



White Paper

Information Sharing Planning (ISP)

for Homeland Security

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Executive Summary

Today's global economy and security environment are increasingly interconnected. Organizations must continuously improve how they share information, and coordinate emergency responses during a crisis. Failure to do so can result in loss of life and assets. Notable examples of these kinds of communication breakdowns include the World Trade Center bombing of 1993 and the World Trade Center attack in 2001, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the global spread of Swine Flu in 2009.

This white paper articulates the need for developing information sharing plans and procedures. It then describes some of the challenges that organizations face after deciding to develop information sharing plans and procedures. Finally, it briefly describes the solutions that Mind-Alliance Systems, LLC offers to help organizations address these challenges and reap the benefits of a systematic Information Sharing Planning (ISP) process.

The Need for Security Information Sharing Plans

During a crisis, information rarely flows effectively within or between organizations that have not developed communication plans and exercised procedures.

As a result, information sharing governance and procedures are becoming key components of national strategies, standards, and plans governing critical infrastructure protection, border security, emergency response, incident management, and business continuity. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's "Project SAFECOM" identifies five factors that contribute to communications interoperability: usage,

training & exercises, technology, standard operating procedures and governance.

Experienced professionals recognize that communication technologies— radios, cell phones, email, pagers, Web portals, notification systems, incident management software—is vital, but is not sufficient to ensure success in crisis communication.

Organizations must also build actionable information sharing plans and procedures in order to reduce the risk of experiencing a breakdown in the flow of information.

Information sharing planning enables interconnected organizations to better understand each other's needs and capabilities.

Coordinating security and emergency response efforts increases their effectiveness.

Information sharing planning also enables organizations to better understand internal processes and external dependencies so steps can be taken to enhance resilience.

A framework for information sharing planning needs to support:

- Evaluating internal communication protocols
- Determining the information needs of external parties and agencies
- Assessing the flow of information between jurisdictions, levels of government, disciplines, and sectors
- Setting requirements for timely, accurate, secure and policy-compliant communication

A pre-crisis planning process must address questions such as:

- What information do I need to share; when and with whom?
- What information do I need to receive; when and from whom?

- What policies restrict or require information sharing?
- What information sharing issues can be identified and addressed ahead of an incident?
- What are the likely consequences of failing to share information?
- During exercises, did participants receive information in a timely manner?

Without a coherent framework or initiative, these questions rarely get answered or incorporated into procedures.

Information Sharing and Communication Planning Issues & Challenges

1. No Single Agency is in Charge

A fundamental impediment to homeland security is the absence of any single agency responsible for planning or leading a disaster response involving federal, state, local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector entities. Each organization has its own rules, roles, responsibilities, and interests. Not surprisingly, planning sessions that unite organizations from different disciplines and jurisdictions are held relatively infrequently. Organizations naturally seek to get their internal procedures in order before embarking on a joint-planning process with partners. As a result, the capability to develop multi-organizational information sharing plans still has not been systematically institutionalized, and efforts to engage in pre-event communication planning often get derailed by other priorities.

2. Improving Information Flow Across Organizations Demands Collaborative Leadership

Dynamic leaders are starting to recognize that information sharing and collaboration technologies can dramatically increase organizational intelligence and enable organizations to solve problems and make decisions more effectively. The idea of proactively defining and institutionalizing information sharing procedures is increasingly being recognized as a lever for more effective management, enhanced transparency and greater performance. That said, some managers still attempt to consolidate power and reduce accountability by controlling information.

3. Many Organizations Lack Documented Plans and Procedures Needed to Craft Information Sharing Plans

Often the inputs needed to develop information sharing plans and procedures – detailed knowledge of an organization’s mission and procedures – reside in people’s heads, in documents that are not readily accessible to the organization, or in another form that can only be shared with partners in a controlled manner.

4. Excessive Focus on Technology

The planning process must be led by agency leadership, planners and operations managers. Their planning processes are distinctly different from system integration requirements analyses done by IT architects in that it produces action plans and issues reports – not technical requirements documents.

IT departments are clearly needed to support software and hardware systems required for communication and information sharing. However, many organizations over-delegate responsibility for achieving situational awareness to IT departments tasked with handling the technical aspects of information

integration. Many issues that impede the flow of information are caused by the absence of planned procedures, rather than deficiencies in technology. In fact, speakers at Homeland Security conferences often state emphatically: “Technology is not the problem!”

It is now clear that planners and operational managers are responsible for defining information needs and “business” requirements, and for ensuring that procedures keep pace with the operating and regulatory environments. These management tasks encompass defining procedures and protocols, training stakeholders, and negotiating agreements, in addition to technology concerns.

A Process for Developing Actionable Information Sharing Plans

In order to develop plans and procedures that govern information sharing and communication during a critical incident, organizations need:

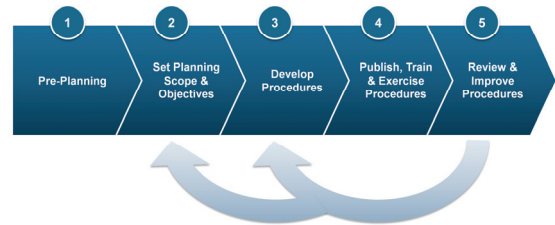
1. A rigorously defined conceptual framework and methodology for analyzing what information needs to be sent and received in order to perform tasks and mitigate risks.
2. A software support system for building information sharing plans that enables planners to manage all the inputs, and easily update plans to account for changes that occur when new personnel, systems and policies are adopted

1. Information Sharing Planning (ISP)

Information Sharing Planning (ISP) is a structured process developed by Mind-Alliance Systems for building information sharing plans and communication procedures. ISP combines principles of strategic and scenario planning

with capabilities-based planning, risk management and performance assessment.

