

Creating a Charter for a Multi-Agency Communications Interoperability Committee:

Template and Questions To Consider





Table of Contents

- Overview and Background..... 1**
- What Is the Purpose of a Charter Document?.....2**
- How To Use This Tool.....2**
- Section 1: INTRODUCTION3**
- Section 2: PURPOSE4**
- Section 3: AUTHORITY.....5**
- Section 4: OUTCOMES6**
- Section 5: SCOPE.....7**
- Section 6: OPERATING PRINCIPLES..... 10**
- Section 7: MEMBERSHIP 11**
- Section 8: DECISION MAKING 13**
- Section 9: LOGISTICS 14**
- Conclusion 14**
- Sample Appendix 1 15**

Communications Interoperability Continuum

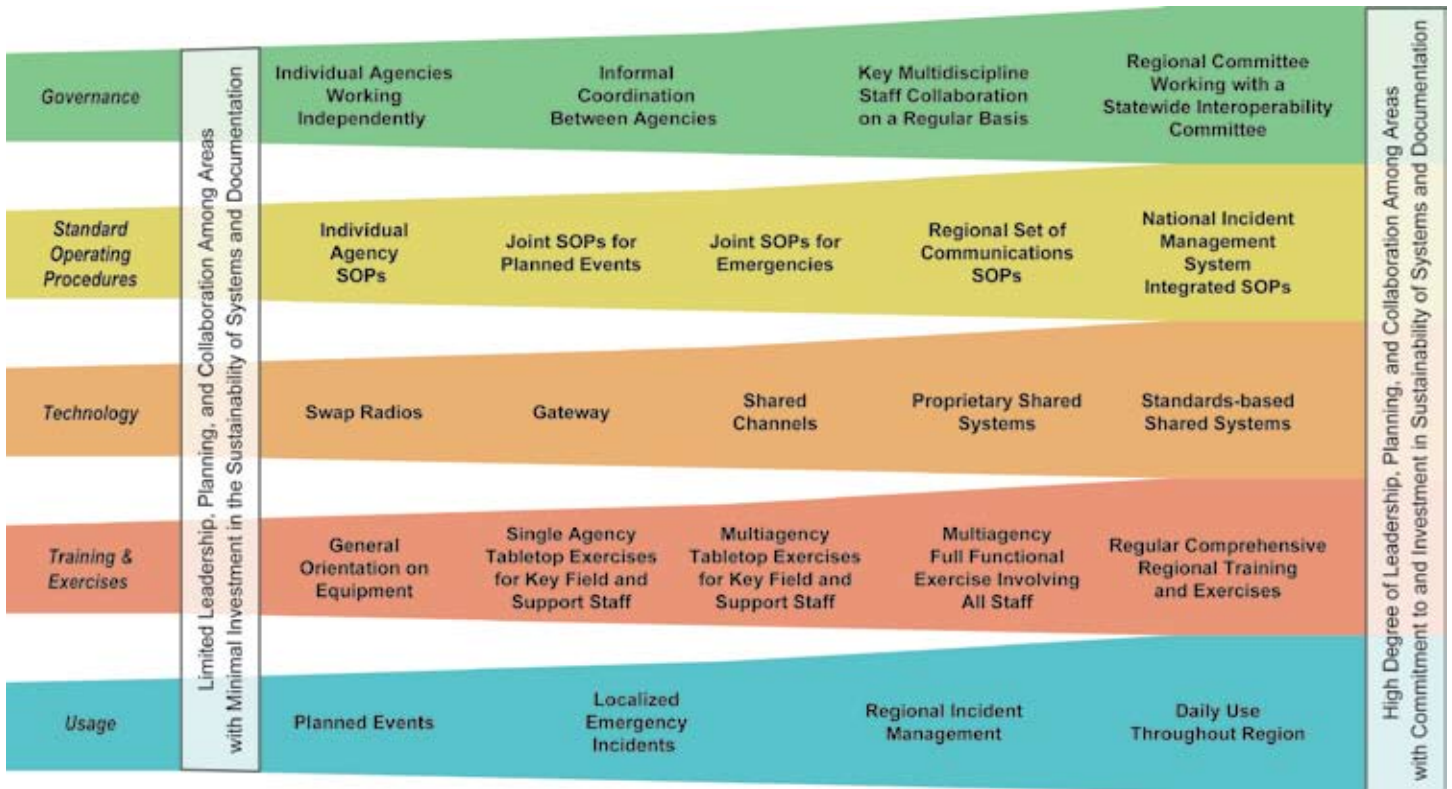


Figure 1

Communications Interoperability Committee Charter Template

Overview and Background

With its Federal partners, SAFECOM and Disaster Management (DM) provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies. As communication programs of the Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Interoperability and Compatibility, SAFECOM and DM are managed by the Science and Technology Directorate.

