



# **KC RICE-SLICE '18**

## **After-Action Report**

*FEMA Region VII*



**FEMA**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Kansas City, and St. Louis Executive Boards exercises are intend to build upon ongoing efforts to evaluate, test, and exercise the agencies continuity capabilities, including no-notice exercising and external evaluation of the Federal Community's continuity programs. The Continuity Exercise demonstrated the ability to activate an agency's Continuity of Operations (COOP) and evaluate continuity plans and reconstitution procedures. The purpose of the exercise was to test the Federal community's ability to activate, mobilize, and commence initial emergency Continuity of Operations under guidance outlined in the Federal Continuity Directive 1, federal statutes, Executive Orders, and Agency plans in response to a severe emergency that affects the Kansas City and Saint Louis metropolitan areas.

KC RICE-SLICE '18 focused on a severe winter storm with cascading effects, which occurred July 25 at 0800 (CDT). The storm targeted Federal, State, Local government facilities and private organizations across Kansas City and St Louis Metro areas. The incident degraded local response capability and severely degraded the Federal agencies capability to perform Essential Functions and Activities at the respective Primary Operating Facilities.

Overall, KC RICE/SLICE '18 successfully provided a learning environment that presented an opportunity for agencies to review their continuity plans and procedures, interact with other agencies, and reinforce the need for robust continuity planning, training, and exercises. This report will analyze the exercise results, identify strengths, and identify potential areas for further improvement.

### Major Strengths

The major strengths of the KC RICE/SLICE '18 exercise are as follows:

Senior leadership was able to convene and make the decision to COOP to their alternate sites.

The accountability process was coordinated across the region for all personnel.

D/As identified no gaps in performing PMEFs at their alternate facilities.

### Areas for Improvement

The evaluators identified the following opportunities for improvement:

There was a lack of ENS notification at the beginning of the exercise, which caused some confusion on the STARTEX.

D/As indicated that there needs to be more training conducted at alternate sites.

The use of acronyms hindered the communication process and delayed the submission of some documents.

## GENERAL ANALYSIS OF KC RICE-SLICE '18

As the regions continue to enhance and mature their continuity programs and response and recovery capabilities, they also should continue to identify, document, and incorporate best practices and lessons learned.

During this exercise, various Department and Agencies (D/As) Evaluators and Controllers identified several strengths and areas for improvement. As Lessons Learned Advisors and other Continuous Improvement Program personnel work with the region to conduct root cause analysis, develop corrective actions, and build an Improvement Plan for this After-Action Report (AAR), they should consider whether these items are best practices or lessons learned to share across Region VII.

### Objective 1: Utilize Activation Process and Trigger Decision Making Processes

#### Strengths

**Strength 1:** D/As activated COOP Plans based upon the recommendation from the COOP Manager to Senior Leadership. Senior leaders convened to aid leadership in making the decision to COOP to their alternate facilities or implement telework as necessary.

**Strength 2:** Leadership was fully engaged with the exercise and activated COOP based upon the incident and recommended actions. This allowed for great communication with employees, which aided in the successful completion of each objective.

#### Areas for Improvement

**Area for Improvement 1:** The lack of ENS notification confused participants, controllers, and evaluators on the initial start of the exercise. Members compensated by pushing out their own message to notify personnel of the COOP event. The ENS message did finally go out; however, it was not marked as an exercise document.

### Objective 2: Conduct COOP at Alternate Facilities and Work towards Reconstitution.

#### Strengths

**Strength 1:** D/As identified no gaps in conducting PMEFS at alternate facilities. All personnel knew where to go and what their role was in completing the PMEFS. They were able to test the interoperability of communications and IT systems.

**Strength 2:** D/As have embraced the telework concept. It has supplemented and enhanced the capability to complete PMEFS. Telework has become a useful tool to assist Leadership when making decisions on COOP activation.

#### Areas for Improvement

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**Area for Improvement 1:** D/As need to conduct training with both their primary and alternate ERG members. There were gaps in the knowledge that the alternates had and need to be addressed or conduct more training.

**Area for Improvement 2:** Some D/As indicated that there is a need for more training once they arrive at the COOP Site on setup. Once they were setup, they were able to perform the PMEFs.

### Objective 3: Provide Situational Awareness to Organizational Stakeholders.

#### Strengths

**Strength 1:** D/As used the Common Operating Picture (COP) to gain awareness, which provided the operating status of the D/As. Some of the D/As provided FEMA Region VII a Quick Look and Continuity Status Report form.

**Strength 2:** D/As provided Situation Report to internal and external stakeholders and employees. This kept everyone informed on what the status was of the COOP activation.