Planners apply the ISP process in planning sessions, tabletop exercises, and after-action review both within their organizations and with partners.



In a 2006 project for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security conducted in New Jersey to analyze the flow of information in a mock plague outbreak, Mind-Alliance used the ISP process to discover gaps, bottlenecks, and delays in the sharing of information that would have cost thousands of lives in a real emergency.

To do so, a facilitator walked participants through each incident in an emergency event, and asked questions such as:

- Given this event and incident, what tasks do you need to perform to mitigate risks?
- What information do you need and do you produce when you do those tasks?
- From whom do you get that information? Are they the best or only source?
- To whom do you provide the information? How is it communicated? Is it provided upon request or pushed automatically?
- What policies, plans and restrictions govern the provision of the information?
- What technical means are used to deliver or obtain the information?

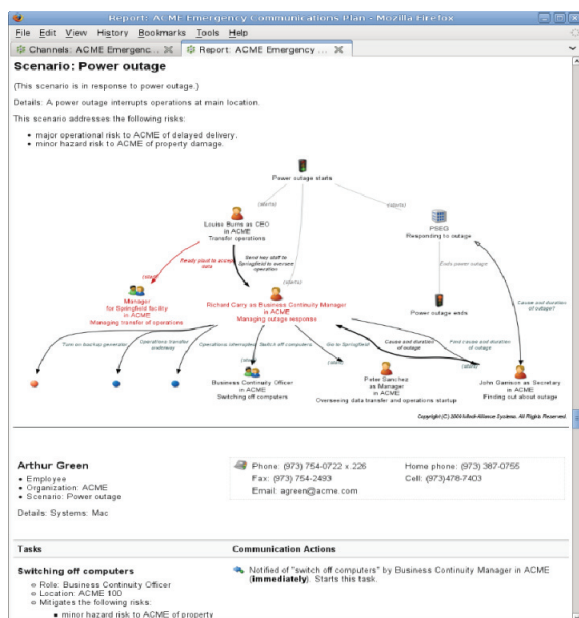
- What happens if you cannot obtain the information you need?
- How long, upon receiving a request for information, does it take to provide it?

The project also validated the need for software capable of managing and analyzing all the information gathered in the ISP process and used to build information sharing plans.

2. CHANNELS Software

CHANNELS enables organizations to collaboratively apply the ISP process. The software helps them to organize the information collected in interviews and group planning sessions and construct an information sharing plan. CHANNELS automatically analyzes the plan to identify improperly defined elements, uncover gaps, and point out weaknesses. It then extracts actionable and up-to-date information sharing procedures for each organization, role or individual.

The system also generates analytical reports and visualizations to make plans comprehensible and manageable.



Sample SOPs generated by CHANNELS software for power outage scenario.

Benefits of Information Sharing Planning

ISP provides homeland security organizations with a wide range of planning, operations and management benefits. Organizations get an opportunity to make the flow of vital information faster, policy-compliant, and more resilient – less likely to break down due to technical issues, human factors, or other reasons.

The enhanced understanding of a partner's information needs improves organizational intelligence and operational efficiency. This understanding is key to better directed, more timely operational information sharing, and leads to effective coordination and policy compliance.

Planning Benefits

- Develop better plans, exercises, after-action reviews and protocols, in much less time
- Verify that communication flow is embodied in protocols and capabilities before embarking on expensive exercises
- Improve compliance with regulations, planning frameworks, and internal policies
- Produce a single source of updatable records to document procedures

Operational Benefits

- Faster collection of information from other agencies and better directed external communication, as a result of clear protocols
- Enhanced coordination: Emergency operations centers (EOC) becomes more effective regional gateways for

emergency response situational
information

- Streamlined intelligence: Fusion Centers leverage document collection requirements and “essential elements of information” for threat analysis

Management Benefits

- Better integration of intelligence and decision making during a crisis
- Enhanced collaboration across units, jurisdictions and disciplines
- Reduced legal and regulatory compliance risk
- Smarter, risk-driven allocation of funding and resources to the most critical information needs
- Reduced institutional knowledge loss and disruption due to turnover of personnel and liaisons officers
- Faster turnaround time through anticipated requests for information from governors and other jurisdictions, disciplines, and sectors

About Mind-Alliance

Mind-Alliance Systems, LLC develops information sharing planning software to help public agencies and private enterprises improve their resilience, enhance their organizational intelligence and decision-making, and streamline business processes.

CHANNELS software provides organizations with the value of a proven systematic process and management system for finding and fixing information flow issues that would otherwise put safety, operational performance and compliance at risk.

To learn more about how **Mind Alliance** can help your region develop robust information sharing plans visit www.mind-alliance.com or call **1-888-731-6018**.