OIC helps the public safety community and local, tribal, state, and Federal policy makers address critical elements for success as they plan and implement interoperability solutions. OIC works with the public safety community to encourage a shift from a technology-centric approach to a comprehensive focus on improving interoperability. Although technology is critical for improving interoperability, other elements, including governance, standard operating procedures, training and exercises, and usage of interoperable communications, play a vital role.

To assist this shift to a comprehensive focus on interoperability, SAFECOM worked with public safety practitioners and local communities to develop a comprehensive framework called the Interoperability Continuum (see Figure 1).

SAFECOM developed the Interoperability Continuum in accordance with its locally driven philosophy and its practical experience in working with communities across the Nation. The Continuum visually depicts the core facets of interoperability according to the stated needs and challenges of the public safety community and aids the efforts of public safety practitioners and policy makers to improve interoperability.

One of OIC’s goals is to provide the public safety community with tools to improve all aspects of the Continuum. This tool focuses on the Governance element of the Continuum, specifically to help communities that are interested in creating a charter document for their multi-agency interoperability committee.



Purpose

A charter document describes the reason the group exists and establishes the ground rules of operation. It provides clarity and aligns a diverse group with a common purpose. When creating a charter, the group must agree upon key issues that determine how the group best achieves its desired outcomes. Issues include:

- Purpose
- Authority
- Outcomes or Deliverables
- Scope of Project
- Operating Principles or Decision Making Process
- Membership
- Management
- Logistics

How To Use This Tool

This tool is intended to be your guide for creating a charter for an interoperability committee or governance group. It is laid out in a recommended charter structure with suggested headings for each section. The tool outlines potential issues and questions that should be addressed when setting up a communications interoperability committee. The sample content provided is taken from a committee operating on a local regional level (i.e., multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency).

This document does not address every issue that local regions, states or jurisdictions may face when seeking to create a charter for an interoperability committee or governance group. Members of the committee or group should customize the charter to the committee's specific needs and requirements.



Section 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the most critical aspects to a successful multi-agency effort is a charter set of guidelines and principles for stakeholders to follow as they come together and work to tackle challenges outside the realm of their agency, discipline, or jurisdiction. Certain norms and principles must be in place to transform a new committee into a highly effective team with common goals. There must be clarity of purpose, leadership, established roles and responsibilities, and a strong foundation for making decisions.



Questions
to consider:

- ① Why is the group coming together? What are they committing to do?
- ② What is the outline of the charter? What are the major sections?



The *[state/local region]* Communications Interoperability Committee is committed to cooperatively addressing the challenge of communications interoperability. This document describes the purpose, authority, outcomes, scope, operating principles, membership, and management by which the *[state/local region]* Communications Interoperability Committee will achieve success.

Section 2: PURPOSE

When writing the purpose of the charter, communicate the committee's goals. The purpose section should explain who is establishing the committee (agencies, jurisdictions, etc.) and why. The problem statement and challenges facing the committee can also be addressed. Other content to consider includes:



Questions to consider:

- ① Why does this committee exist? What are its goals?
- ② What would happen if this committee failed to exist? What would happen if its goals were not met?
- ③ How will the group work together as a partnership? How will each individual agency and jurisdiction keep a regional focus?
- ④ For a regional committee, how will projects underway in each jurisdiction be aligned to a regional plan?
- ⑤ For a state committee, how will projects underway in each region be aligned to a state plan?
- ⑥ Whom does the group represent? How will the stakeholders be heard?

This committee exists to address the challenges facing interdisciplinary communications across multiple jurisdictions. It was established to create a centralized interoperable communications planning and implementation capacity for *[state/local region]*. The committee's goals are:

- *[Insert goal one]*
- *[Insert goal two]*
- *[Insert goal three, etc.]*

It is necessary for public safety organizations to communicate or share critical voice or data information with other jurisdictions in day-to-day operations, natural disasters, emergency response scenarios, and terrorist incidents. Failure to accomplish the mission in each situation can result in the loss of lives and property.

This committee exists to establish a partnership among *[list type of agencies involved. For example, public safety agencies, government agencies, etc.]* in order to enhance communications interoperability capabilities.