### Objective 4: Conduct Accountability for the Impacted Area.

#### Strengths

**Strength 1:** Web-based tools supported the simultaneous and collaborative sharing of real-time operational updates within the D/As and with ERG/non-ERG members. The accountability was coordinated effectively across the Region for all personnel.

#### Areas for Improvement

**Area for Improvement:** The discussion to activate Orders Succession and Delegation of Authority was driven by the leadership having to step out of the exercise. This process should be established prior to a COOP activation to ensure a smooth transition of authority.

### Objective 5: Discuss/Initiate Operational Coordination Across Organizational Internal/External Stakeholders.

#### Strengths

**Strength 1:** D/As initiated coordination with FEMA Region VII and GSA to provide operational status, COOP activation, and Reconstitution status. The D/As indicated internal coordination was complete by communicating the damage assessment to leadership to aid in COOP activation.

#### Areas for Improvement

**Area for Improvement:** D/As discussed the use of acronyms as a hindrance in the communication between each other and leadership. Need to reduce the use of acronyms in future exercises.

## APPENDIX A: AGENCIES FEEDBACK

The responses captured in this section are from the Agencies in the Region VII KC RICE-SLICE '18 Exercise.

### Kansas City

#### Agency Specific Objectives

##### A. General Observations

- The exercise afforded the D/As the ability to test our abilities to function under trying conditions while still executing our mission.
- In general, the exercise went well and staff were able to perform MEFs without any difficulty while at their alternate or telework sites.
- All D/As received and responded to injects. The layout allowed some time with issues to give proper thought and implement the decision making processes into injects for some D/As, while others struggled and didn't get through all the injects.
- The exercise went well and received positively by all D/As.
- Need a better understanding of our role (as compared to the contractors on site)
- Some D/As indicated they need more training and to exercise to ensure everyone on the ERG is familiar with the COOP Plan and facility.
- We need to ensure we are engaging our stakeholders - HQ, State and local level.
- There was discussion on what to do with mail and where each D/A would retrieve it if not able to get it at their Primary Operating Facility.

##### B. Exercise Structure and Flow

- With the first inject being the day prior; the discussions and convening of leadership happened with the first inject to make the decision to activate the COOP Plan. This set the stage for the next day to arrive at the COOP facility to initiate the setup to be able to perform PMEFS.
- HUD-Suggested adding a row to the MSEL to alert D/As when they need to submit documentation to other internal/external partners.
- CBPO-Indicated the flow of the exercise was better than in previous years and it was a great learning experience.
- USACE-The exercise went well, but was unable to get through all the general injects, as they tailored the injects to their organization to meet the exercise objectives. The Commander was engaged and wants to be more COOP centric.
- SSA-They do not have the capability to use telework in their COOP activation, however thought it might be beneficial to explore for the future.

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- CMS-Indicated the exercise was good because they were able to implement their telework as part of the COOP activation.
- TSA-The exercise went as planned and communication was good between divisions in the organization. The injects were vague; however it added value to stimulate or foster communications.

C. Preparation for the Exercise

- Exercise preparation began early enough to allow D/As time to ensure their COOP Plans were complete.
- The preparation allowed for the D/As to ensure their organization and personnel were ready for the COOP Activation.
- The Controller/Evaluator training allowed personnel the skills and knowledge to ensure the exercise met the objectives.
- The documentation and MSEL provided the information to drive the scenario, which led to successful completion of the exercise.
- D/As indicated that they would like to see more exercises in the future.

D. Participation in the Exercise

- We feel this is very important and push folks to participate even if the “time is not right” or the “right folks are not available.”
- The D/As that participated indicated the exercise was a success; however, we had fewer people participating this year and want to encourage more participation in the future.
- Many D/As developed specific injects to exercise to ensure their agency could fully meet the exercise objectives.
- Participation was at a level consistent with other training we conduct. Leadership indicating training is important to them sends the message that it should be important to their subordinates. Leader involvement encourages participation, and executive level guidance and feedback promotes long-term ownership and participation.
- The D/As indicated that the exercise was taken seriously, which ensured realism with the scenario and ensured exercise objectives were met.

E. Strengths Observed

- The exercise aided in open discussions between the D/As internal/external customers.
- The MSEL drove the major injects and they improved and added injects into the scenario.
- The exercise allowed for D/As to become familiar with the forms

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- Accountability was coordinated effectively across the region for all personnel.
- Situational awareness materials were readily accessible and disseminated.
- Personnel were able to successfully use GETS/WPS and have satellite phones for key staff.
- Alternate facilities were able to be utilized.
- Pre-information exercise and inject information was helpful to make decisions.

