



Frequently Asked Questions for Statewide Plan Criteria

General

Q: Why are plans referred to as “Statewide plans” and not “state plans”? Is there a difference?

A: Plans are referred to as statewide plans because they should incorporate the perspectives and support of all stakeholders from across the state. Although the Governor’s Office acts as an umbrella organization for the effort, statewide plans should employ a “bottom up,” as opposed to a state-driven “top down,” effort. Because local emergency responders are the ones who will be most affected by the Statewide Plan, it is critical to develop a plan that meets their needs most effectively and receives their support.

Q: What benefits are states and their local communities expected to get out of this process?

A: The process of creating a consensus-based statewide interoperability plan involves an investment of time and resources. Benefits to states include gaining the perspectives and support of many different stakeholders at the state and local level to create a strategy that is both attainable and sustainable. The process of developing a statewide plan will help local governments and the states determine a prioritized set of initiatives that will lead to coordinated improvements in statewide interoperability and that will guide the investment of resources for a maximum return on investment.

Q: What are the national goals towards which states are supposed to develop their statewide plans?

A: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s mission is mitigation of threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences that stem from acts of terrorism and natural disasters. It views this responsibility and commitment as shared with local, tribal, state and Federal governments, as well as the private sector. The Federal Government has established national goals that are intended to strengthen preparedness in the United States and to guide how local, tribal, state and Federal governments invest DHS’ and their own resources in order to achieve the greatest return on investment for our Nation’s homeland security. The goals are based on risk-based priorities. Statewide plans support a number of these national goals, including the National Preparedness Goal, the National Incident Management System (NIMS), and the National Response Plan.

The National Preparedness Goal identifies “Strengthen Interoperable Communications” as a priority goal. (See page 13, section 3.2.2 of the National Preparedness Goal at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/docs/InterimNationalPreparednessGoal_03-31-05_1.pdf.)

“Interoperable Communications” is also number 18 on the Target Capabilities List on page 7 of the same document. Interoperable Communications is explained more fully in the Target Capabilities List: Version 1.1, pages 17-21 at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/docs/TCL1_1.pdf.



Q: How much detail is required for the statewide plan in response to the criteria?

A: The amount of detail you include may vary according to the subject matter. In general, include as much detail as possible for each section and criteria element to better guide interoperability planning efforts across your state and with your state partners. The statewide plans generated out of this effort should include meaningful initiatives, goals, and performance measures that can be leveraged across the state to guide the allocation of funds for interoperability.

Q: Will the Federal Government provide guidance for completing statewide plans?

A: The DHS SAFECOM program has supported the National Governors Association (NGA) along with the National Public Safety Telecommunications Committee (NPSTC) in conducting a Statewide Planning Workshop scheduled for March 2007. Teams from all 50 states, U.S. Territories and Washington, D.C. will convene to work on their statewide plans with technical assistance provided by NGA and SAFECOM.

A number of tools, such as the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan, version 2.0 (SCIP 2.0), the *Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook*, as well as a template, will be available on the SAFECOM Web site (<http://www.safecomprogram.gov>) as of March 2007. Additional technical assistance may be provided by the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) at DHS.

Q: How does someone from my state sign-up for the Statewide Planning Workshop?

A: The Workshop is by invitation only through the Governor's office for your state. If you would like to make your interest in attending known, contact your Governor's office.

Q: Will a template be provided for statewide plans?

A: A *Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook* will be released in March 2007 and posted on the SAFECOM Web site (<http://www.safecomprogram.gov>). The *Guidebook* provides explanations of the criteria and guidance on how to write the Plan as well as a recommended outline for states to apply to their statewide plans. Additionally, a template based on the recommended outline is being developed and will be provided on the SAFECOM Web site.

Q: Will SAFECOM set up an e-mail distribution list to send out the Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook?

A: No. An electronic version of the *Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook* will be available on the SAFECOM Web site at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov> in March 2007. The *Guidebook* will also be made available to statewide planning teams at the NGA and NPSTC Statewide Planning Workshop in March 2007.



Q: How is DHS going to use the statewide plans it receives?

A: DHS will assess the plans for strengths and weaknesses and provide feedback to states.

Q: Will DHS provide a way for states to ask questions and receive answers on statewide plans and the criteria?

