

REHEARSING RESILIENCE:

THE POWER OF TABLETOP EXERCISES

Marilyn King, Ed.D. - Deputy Superintendent/Safety Coordinator, Bozeman Public Schools
Kevin Larson - Operations and Training Manager, Gallatin County Emergency Management
Scott McCormick - SRO Sergeant, Bozeman Police Department
Mike Van Vuren - Deputy Superintendent, Bozeman Public Schools

OUTCOMES

- Understand the purpose and benefits of tabletop exercises (TTXs) for validating emergency plans and procedures
- Learn the key components involved in designing an effective tabletop exercise
- Explore best practices for facilitating productive discussions during TTX scenarios
- Discover how to identify strengths and areas for improvement in response plans through TTXs
- Examine strategies for fostering collaboration and coordination among partner organizations during TTXs
- Gain insights from a recent tabletop exercise case study involving the Bozeman School District
- Learn about the exercise development process, execution details, and lessons learned from the case study TTX
- Understand the role of proper design and facilitation in maximizing the effectiveness of tabletop exercises

Goal Of Tabletop Exercise...

Evaluate an organization's preparedness for a particular disaster and inform required participants of their roles in the response.

BENEFITS OF TABLETOP EXERCISES

- Tabletop Exercises increase critical thinking among leaders under “near-real” conditions
- Tabletop exercises uncover issues before they happen for real
- Tabletop exercises bring together the right people and organizations, including outside organizations, to coordinate decision making
- Tabletop exercises establish clear preparedness objectives and work to achieve them
- Thoughtful and objective evaluation of tabletop exercises will strengthen crisis preparedness

Critical!

The first time you meet key community partners should NOT be during an actual incident response. Look for ways to engage with those organizations or individuals who will likely be response partners.

DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

Planning is the hard part!

Clarify Objectives and Outcomes.

Be clear about what you hope to achieve during the exercise. However, deciding how you will use the results after the exercise is over is even more important.

- Establish preparedness and roles for central office team
- Practice emergency manual protocols with principals
- Practice emergency manual protocols at the building level



DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

Choose the Right Participants and Exercise Team.

Assemble the security partners who manage actual emergencies to be your players. You want the key decision-makers in the room: operations personnel, emergency responders, local and state officials, vendors, and even executives. Identify observers who can contribute to discussions and use the lessons learned. Build a dynamic exercise team that brings experience and new ideas.

Exercise Team:

Safety Coordinator, Prevention Coordinator,
SRO/Law Enforcement

Participants:

- Central Office Administration
- Elementary Principals
- Middle and High School Principals
- Entire Administrative Team
- Additional personnel participated as appropriate (e.g., bus)

DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE TABLETOP EXERCISE

Design an Interactive Scenario and Exercise Plan.

Create a solid, believable scenario that meets your objectives, but don't get hung up on it. Time is better spent designing great questions, a detailed game plan, and an approach that will engage all players in an interactive dialogue.

An effective TTX doesn't need to be complicated to be effective.

- Armed Intruder
- Angry Parent
- Hazardous Materials
- Data Breach
- Bus Accident
- One full scale
- One full scale TTX

ENGAGEMENT

Create an Interactive, No-Fault Space.

Avoid the stiffness of a TTX by creating an environment that builds trust and encourages discussion. Declare the venue a “no-fault zone” to allow people to ask any question and make mistakes. Design the physical space to stimulate interaction. Engage all players and help them think through the series of actions that will get the best outcome.

We make sure to state this at the beginning of each exercise, and underscore it every time we increase the number of participants or add participants who our principals may not know.

ENGAGEMENT

Ask Probing Questions to Gain Insight.

Use an experienced facilitator who can uncover key issues and discern valuable insights. Follow a good script but be flexible and responsive to the conversation. Know where to probe for additional information

This is done as the facilitator progresses through slides.



ENGAGEMENT and LEARN

Capture Issues, Lessons, and Key Gaps.