F. Weaknesses Observed

- Ensuring everyone has access to all of the resources is vital and should have been less of an issue.
- Mixed coordination and engagement levels between agencies could have been more prominent to allow a more real world communication and collaboration environment.
- Redundant communication lines are needed, to include POTS lines.
- The alternate facility had some space and functionality issues to include backup power issues.
- Some D/As realized that they didn't have contact information readily available.
- D/As were concerned about how to handle the distribution of the mail if we have an event that leaves our facilities in accessible.

**Conclusion**

A. Exercise Takeaways

- The exercise was more beneficial this year than it has been in the past and D/As want to have more exercises.
- D/As want to build on what they have learned from this exercise and implement a more robust COOP Program.
- D/As want build on the community participation to include agencies outside of their organization.

B. COOP training or practice procedures

- This was a plausible scenario and allowed the D/As to implement their COOP Plans and transition to their COOP Facilities.
- The injects were well developed that allowed for the D/As to discuss options on addressing the situation.
- The exercise allowed most D/As to practice their relocation and telework procedures, to allow for a real COOP Activation in the future.

C. Additional Comments

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- The exercise went great and leadership were fully engaged.
- The flow of the exercise was better this year with MSEL and injects.

## St. Louis

### Agency Specific Objectives

#### A. General Observations

- To exercise CBP COOP during natural disaster the effectiveness of current COOP.
- GSA was able to partner with St. Louis East, increasing their range of play and involvement.
- FSIS was able to use this tabletop exercise to review FSIS lab procedures.
- Train on Roles and Responsibilities of all personnel during an interruption event.

#### B. Exercise Structure and Flow

- The exercise had good flow.
- This exercise was done differently than others I have been involved with in the past.
- Look at the future to grow from this tabletop to develop a full scale exercise (FSE).
- Ideally, a successful exercise uncovers and documents problems. Once the problems have been fixed, consider running a follow-up exercise to ensure the repairs work.

#### C. Preparation for the Exercise

- Continuity Manager getting certified as a Level I and II practitioner.
- Having hard copy of COOP, EOP, and Annexes in hand instead of scrolling through a hard drive.
- Practice, we need to be more active with drills (random) to correct any gaps and improve our COOP. A new environment requires a different approach.
- ICS 300/400.
- The exercise establish a plan performance baseline, outlining the primary objective to ensure that the plan works when it's needed.
- Look at conducting semi-annual exercises, this will help basic exercises that test specific elements to be test right away. An annual exercises takes too much time (usually 90+ minutes) to refresh individuals on continuity procedures.
- This tabletop allowed for active adjustments to be made in the COOP plan.

#### D. Participation in the Exercise

- The exercise gave us the opportunity to demonstrate coordination of our resources and reinforced our plans for necessary communication and function.
- This exercise will help FSIS to participate in full scale exercises in the future.

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E. Strengths Observed

- This allowed for open discussion for accomplishment and process improvements.
- Provided a chance for D/A COOP Manager to educate Senior Leadership on COOP Procedures
- Alternate facility was able to be discussed and utilized.
- Individuals were able to gain knowledge of plan.
- This allowed the COOP Plan to be readily available, easy to read and discuss.
- This exercise was more realistic than the previous year.
- Quickly recognized the need and updates required for our new facility layout.

F. Weaknesses Observed

- No communications towards improvement.
- Not having hard copy of COOP Plan hindered the exercise.
- The COOP Plan needed to be updated
- Do not conduct exercises quarterly/annually.
- IT Infrastructure
- Need to establish communications with partners.

**Conclusion**

A. Agencies Takeaways

- D/As are looking to have a Full Scale Exercise in the future.
- Have more agency involvement
- Know what other D/As are participating, this would allow for D/As to communicate with one another and exercise/review interagency MOUs/MOAs.
- Focus on diversity instead of D/As response
- Would like to see an exercise on how D/As would respond to a highway/bridge closures in Saint Louis
- How to implement the COOP and communicate with outside agencies
- Increase drills, audits, more decision based on staff, accessibility, and operators involved in the exercise. Wait for orders coming from the OFO
- Have an ADVON for full COOP Activation at the alternate facility
- FSIS has determined that there are redundancies in micro-analysis procedures and gaps exist at the Chem site

B. COOP training or Assistance Needed to Strengthen the Exercise

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- This exercise was better for COOP Planners. Having a small scale exercise allowed planners to build off this exercise and work with leadership.
- Avoiding complex situations will allow for the exercise to flow as needed, to test procedures outlined in D/As COOP Plan

C. Additional Comments

- Revise and participate in being more active in new facility for changes & improvements
- D/As will determine effectiveness of current COOP
- Good approach as an Agency to reflect and make improvements

## **APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

The responses captured in this section are from the Participants in the Region VII KC RICE-SLICE '18 Exercise.

