

Step 6: Plan Implementation and Maintenance

Train Stakeholders on the Plan and Their Roles

Everyone involved in the plan needs to know their roles and responsibilities before, during, and after an incident. Key training components include:

- **Hold a meeting.** At least once a year, hold a meeting to educate all parties on the plan. Go through the plan to familiarize these stakeholders with it.
- **Visit evacuation sites.** Show involved parties not only where evacuation sites are located, but also where specific areas, such as reunification areas, media areas, and triage areas will be located.
- **Give stakeholders appropriate and relevant literature on the plan, policies, and procedures.** It may also be helpful to provide them with quick reference guides that remind them of key courses of action.
- **Post key information throughout the building.** It is important that congregants are familiar with and have easy access to information such as evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations. Ensure information concerning evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations is communicated effectively to congregants with disabilities or others with access and functional needs.
- **Familiarize congregants with the plan and community partners.** Bringing law enforcement, fire, and EMS personnel and community partners that have a role in the plan, as well as other organizations that use the building(s), into the church to talk about the plan will make congregants and others more comfortable working with these partners. This may include community partners who are congregation members.
- **Train stakeholders on the skills necessary to fulfill their roles.** Persons will be assigned specific roles in the plan that will require special skills, such as first aid, how to use ICS, and the provision of personal assistance services for children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Practice the Plan

The more a plan is practiced, and stakeholders are trained on the plan, the more effectively they will be able to act before, during, and after an emergency to lessen the impact on life and property. Exercises provide opportunities to practice with local emergency management officials and community partners, as well as to identify gaps and weaknesses in the plan. The exercises below require increasing amounts of planning, time, and resources. Ideally, you will create an exercise program, building from a tabletop up to a more advanced exercise, like a functional exercise.

- **Tabletop exercises** are small group discussions that walk through a scenario and the courses of action a church will need to take before, during, and after an incident. This activity helps assess the plan and resources and facilitates an understanding of emergency management and planning concepts.
- During **drills**, local emergency management officials, community partners, and relevant church personnel use the actual church grounds and buildings to practice responding to a scenario.
- **Functional exercises** are like drills but involve multiple partners. Participants react to realistic simulated events (e.g., a bomb threat, or an intruder with a gun) and implement the plan and procedures using ICS.
- **Full-scale exercises** are the most time-consuming activity in the exercise continuum and are multiagency, multi-jurisdiction efforts in which resources are deployed. This type of exercise tests collaboration among the agencies and participants, public information systems, communications systems, and equipment. An emergency operations center is established (usually by the local emergency management agency) and ICS is activated.

Before deciding about how many and which types of exercises to implement, you should consider the costs and benefits. You should also consider having representative(s) participate in larger community exercises to ensure that their efforts are synchronized with the whole community's efforts.

It is up to the planning team to decide how often exercises should be conducted. While frequent exercise is important, it is imperative that exercises are high quality. To conduct an exercise effectively:

- Include local emergency management officials and community partners
- Communicate information in advance to avoid confusion and concern
- Exercise under different and non-ideal conditions (e.g., time of day, weather)
- Be consistent with common emergency management terminology
- Debrief and develop an after-action report that evaluates results; identifies gaps or shortfalls; and documents lessons learned
- Discuss how the plan and procedures will be modified, if needed, and specify who has the responsibility for modifying the plan.

Review, Revise, and Maintain the Plan

Planning is a continuous process that does not stop when the plan is published. Plans should evolve as lessons are learned; new information and insights are obtained; new threats or hazards emerge; and priorities are updated. Reviews should be a recurring activity. Planning teams should establish a process for reviewing and revising the plan. Many organizations review their plans on an annual basis. In no case should any part of the plan go for more than two years without being reviewed and revised.

Some organizations have found it useful to review and revise portions instead of reviewing the entire plan at once. Certain events will also provide new information that will be used to inform the plan. You should consider reviewing and updating their plan after the following events:

- Actual emergencies
- Changes in policy, personnel, organizational structures, processes, facilities, equipment, or membership size
- Formal updates of planning guidance or standards
- Formal exercises
- Threats or hazards change, or new threats or hazards emerge
- Changes in the church's demographics (e.g., changing language needs) or site assessment.
- The planning team should ensure that all local emergency management officials and community partners have the most current version of the house of worship's plan.