Don't just rely on teams of notetakers; capture and review key points in real-time during the exercise. Use visual tools and a timeline to see how decisions unfold as an event escalates.

Prepare an After-Action Report.

Document the exercise and next steps in an AAR. Make it stand out with clear diagrams, lists of best practices, opportunities for improvement, and lists of resources. Make it useful and readable; don't make it an AARRRGH!

LEARN

Create a Specific, Near-Term Plan.

The best way to put learnings into action is to use the AAR to develop a simple and specific near-term plan for your organization. Don't try to do everything at once. Start with the practical, low-hanging improvements and build from there.

Provide Tools and Guides to Boost Learning.

This is the biggest missed opportunity for continued learning. Leverage the exercise by providing hands-on tools and guides so all participants can improve their plans. Even better, give them a scaled-down version of the exercise (A.K.A. a TTX-in-a-box) that they can run with their colleagues when they get back to the office.

Strategies For Fostering Collaboration And Coordination Among Partner Organizations During TTXs

Team Initiation Tips

- Form core and ad-hoc planning teams
- Utilize data from capacity assessments to identify members' skills
- Establish group leaders
- Plan and participate in joint team activities
- Present coordination activities to other stakeholders

Local Community Partners With A Responsibility In School/Campus Emergency Management And With Information On The Community

- Emergency Management
- Law Enforcement
- Fire
- EMS
- Public Health
- Mental/behavioral health
- Youth-serving organizations
- Nonpublic and public schools



MANAGE THE TEAM & STRENGTHEN THE PARTNERSHIP

- Form a common framework
- Communicate continuously and effectively
- Meet routinely as a team
- Institutionalize roles
- Collaborate on training
- Coordinate exercises and drills

FRAMEWORK TIPS

- Learn each others' vocabulary, command structure, and culture
- Respect confidentiality of team members
- Build rapport with team members
- Establish a common set of terms and definitions
- Train on National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS)
- Provide copies of ICS, contact information, and EOP to all members
- Ask questions

MEETING AGENDA TIPS

- Have a specific start and end time
- Start with a clear agenda
- Assign meeting facilitator
- Take and distribute meeting minutes
- Prioritize two to three goals or objectives
- Form subcommittees if needed
- Identify agenda items for subsequent meetings
- Follow through on unfinished business

EXERCISE TIPS

- Coordinate with community partners in the development and implementation of exercises
- Provide information to staff, students, families, etc., about exercises that will be conducted
- Review the proposed scenarios to ensure their appropriateness for students (if students will be participating)
- Make sure to assign a note-taker for the actual TTX so that points can be referred to during the after action process
- Evaluate the exercise to measure the effectiveness of EOP implementation
- Conduct a debrief and develop an after-action report



BOZEMAN SCHOOL DISTRICT 7 TABLETOP EXERCISE: REUNIFICATION



**BOZEMAN
SCHOOL
DISTRICT 7**

PARTICIPANTS

Bozeman School District

Bozeman Police Dept

Bozeman Fire Dept

Bozeman Street Dept

Gallatin County Sheriff's Office

Gallatin County Coroner's Office

Bozeman Health Deaconess Regional
Medical Center

Gallatin County 9-1-1 Dispatch

Bozeman Yellowstone International
Airport

Hyalite Fire Dept

Central Valley Fire Dept

Montana State University Emergency
Management

Federal Bureau of Investigation

State of Montana Disaster &
Emergency Services

Missoula County Office of Emergency
Management

National Traffic Safety Bureau

PREFACE

Learning and sharing ideas, not judging.

Opportunity to learn, grow, improve.

Show of hands- how many have kids, now or future, in Bozeman School system?

Set participants up for success, will be setting our community up for success.

Thank you to district staff making themselves available (voluntold?) to this opportunity, we know this may stretch some boundaries of comfort. We will make every effort to make it engaging and valuable.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

- Our goal is to test the District's reunification plan and discover areas that can be enhanced.
- We hope the partner agencies will gain valuable insights as to how the District will respond, and what the decision-making process will look like.
- Facilitators will guide the discussion, not everything is scripted. Raise your hands, please no side conversations.
- We can't follow every rabbit trail, even if worthy.
 - We'll capture items for the future.
- Some of you will have to serve in a backup role for people not present.
- We have both active participants and observers present.
- We will have an After Action Review to close things out.

