

Chapter 4

Evaluating the Exercise and Its Impact

This Chapter Discusses:

- ▶ Purpose of evaluation
 - ▶ Considerations before planning exercise
 - ▶ After-exercise survey
 - ▶ Debriefing session and questionnaire
 - ▶ Long-term impact assessment
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Evaluation is an invaluable tool for both: 1) assessing the efficacy of the tabletop drill for preparing your hospital's staff for a bioevent; and 2) understanding the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in your hospital's overall preparedness for a bioevent. An evaluation will be strongest and most useful if you begin to plan it in the early stages of your tabletop exercise planning. Preparing for the evaluation at this stage will help you focus on what you would like to achieve through the tabletop exercise and develop objectives to guide the exercise planning.

Purpose of Evaluation

The evaluation component of a tabletop exercise can be used to:

- Assess the impact of the exercise on staff and institutional preparedness
- Revise bioevent preparedness plans and procedures
- Identify areas for improvement in bioevent preparedness
- Develop trainings on specific bioevent-related topics or for specific staff groups
- Inform and improve future bioevent preparedness exercises

The following is a list of steps intended to help you conduct the evaluation. You can refer to this list to understand the entire process. Each step is explained in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

In Brief: Steps for Conducting an Evaluation

Determine and document the objectives for your institution.

- After participants are identified, based on the exercise objectives, determine a sub-group of these participants that will be in the debriefing session.
- Choose separate **moderators** to (a) conduct the exercise, and (b) conduct the evaluation.
- Revise instruments to make them relevant to hospital.
- If desired, identify stenographers or note takers to record tabletop exercise and debriefing session.
- Conduct tabletop exercise.
- Immediately after exercise, administer After-Exercise Survey (Appendix 6).

- Within a week of exercise, hold debriefing session.
- Three to twelve months after the exercise, administer the long-term impact assessment.
- Analyze and disseminate results to key stakeholders in emergency preparedness at your institution.

Before you actually begin planning the tabletop exercise, you will want to consider the issues listed below. This will help you to structure, focus, and make the exercise as relevant to your staff and hospital as possible.

Considerations Before Exercise Planning

Objective of the Exercise

The overarching goal of all bioevent tabletop exercises is for participants and the institution to increase preparedness. Defining what participants should learn depends on a variety of factors including:

- Exercise objectives
- Population participating
- Sophistication and experience of an institution and its participants regarding bioevent preparedness.

For example, if the tabletop exercise is limited to infection control practitioners in a hospital network—a specific learning objective would likely include enhanced knowledge of isolation procedures, creating cohort areas and establishing non traditional isolation areas.

Participants for the Exercise

It is key to identify who will participate in order to develop an appropriate exercise, and knowing the participant population is key to evaluating an exercise's success. An exercise targeted specifically at physicians will have different content and focus than an exercise aimed at ancillary services staff, and the knowledge each group is expected to gain from an exercise would be very different. In addition, an exercise designed for staff with little training or experience in dealing with a bioevent will emphasize awareness about the emergence of bioterrorism events or the existence of a new infectious diseases and the emergent need to begin institutional or departmental planning. An exercise designed for staff well versed in bioevent preparedness will emphasize testing assumptions and identifying gaps in existing plans. An evaluation of success should reflect these differences.

When deciding whom to invite to the exercise, keep the following questions in mind:

- What are the objectives of the exercise? Who needs to participate to meet these objectives?
- What level(s) of staff will participate? Will having different levels of staff in one exercise influence the groups' ability to communicate freely?
- Is there appropriate space available for the number of staff invited?

After determining the above, you can consider qualities of an ideal candidate to fill the role of lead evaluator and then choose this person based on available resources.

Conducting the Evaluation

Lead Evaluator

It is important to identify a **lead evaluator** and member of the evaluation team early on in the TT planning process- preferably within the first or second meeting of the planning committee. As stated in Chapter 2, an ideal person to lead the evaluation is a hospital staff person who is able to be relatively unbiased and open to new and possibly unexpected staff feedback following the tabletop and evaluation exercises. Who this person is depends on the size and structure of your hospital. The **lead evaluator** should not participate in the tabletop exercise and should not be an immediate supervisor of any of the participants. Some ideas of possible **lead evaluators** are:

- A hospital bioevent or emergency preparedness program coordinator
- An administrative manager
- Medical or nursing staff person
- Risk Manager or Quality Improvement Manager

Depending on hospital resources, it is also possible to hire an outside consultant to assist with evaluation activities such as designing or administering the After-Exercise Survey or conduct the debriefing session and analyze results. (See also *Conducting a debriefing session*).