This committee provides a forum for each *[jurisdiction and/or agency]* to discuss related public safety communications initiatives that may or may not impact the work of this committee. This helps ensure individual projects have an opportunity to align with the regional plan.



Section 3: AUTHORITY

This section lists any legal directives or funding sources that give the authority to the chartered group to perform its prescribed tasks. This section should offer a brief description of the chain of command when the committee submits policies or proposals for review and who is authorized to act upon the committee's behalf.



- ① What is this committee empowered to do and under whose authority?
- ② To what body or office will this committee submit its policies, plans, and projects for approval?
- ③ What recommendations can be made by this committee and to whom?
- ④ What sources of funding will this committee identify for its projects? How will this be done?
- ⑤ Will the members of this committee be empowered by their jurisdiction or region's chief executive officer to act on behalf of the entire jurisdiction or region (for committee voting purposes) regardless of discipline or rank?



- A. This committee has the authority to evaluate the state of both current and emerging communications interoperability in the *[region/state/jurisdiction]*, create a plan for *[region/state/jurisdiction]* communications interoperability, oversee implementation of the plan, and develop appropriate policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- B. All policies, plans, and projects will be submitted to and approved by the *[insert office, position or approving body]*.
- C. This committee can make recommendations to help direct the use of *[insert type of funding]* funds earmarked for capital improvements and operational upgrades to improve *[insert scope of project, i.e. regional/statewide/etc.]* public safety communications and interoperability.
- D. This committee should identify additional sources of funding allotted through cross-discipline and cross-jurisdictional coordination.
- E. The members of the committee were selected by *[how were each selected]* and given the authority to *[insert authority granted to members by their jurisdiction/region]*. Although the individuals may come from one particular discipline within a jurisdiction or region, they will represent the overall interests of all disciplines in the jurisdiction or region while serving on the committee.

Section 4: OUTCOMES

This section describes committee objectives and implementation of these objectives. Objectives should be ambitious but realistic. When possible, the committee's objectives should be quantifiable so effectiveness and progress can be measured.



Will the committee:

- ① Conduct an assessment to better understand the current baseline of communications interoperability in the region?
- ② Form working groups around issue-specific tasks? What will their objectives be? How will they be held accountable?
- ③ Develop a Communications Interoperability Strategy and Spending Plan?
- ④ Manage implementation of a Communications Interoperability Plan or will it be passed off to another responsible party for implementation?
- ⑤ Be responsible for creation of the best practices, policies, procedures, and protocols for communications interoperability and incorporation of these into existing regional interoperability agreements?
- ⑥ Ensure the training of key communications personnel? How will training be made available?
- ⑦ Define success? Are there short- and long-term goals?

The desired outcomes that the committee will accomplish are listed below:

- A. Conduct an assessment to better understand the current baseline of communications interoperability in the *[region/state/jurisdiction]*.
- B. Task a working group to identify and recommend future technologies that will enhance the communications interoperability capability in the *[region/state/jurisdiction]*.
- C. Create a *[region/state/jurisdiction]*-wide Communications Interoperability Strategy and Spending Plan.
- D. Manage implementation of the Communications Interoperability Plan.
- E. Create *[region/state/jurisdiction]*-wide best practices, policies, procedures, and protocols for communications interoperability and incorporate them into existing regional interoperability agreements.
- F. Ensure the training of key communications personnel—especially dispatchers and dispatch center supervisors as well as technical communications support staff.
- G. Ensure training opportunities around communications interoperability are available to all necessary and authorized public safety practitioners.



Section 5: SCOPE

Figure 2 identifies the different areas that may need to be taken into account to enhance communications interoperability. It is important to note that scope may vary across states or regions. Additionally, not all of these elements must be addressed by a state or region at one time. Most interoperability efforts require a phased approach that include some areas in the initial effort and include other areas as progress is made and interoperability is enhanced.