SCENARIO SETTING

- It's a partly cloudy day in mid-May; the time is 11 AM. Gallatin High School is fully in session and has the following population:
- 1,330 students from 9th through 12th grades.
- 108 teachers, including 13 substitutes.
- 81 staff members.



TRIGGER POINT 1

A small private jet takes off from Bozeman's Yellowstone Airport; six passengers and two pilots are on board. The plane turns south and begins its ascent.





Less than a minute after take off, the pilot radios the control tower and declares an emergency. the tower observes rapid descent by the aircraft, but receives no further radio traffic from the crew.

9-1-1 CALL



INITIAL INCIDENT

The aircraft, with nearly a full load of fuel, crashes into the upper level of the Gallatin High School; there is a significant explosion, with the plane and part of the structure quickly catching fire.

Two classrooms on the upper level are directly impacted; they were full of students and teachers, one of whom was a substitute for the day.



INITIAL INCIDENT cont'd

Bozeman Fire and Police Departments are dispatched to the incident.



INITIAL INCIDENT cont'd

Students and staff evacuate from the building. those closest to the impact suffer a variety of injuries, many need assistance getting out, or are unconscious.

Those furthest are able to evacuate in a somewhat orderly fashion. overall, many people have to quickly get out of the building however they are able to; many leave rapidly but in groups, and some leave as classes, accompanied by a teacher or staff.

The fuel from the jet causes fire to spread quickly, a good portion of the school is catching on fire.



INITIAL INCIDENT cont'd

Bozeman Fire Dept arrives first:

A mass casualty incident is declared, and agencies and organizations from around the county, and region, are activated to assist.

It is quickly recognized that there are dozens of people hurt, with varying types and extents of injury; fatalities are inevitable.

Literally hundreds of people are around the periphery of Gallatin High, mostly students, but many are random onlookers.

Social media spreads information rapidly throughout the community, some accurate, some far less so.

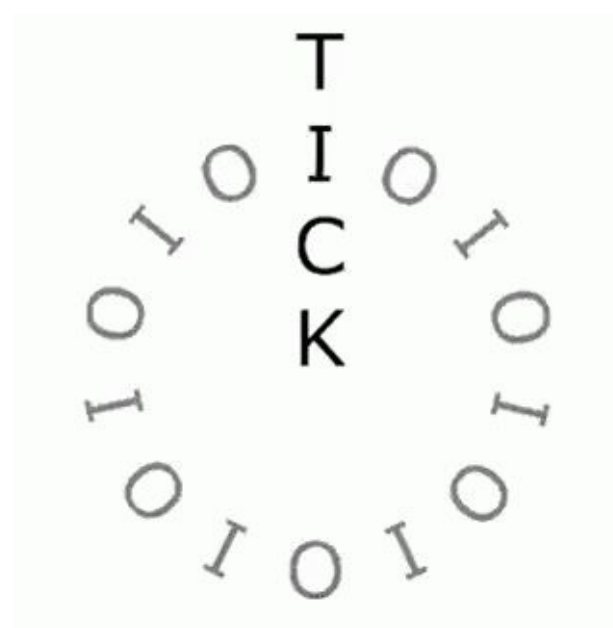
The first Bozeman FD Battalion Chief on scene quickly recognizes the need to link up with a school administrator.

INITIAL INCIDENT

School Impacts

- Seriously Injured (red)- 42 students, 8 teachers, 2 staff.
- Significantly Injured (yellow)- 67 students, 5 teachers, 4 staff.
- Minorly Injured, mobile (green)- 85 students, 20 teachers, 9 staff.
- Fatalities: six students perish while on the way to, or shortly after arriving at, hospitals. Three of these were during MedFlights to Salt Lake City, Denver, and Seattle. Two teachers, one a substitute, expire while enroute to Idaho Falls.
- No one has heard anything from teachers or students who were in the two classrooms that were struck directly.
- Parents are reaching out to teachers and staff by any means possible: cell phone, social media platforms, email. In particular, parents are arriving in the area by vehicle; traffic flow in western Bozeman grinds to a crawl.