A: A repository of information on statewide planning, the criteria, and Frequently Asked Questions will be established on the SAFECOM Web site at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov>. To send a question and receive an answer, please send an e-mail to SandT.OICstatewideplanning@hq.dhs.gov.

Q: My state is in the early stages of planning for interoperability. What should we do first?

A: SAFECOM recognizes that states are in various stages of planning for interoperability and suggests using a phased-in approach to planning to implement the plan over time. The first step SAFECOM recommends is setting up an appropriate governance structure. The *Statewide Interoperability Planning Guidebook* provides additional information on steps to take.

Background and Preliminary Steps

Q: My state does not have a full-time Interoperability Coordinator and we do not have plans to create such a position. Does this mean that my state will be ineligible for DHS funding?

A: To be eligible for funding, DHS requires states to have submitted completed statewide plans by December 31, 2007. SAFECOM has found that having an Interoperability Coordinator is a critical success factor for states implementing their plan on a timely basis. If your state does not have a full-time Interoperability Coordinator, you should include your plans for creating the position. Alternatively, if your state does not intend to plan for a Coordinator, explain what position within the state has been charged with the responsibility to implement interoperability efforts and how they will staff implementation of its statewide interoperability plan.

Q: Will the Federal Government provide funding for the position of full-time Interoperability Coordinator?

A: States may use 15% of 2007 State Homeland Security Program (SHSP) grant funds to support a Statewide Interoperability Coordinator. Refer to SHSP section C.6 Personnel (page 46), and Chapter III, Section E.6 Personnel (page 36) for guidance. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/odp/docs/fy07_hsqp_guidance.pdf



Strategy

Q: What if neighboring states (or countries) are not prepared to enter into an interoperability plan with our state?

A: The statewide plan should include your approach for developing interoperable communications plans to coordinate with neighboring states or countries at their current state of readiness. In cases where a plan for coordination with neighboring states and, where applicable, countries, does not exist, the state plan should provide a course of action to begin to develop such a plan and a timeframe for the plan.

Q: The criteria indicate that statewide plans should include a strategy for data interoperability as well as voice. What if our system does not include data?

A: The statewide plan should include your plans for incorporating data in the future. If your state system does not currently include data, you should describe how you plan to develop data interoperability efforts in the future and the timeframe for this effort.

Q: How often will states have to submit statewide plans?

A: States will need to submit statewide plans to DHS at least every three years.

Methodology

Q: Is using the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) methodology a requirement?

A: Use of the SCIP methodology (SCIP 2.0) is not a requirement but is recommended as a tool for including local, multi-jurisdictional, multi-disciplinary input, and building local support for the plan. The criteria identify those inputs as necessary for development of a comprehensive statewide plan. Because the local emergency responders are the ones who will be most affected by the statewide plan, it is critical to develop a plan that meets their needs most effectively and has their support. The SCIP methodology 2.0 is available for download at www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFEKOM/tools/scip/default.htm.

Governance

Q: My state does not have a formal governance body. Does DHS require one to receive DHS funding?

A: SAFECOM has found that statewide interoperability planning and implementation are best achieved with the oversight of a formal governance body. Establishing a formal governance body should be the first step that states take in developing their statewide plans. A governance body is important for a number of reasons, among which is that it helps officials at the local and state levels identify who should be involved and how decisions among these stakeholders will be made. A detailed methodology for establishing a governance structure is contained in the



Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan methodology version 2.0, available as of March 2007 on the SAFECOM Web site at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov>.

If your state does not currently have a governance body, you should describe a strategy for creating one, the timeframe in which it will be completed, and how you will manage the interoperability effort in the interim.

Technology

Q: Is using the CASM tool a requirement? If so, how do we access it?

A: No. At minimum, you must collect the type of radio system, data and incident management systems, the manufacturer, and frequency assignments for each major emergency responder organization within the state. Ultimately more detailed information will be required to complete the documentation of a migration strategy.

Some states may chose to use CASM. The CASM tool is available through the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) at DHS. Once the CASM process is established for the state, access to the system will be provided through accounts managed by your State Local Administrative Manager (LAM). The processes for use of CASM in statewide planning and for the position of State LAM are being defined. Information on these processes will be forthcoming.