*The next step after selecting a **lead evaluator** is to review and tailor each of the following evaluation tools so each tool will be as useful as possible for your hospital and your exercise objectives. The purpose of each tool is explained below.*

Template Evaluation Tools

Included here are some template evaluation tools to assist you in evaluating your tabletop exercise, including:

- After-exercise survey
- Debriefing questionnaire
- Guidelines for assessing long-term exercise impact.

These tools are designed to be flexible, offering options for tailoring the tool to match various exercise goals and participant populations. The **After-Exercise Survey** is intended to assess exercise impact and participant satisfaction. The **debriefing session questionnaire** features questions designed to elicit further feedback from participants in a more open-ended format. Finally, the guidelines for assessing long-term impact are to assess the impact of an exercise on an institution’s bioevent preparedness 3 –12 months after the exercise. Following are further descriptions of each tool.

Timeline for Conducting Evaluation

Activity	Time
Hot Wash	Immediately following the conclusion of Module 3
After-Exercise Survey	Immediately after the Hot Wash
Debriefing Questionnaire	Within 7 days of the Tabletop Exercise
Long-Term Impact Assessment	Within 7-10 days of the Tabletop Exercise

After-Exercise Survey

Purpose of After-Exercise Survey

An **After-Exercise Survey** is an opportunity to gather information from each exercise participant about general satisfaction with the exercise, specific areas where knowledge was/was not gained, and comments and suggestions participants have about the exercise. The survey should be distributed to all participants of the tabletop exercise and collected before the participants leave the exercise.

Goals of an **After-Exercise Survey** include:

- Assessing the self-reported impact of the exercise on participants’ bioevent preparedness.
- Determining the impact of the exercise on knowledge of participants in a variety of areas related to bioevent preparedness.
- Gathering suggestions for how to make future exercises most valuable for participants.

The **After-Exercise Survey** template (see [Appendix 6](#)) includes three sections:

- **General impact:** Measures participants’ general perceptions of the impact and value of the exercise (Appendix 6, Q 1-3).
- **Knowledge impact:** Identifies areas related to bioevent preparedness where respondents increased their knowledge base, and specifically identifies new information learned during the exercise (Appendix 6, Q4-10).
- **General participant feedback:** Gathers various comments from participants as to their likes, dislikes and recommendations as to the form and content of the exercise (Appendix 6, Q11-13).

Debriefing questionnaire

Debriefing Session

A debriefing session is a short (45-60 minute) group discussion in which a small group of participants assemble ideally within a week after the exercise to discuss in detail their experiences with the exercise.

Purpose of debriefing session

A debriefing session offers the opportunity for participants to voice perceptions about the exercise.

Goals of a debriefing session include:

- Discovering in detail the impact of the exercise on participants and the institution
- Identifying how future exercises might be improved
- Probing responses to the After-Exercise Survey; exploring responses and clarifying comments.

Participants for Debriefing Session

Participants in the debriefing session should be:

- A small subset of exercise participants (8-12 people)
- From a variety of departments and/or levels (if applicable)

Note: It is important that participants feel comfortable speaking frankly in the session. If having staff from different levels makes this a problem, then having more than one group should be considered.

Leader for Debriefing Session

An appropriate leader for the debriefing session is:

- Objective and neutral
- Knowledgeable about the exercise and its goals; however, not involved in the design or conduct of the exercise
- Skilled at encouraging and mediating group discussion
- A staff person who has not participated in the tabletop but who has observed it
- Outside consultant

The person conducting the debriefing section should only pose the questions and not answer them his or herself to avoid biasing the debriefing session.

See [Appendix 7](#) for guidelines on how to conduct a debriefing session.

Guidelines for long-term impact assessment

Purpose of Long-Term Impact Assessment

In the “Hot Wash” portion of the exercise, participants are encouraged to identify the institution’s strengths and weaknesses, and to develop a list of next steps to increase bioevent preparedness.

Performing an assessment of long-term impact is key to determining if policies and practices brought up in the Hot Wash have actually been addressed and to what degree the exercise facilitated this process.