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS: 25 MINUTES



INJECT 1

Cell towers in the area are completely overwhelmed 15 minutes after the impact; no calls can be completed, and text messages are delayed significantly, at best.

Landlines are still function.





INJECT 2

Media.

Reporters from a variety of local news outlets arrive on the scene quickly. Their locations for taking video are very close to the school, they are attempting to interview students, and they would like a press release from the School District as soon as possible.

INJECT 3

Staff from Bozeman Health Deaconess needs to speak with someone from the high school who can put them in touch with parents; they need consent before many of the students can be treated. They also need help identifying, and then notifying parents of, three deceased students. Other hospitals begin calling with similar needs.



REPORT OUT

1. What decisions did you face? What were your actions?
2. What are you anticipating, what are your next steps?
3. What questions were raised, challenges faced? What are your unmet needs?

TRIGGER POINT 2

**TIME OF INCIDENT
+ 2 HOURS**

OPERATIONS AND ACTIVITY

- A unified command of Fire Dept, Law Enforcement and Emergency Management leaders is established near the school to coordinate the response.
- Fire trucks still need access to school; they are experiencing delays getting through parent traffic; the fire is **not** controlled.
- Same for ambulances; over 100 patients still need transport.
- Street Dept is trying to place signs and barricades for access control.
- MEDIA. Want spots for footage; blocking access; interview requests.

A team is working to set up the reunification center. Staff tasked with accountability estimate an initial **450 people unaccounted for**, including 2 teachers and a staff member. Parents are having difficulty getting to the reunification center; when they do get there, they are highly emotional, difficult to manage, and demand answers.

Several District staff and High School admin formed a team at the hospital. They are having initial success connecting parents with their injured children at Bozeman Health Deaconess, as well as the other facilities utilized.



