOURCES and FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION*

- What is the protocol for staff members who have been told not to report to work or to work from home?
- How will you track time and hours worked for your employees if they are working from home?

### *Possible Questions for IT, MANAGEMENT, and CRISIS MANAGEMENT*

- Do you have policies in place permitting employees to work from home? If so, will your employees actually 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?



## 14 SUNDAY

**Access Restoration**  
Sunday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 10:00AM

- Although main roads and tracks have been cleared, some major traffic concerns remain:
- The Long Island Railroad has resumed some service to Jamaica, though no trains are running into Penn Station.
- Metro North is also running limited service into 125th Street.
- Some streets in lower Manhattan are still impacted by heavy damage related to flooding.



**Recommendation**  
In terms of long-term strategy, what are some ways the organization can mitigate commuting challenges for its employees?

## 15 Access Restoration, Sunday Morning, 10:00 AM

Although many roads and tracks have been cleared, some major traffic concerns remain:

The Long Island Railroad has resumed some service to Jamaica, though no trains are running into Penn Station.

Metro North is also running limited service into 125th Street.

Some streets in lower Manhattan are still impacted by heavy damage related to flooding.

### Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- In terms of long-term strategy, what are some ways the organization can mitigate commuting challenges for its employees?
- Who around the table would still be affected by the remaining road closures and limited train services?



## 16 MONDAY



### 17 Getting Back to Normal, Monday Morning, 9:00 AM

With a few exceptions, roads, bridges, and public transportation systems are back up and running.

Almost a quarter of your clients have called to try to postpone work on their accounts, saying that they will not be able to pay until their operations start again.

#### Possible Questions for FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- How will the loss of a large share of clients (even if it is only temporary) affect your ability to do business?



### 18 The Road to Recovery, Monday Afternoon, 2:00 PM

The CFO requests that available City, State, and Federal loan assistance programs that the company qualifies for are identified.

A team is assembled to discuss additional recovery plans for the next several weeks.

#### Possible Questions for ALL and CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Which employees would be responsible for researching and obtaining any type of financial assistance for long-term recovery needs?
- What must these long-term recovery plans entail?
- What will mitigation plans look like for future storms of this magnitude?



### 19 THANK YOU