

Field Operations Guide Best Practices

Introduction

During the Joint SAFECOM and National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) in-person meeting held in October 2016, the NCSWIC Planning, Training, and Exercise (PTE) Committee identified the need to compile best practices for developing a Field Operations Guide (FOG). Before developing the document, the committee surveyed NCSWIC members on best practices and lessons learned during their states FOG development. Using responses from the survey, the committee developed this best practices guide for developing a FOG. This document is intended to serve as a resource for Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWIC) and/or state governing communications bodies who are beginning the process of developing or updating a FOG.

Best Practices for FOG Development

A total of 12 respondents completed the NCSWIC PTE survey on best practices for developing a FOG. The following best practices include the information shared by those respondents and the information gathered during in-person PTE committee discussions held on May 3, 2017, and November 7, 2017.

Before starting the FOG development process the following key questions should be considered:

- What is the purpose and objective of the FOG?
- Is the FOG a supplement to the National Interoperable Field Operations Guide (NIFOG)?
- What gaps will the FOG fulfill?
- What communications need to be actively monitored?
- How will this information be shared?
 - o Are hard and soft copies of the FOG required?
 - o What are the print specifications?
 - o What is the cost per printed copy?
 - o How many responders in your state/territory will need a FOG?
 - o How often will the information be updated?

The majority of survey respondents utilized the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) Branch to develop their state's FOG, while others developed their FOGs internally or used a contractor. In all cases but one, the SWIC or deputy SWIC was involved in the FOG development process in various capacities, including:

- Acting as the point of contact (POC) between the state and the DHS OEC ICTAP personnel
- Determining the scope of the FOG
- Gathering information and data needed for the FOG
- Coordinating with federal, state, local, and tribal partners to include their information (frequencies, site locations, etc.)
- Providing input for the layout of the FOG
- Leading the effort with the contractor developing the FOG

Most valuable lessons learned while developing the FOG include:

- Coordinate and collaborate with key individuals (e.g.: communications managers, radio-techs, COML/COMTs) who are subject matter experts on systems
- Ensure the FOG information is correct and conduct an independent review
- Gather local input, including state specific standard operating procedures (SOP) and information
- Develop the FOG in a functional format for first responders and COMLs to use in the field (including the size and fit of the bound version in responders' pockets)
- Review the NIFOG and combine data as needed with state FOG
- Add blank pages in the appendix for updates to avoid re-printing the entire FOG; or use inserts for the entire FOG to allow for one page to be easily updated

Individuals/entities that should be involved in the development of the FOG:

- All state and local agencies
- Additional support staff for collecting information
- Information technology (IT) personnel
- Tribal partners
- Dispatch center staff, AUXCOMM and secondary communications stakeholders (e.g. hospitals and others who are starting to play a bigger role during emergencies, as it relates to communications)

Best practices for methods of collecting data for a FOG:

- Data call to public safety agencies and Council of Governments
- In-person meetings or workshops
- Use existing maps, data, SOPs
- Review Communications Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM) 1 (ensuring updates are complete)
- Tactical Interoperability Communications Plan (TICP)
- Coordinate with the SWIC and regional interoperability committees

Best practices for utilizing the NIFOG information in a state FOG:

- Review NIFOG and utilize the information in state FOG; as needed
- Add 10 blank pages to NIFOG to allow states to input information if a state does not have their own FOG
- Use both printed and online copies of NIFOG

Best Practices for FOG Development

FOG survey respondents also provided feedback on elements of a FOG. Important data points that should be provided in a FOG include:

- Instruction on how to use the FOG
- Current contact lists for each system
- State and regional interoperability resources and POCs
- Frequency information
- Interoperability resources, talkgroups, and public-safety answering point (PSAP) information for specific counties
- State-level information
- Tribal information
- Ensure proper nomenclature is used for interoperability channels

¹ OEC ICTAP Branch or Coordinators can provide information about updating CASM and TICP entries that reflect the most current data for frequencies, talk groups and other communications information prior to starting to assemble data for a state FOG.

Other information to consider incorporating includes:

- Overview and purpose
- Federal systems and operations interdependent with other systems and operations
- Digital application format for use on mobile devices
- Information on memorandums of understanding (MOU) for federal channels
- Consider an independent review to ensure accuracy of the final draft before going to print to alleviate error

Hard versus Soft Copies of the FOG—When deciding whether to print the state FOG or only provide it in a soft copy there are several things to consider, including:

- Providing the FOG electronically, or within an application, allows the FOG to be accessible to everyone who needs a copy
- Electronic copies can be updated as needed
- During a power outage, or in an instance where recharging a laptop or cell phone battery is not possible, only having an electronic copy may create issues with accessibility to the FOG
- Hard copies of the FOG can be provided at the scene of an incident

FOG Formatting

- Some agencies use a format similar to the NIFOG. It has advantages of being pocket size but cannot be changed once it is printed
- Some agencies have a larger format which has interchangeable pages with clear sleeves. While it is larger it provides the option of changing a single or multiple pages
- The NCSWIC PTE Committee can provide examples of printed FOGs and information on print specifications, types of paper, binding, sizing and layout
- Include checklist on both the front and back cover pages for quick reference and accessibility

Additional Resources

The resources below were identified as tools that complement or may assist in the development of a state FOG.

DHS OEC ICTAP Resources

OEC services are supported by Federal funding and are provided at no cost. Funds are limited, and OEC, in collaboration with requestors, will prioritize which requests can be accepted and which may have to be deferred. SWIC may download the [TA/SCIP Request form](#) and complete it at their workstation and submit it electronically as instructed on the form. Upon receipt of the submission, an email with all information from the completed form will be sent to OEC with a copy to the requestor to verify the submission. <https://www.dhs.gov/ictapscip-resources>

NIFOG

The NIFOG is a technical reference for emergency communications planning and for radio technicians responsible for radios that will be used in disaster response. The NIFOG includes rules and regulations for use of nationwide and other interoperability channels, tables of frequencies and standard channel names, and other reference material, formatted as a pocket-sized guide for radio technicians to carry with them. While the NIFOG is an interoperability tool, state FOGs include more specific information to an area, such as frequencies or other resources that can be used along an international border. <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/fog-documents>

CASM

The CASM Tool helps jurisdictions inventory their public safety emergency communications capabilities and assets and enables public safety organizations to share information on communication equipment.

<https://casmnextgen.com/login/LoginForm.php?IncomingURL=%2Fmaps%2FLocation.php>