### **Kansas City**

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat	Moderately	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-exercise information and briefings were relevant, easy to understand, and helped prepare me for my role in the exercise.			5%	35%	60%
KC RICE/SLICE 2018 exercise documentation was useful in preparing for and participating in the exercise.			5%	35%	60%
The exercise scenario was plausible and realistic.				20%	80%
Exercise participants included the right people in terms of level, experience, and respective functional area/organization.				25%	75%
Participants were actively involved in the exercise.		5%		20%	75%
Exercise participation was appropriate for someone in my field and with my level of experience/training.				25%	75%
Exercise play lasted for an appropriate length of time and was sufficient to carry out discussions and simulate decision points.			5%	50%	45%
After the exercise, I am better prepared to deal with the capabilities and hazards addressed.			5%	30%	65%
After this exercise, I believe my organization is better equipped to respond to a severe winter event.		5%	5%	25%	65%

**St. Louis**

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat	Moderately	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-exercise information and briefings were relevant, easy to understand, and helped prepare me for my role in the exercise.			8%	48%	44%
KC RICE/SLICE 2018 exercise documentation was useful in preparing for and participating in the exercise.			8%	44%	48%
The exercise scenario was plausible and realistic.				40%	60%
Exercise participants included the right people in terms of level, experience, and respective functional area/organization.			4%	12%	84%
Participants were actively involved in the exercise.		4%		16%	80%
Exercise participation was appropriate for someone in my field and with m level of experience/training.			4%	28%	68%
Exercise play lasted for an appropriate time and was sufficient to carry out discussions and simulate decision points.			8%	48%	44%
After this exercise, I am better prepared to deal with the capabilities and hazards addressed.			4%	40%	56%
After this exercise, I believe my organization is better equipped to respond to a severe winter event		4%	8%	36%	52%

1. What is the most significant thing that you learned from the exercise?
  - D/As would like to see more exercises in the future
  - The exercise design encouraged more in depth discussions, which helped drive the exercise to meet the objectives
  - The flow of injects in the MSEL was better this year
  - Remove the use of acronyms in exercise products, as all acronyms do not mean the same to different organizations
  - Need more injects that require interagency participation, which will help make the exercise more realistic
2. Decision-making and Implementation
  - Knowledgeable staff and staff felt more prepared in responding COOP procedures than in the past exercises, this helped out in responding to triggers
  - Key and essential personnel were present at the Alternate Location so decision-making and the implementation of those decisions were seamless. Injects and format of the exercise allowed the controller/facilitator to guide the participants towards our identified FEB and agency objectives. Leadership felt confident we can activate, report to our COOP site, and begin executing our Mission Essential Functions (MEF)
  - The senior leadership met and received course of action recommendation. The Regional Administrator reviewed the situation and was able to identify the Active Trigger to activate COOP
  - Pre-information exercise and inject information was helpful to make decisions
  - Management supported the exercise
  - This was a good exercise for ERG members. The Regional COOP Plan was followed and participants cooperated well together. The right personnel were involved in the exercise, providing a good opportunity for teamwork. The discussion of injects was beneficial and decisions were made in an expeditious manner
3. Reporting and Situational Awareness
  - Accountability was coordinated effectively across the region for all personnel. Situational awareness materials were readily accessible and disseminated
  - Our Crisis Management Team understood the importance of employee accountability. General injects, as well as agency specific injects, supported accountability procedures. Our team utilized several platforms to gain accountability throughout the exercise. Senior Leader guidance prioritized accountability as task #1, closely followed by employee situational awareness

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- Learned and practice filling out new forms to update HQ, GSA, and FEMA. Exercised provided an opportunity to update the employee contact listings and ensure each office had a cascade of their employees
- Emergency Notification System worked well throughout the exercise
- This was the first year CBP tried to report in. I am sure it could have been done better, but it was a good thing to add in to the exercise as it would need to be done
- Personnel appeared to have a good understanding of the COOP process and took responsibility for their functional areas. As experienced in this exercise and prior years, reporting was more difficult for teleworkers

4. Inter- and Intra-Agency Coordination

- GSA coordinated with internal and external partners effectively. Several components of outside agency participation allowed for GSA to test processes and plans internal for Reconstitution that are not easily challenged to test
- Intra-agency coordination was uninterrupted at our alternate location. Participants had computers and cell/satellite phone to conduct our daily operations in support of MEF completion. Our agency did not conduct any Inter-agency coordination
- Provided an opportunity to clarify programmatic duties. Also, provided an opportunity to reach out to internal and external stakeholders
- Simulated, as this would primarily be handled by our HQ office
- GSA was able to assist with find a vault
- Participants worked well together and strong working relationships led to smooth coordination process