TRIGGER POINT 3

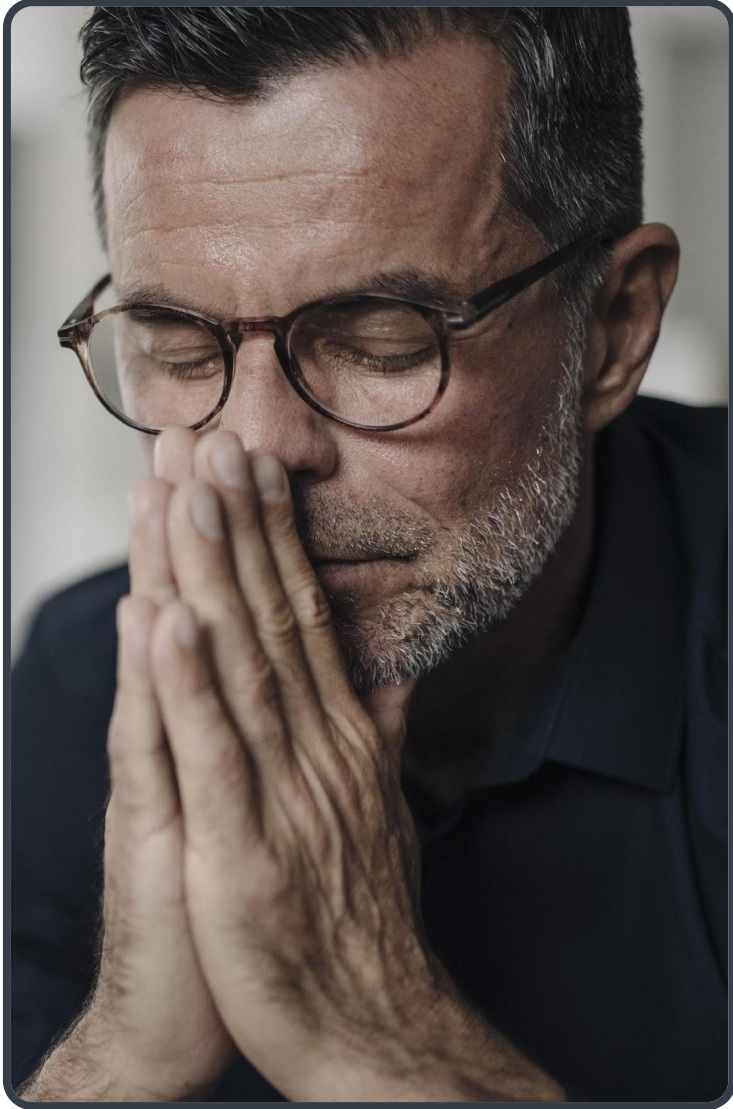
**TIME OF INCIDENT
+ 6 HOURS**

STATUS OF OPERATIONS

- Reunification center is coming together; many families have been brought back together even though the center is not fully fleshed out yet.
- The team has a better grasp of accountability: 175 (173 students, one teacher, one staff) people whose whereabouts are unknown.
- As time has gone on, there begins to be realization by some parents that their children may not have survived.

-Firefighting operations are ongoing; spread of the fire has slowed. Fire Command hopes to have fire controlled within the next few hours. However, it is not yet safe to search for victims in the two classrooms.

-All patients requiring transport to a medical facility are gone from the scene. The District team at the hospital is close to being overwhelmed, but has worked in close collaboration with hospital staff and is making good progress in identifying



INJECT 7

A parent at the Reunification Center has been escalating throughout the day, frustrated by a lack of information. He becomes violent, and assaults the a school staff member that has been trying to help him.

In general, the parents that are left at the Center are highly emotional, exhausted, and need additional support.

INJECT 8

As the active fire decreases, firefighters are able to search and clear areas closer to the initial impact site. They clear some debris from a doorway and discover five students who were trapped in a storage room. They all sustained some smoke inhalation and other minor injuries, but are otherwise ok.



TRIGGER POINT 4

Firefighting operations are ongoing; spread of the fire has stopped. Fire Command hopes to have fire controlled within the next few hours. However, it is not yet safe to search for victims in the two classrooms.

Forward teams from the FAA, NTSB and FBI are in the valley. Some are at the airport, and some are at Gallatin High School. They are using drones to begin to inspect the site; unofficial reports are that they have indicators of numerous deceased persons in the upper level of the school.

HOT WASH

A Hot Wash, or debriefing, is a facilitated discussion held immediately after an exercise, event or incident among response participants. Discussing response action immediately following the incident ensures strengths and weaknesses of the response are addressed accurately.

- Strengths identified in the response
- Areas for improvement identified in the response
- Potential for future hazards derived from the event or associated psychological impacts

AFTER ACTION

The After-Action Meeting is a facilitated meeting held among exercising or response organizations to debrief the exercise or incident and to review and refine the draft After- Action Report/Improvement Plan. The After-Action Meeting should be an interactive session providing attendees the opportunity to review items from the Hot Wash, and to collaborate on collective strengths and areas for improvement from the response.

Corrective actions to address areas for improvement will be identified at this meeting, as well expected completion dates and responsible parties for these corrective action. Corrective actions are concrete, actionable steps that are intended to resolve capability gaps and shortcomings identified in exercises or real-world events. Corrective actions will be one of the following categories:

- | | | |
|---------------|------------|-----------|
| *Equipment | *Exercise | *Training |
| *Organization | *Personnel | *Planning |

Improvement Planning

Following the After Action Meeting an After-Action Report and Improvement Plan is developed.

The Improvement Plan identifies specific corrective actions, assigns them to responsible parties, and establishes target dates for their completion. Corrective actions should be tracked and continually reported on until their completion.

Responsible parties will review and verify all corrective actions under their control.

Questions?

Survey Link