For more information on CASM, please send an email to CASM-support@spawar.navy.mil.

Q: My state is focused on achieving basic operability in local jurisdictions rather than on introducing newer technologies. Does this mean that I cannot meet these criteria in my statewide plan?

A: DHS realizes that some states are focused on achieving operability across local jurisdictions more than managing technology refreshment. However, the desired result or goal for requiring the statewide plans is to ensure that states have an approach for how they will achieve interoperability. All agencies inevitably adopt new technologies over time and this strategic plan will guide them in maintaining communications interoperability over time. You should describe a detailed approach for how your state will manage technology lifecycles that affect interoperability.

Standard Operating Procedures

Q: Do we need to develop SOPs before we complete the statewide plan?

A: Having SOPs in place prior to completion of the statewide plan would be ideal. If your state has not developed SOPs, describe a process for how the SOPs will be developed, managed, maintained, upgraded, trained, exercised and communicated, as well as which agencies will be



involved. Describe how you will ensure NIMS compliance in terms of the Incident Command System (ICS) and preparedness.

Training and Exercises

Q: Will training and exercises be needed in order to complete the statewide plan?

A: No. Training and exercises are not needed to develop a statewide plan that meets the criteria.

Q: Will DHS provide funding for training and exercises?

A: State Homeland Security Program grant funds may be used to fund training and exercises.

Usage

Q: How can I meet the criteria for usage in my statewide plan?

A: The statewide plan should describe a process or a strategy for achieving regular usage on a statewide basis in the future that includes the timeframe in which this criterion will be met.

Funding

Q: Will leaving some sections of the statewide plan incomplete hurt our chances for receiving DHS funding?

A: If there are sections of the plan that you cannot address, give the reason why and describe how and when it will be completed.

Q: Will the Federal Government provide any funding for completing statewide plans?

A: There are no Federal grants specifically targeted for completing the statewide plans. State Homeland Security Program grant funds may be used for this purpose.

Q: What is the rationale for requiring statewide plans given the limited resources available to support this effort?

A: Statewide planning will help states create a strategy for achieving interoperability that is comprehensive and best meets the needs of stakeholders across the state. The plans will help states to develop a prioritized list of initiatives to guide investment of precious resources that maximizes return on investment. The statewide plans will also help DHS identify national priorities and where to allocate Federal resources to communities and states.



Q: Will DHS help identify sources of Federal funding that may be available to states?

A: A list of many, though not all, of the Federal grant programs for states is listed on the SAFECOM Web site at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov>. See Grants and Funding.

Q: Will SAFECOM provide information on how states around the country have achieved a comprehensive funding strategy?

A: Funding strategies and information are contained on the SAFECOM Web site under Grants and Funding at <http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFECOM/library/grant/>. It includes reports on *Funding Strategies* and *Funding Strategies Best Practices*, among others, developed from experiences with states around the country. In particular, it includes reports on the funding strategies pursued by Nevada and Kentucky during the Regional Communications Interoperability Pilots (RCIPs) that SAFECOM conducted with them.

Implementation

Q: How do performance measures differ from critical success factors?

A: Performance measures are usually quantifiable elements that can be used to track the ongoing performance of interoperable communications initiatives. Examples might include rates of response, percentage of downtime, number of responders or agencies trained, results of formal surveys, exercise evaluations, rates of adoption of model procedures, growth in shared systems, percentage of agencies participating with governing bodies, etc. Critical success factors are often qualitative elements or milestones which are necessary for the project or initiative to be successful. Examples might include the creation of a joint dispatch center, upgrades to standardized technology, or the presence of a governance body.

Q: Will states be required to implement statewide plans as soon as they are completed?

A: Statewide plans should adopt a phased-in approach to implementation that identifies milestones and deadlines over time. DHS recognizes that states are at very different stages of the planning process. Some plans may need to be refined and others will be ready for immediate implementation. States will receive suggestions on the strengths and weaknesses of their plan from a peer review panel at DHS. After taking those comments into consideration, states should be ready to begin implementation of their plans.

Review and Evaluation of Plans

Q: Will the quality of the plan dictate whether it receives DHS funding?

A: To receive DHS funding, states must submit completed statewide plans that address the statewide planning criteria. DHS will offer comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the plans to states.