5. Resilience of Communications and Information Technology Systems

- Personnel were able to successfully use GETS/WPS and have Satellite phones for key Staff Service Offices to continue MEFs
- Communication systems were adequate. Our Alternate Location has knowledgeable on-site IT support. Couple that support with applications on our computer for communication and access to file system (regardless of physical location) and we feel confident we could execute our MEFs in a COOP environment
- Highlighted the importance of doing a pre-survey of the Alternate Location to ensure comm and info systems were working and compatible with laptops. Allowed for 100% check on GETS cards and how to use them
- Worked well, and back-up system are in place
- Communications worked very well. I believe that because our Airport IT systems are so new we would have been fine at that location

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- Onsite systems for the site worked well and limited IT support was needed. We had a very short power outage in the area that highlighted the importance of backup information needed on jump drives and the ability to use off-net tools

6. Alternate Facility

- The Alternate Facility was available
- Our Alternate Facility is able to function in about 4 hours. It is about 35 miles away so its off the same “grid” as our HQ, but still easily accessible. Space was appropriate for a 30 member Emergency Relocation Team (ERT)
- Highlighted the need to secure building and other security measures to implement. The ERG team evaluated the alternate location based on power grid, distance from primary operating facility, and amenities to support personnel for long periods of time
- Tested COOP capabilities at 3 alternate site locations
- Our Airport Office is the office where the majority of officers are assigned, it has full functionality other than the vault
- Personnel felt the site was well prepared for the COOP exercise. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> time we used this facility and the setup was conducive to COOP activity. The drive to Topeka is approximately 1 hour from the KC Metro area and our furthest offsite COOP location, but personnel were able to participate onsite with minimal disruption

7. Additional Comments

- The design team put in many dedicated hours to create the players handbook, controllers handbook, MSEL, and exercise design spreadsheet. Kudos to them! This helped me personally as a COOP Coordinator and it significantly increased our preparedness and will ultimately improve operational capability in a disaster situation
- Consider an “instruction” sheet for all new COOP facilitators so they know their roles and responsibilities. In that instruction sheet, have a timeline for actions/events and identify the “action officer” for each action. I am not sure everyone understood they did NOT have to cover every inject. Likewise, Controllers need to understand they have a “literary license” with respect modifying injects. Consider a power outage for next year’s KC-RICE in light of SHAKEN FURY '19 since KC-RICE will be about 7 weeks post SHAKEN FURY and this would be consistent with power outages associated with earthquake aftershocks
- Possibly a centralized SIMCELL to allow participants to play and can then enhance the cross agency coordination to provide a single place to call and work through issues as if they were real time to D/A’s that are not participating
- ERG participants indicated the event was well organized, well planned, and appreciated the teamwork exhibited throughout the event. Improving the exercise

for off-site participants was mentioned several times, so the ability to hear, participate, and communicated could use improvement for teleworkers

## APPENDIX C: EXERCISE PARTICIPANTS

KC RICE '18
Customs and Border Protections
Federal Railroad Administration
Federal Transit Administration
Food and Drug Administration
Federal Protective Service
General Services Administration
Housing & Urban Development
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
Social Security Administration
Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USCIS NBC
USDA RMA
USCIS NRC
Veterans Administration

SLICE '18
General Service Administration
National Geospatial Agency
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
USCG Sector Upper Mississippi River
USDA FSIS OPHS Midwestern Laboratory

### Number of Participants

- 20 agencies & organizations
- ~ 333 Participants
- ~ 185 alternate sites (including telework locations)

Of the 20 agencies that participated in KC RICE-SLICE '18, (65%) provided input to this

AAR.

**APPENDIX D: ACRONYMS**

Acronym	Term
AAR	After-Action Report
CCTA	Complex Coordinated Terrorist Attack
COOP	Continuity of Operations
D/As	Department and Agencies
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
ENS	Emergency Notification System
ERG	Emergency Relocation Group
ERT	Emergency Response Team
FOB	Forward Operating Base
HSPD	Homeland Security Presidential Directive
ICS	Incident Command System
IT	Information Technology
IM	Instant Message
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GETS	Government Emergency Telecommunications System
GSA	General Services Administration
LFA	Lead Federal Agency
MEF	Mission Essential Functions
MSEL	Master Scenario Events List
NCSC	National Customer Service Center
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
PMEF	Primary Mission Essential Functions
SimCell	Simulation Cell