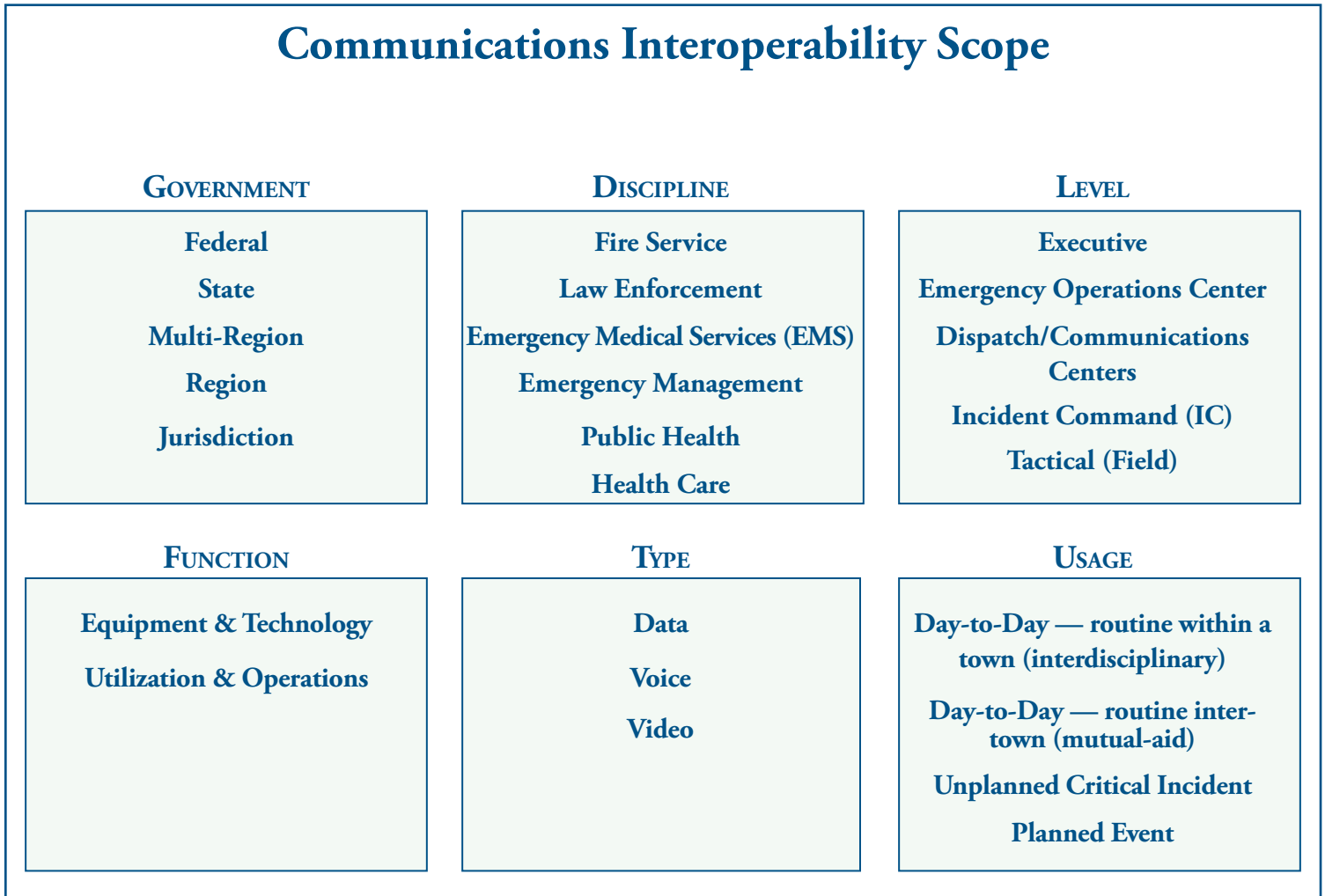


Figure 2

Section 5: SCOPE (CONT.)

Consider the issues outlined below when determining the scope and phased approach of an interoperability effort.

1. Government

Will this committee:

- Work toward identifying initiatives that improve regional/statewide public safety communications interoperability?
- Work with Federal and state agencies to prevent duplication of effort?
- Coordinate procurement decisions?
- Ensure that the recommendations in the state or other existing regional interoperability plans are being addressed?
- Coordinate with various multi-regional organizations and keep these organizations updated on the committee's actions?
- Address regional organizations that are not directly funded by homeland security grants and identify ways to coordinate activities through sharing of resources or technologies?
- Educate public officials to increase awareness and ensure the success of communications interoperability initiatives?

2. Inclusion

- Which disciplines/agencies will be included in the initial phase of the effort?
- Which disciplines/agencies will be included in future phases as progress is made?

3. Level

- Which levels (command, tactical, etc.) will be included in the initial phase of the effort?
- Which levels will be included in future phases as progress is made?

4. Function

Will this committee address equipment and technology (equipment procurement and maintenance) as well as utilization and operational components (authorization, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), IC, and training) of communications interoperability? In which phases will each be addressed?

5. Communications Type

Will this committee address voice, data and video communications interoperability? Will voice, data and video be addressed in different phases?

6. Usage

Which distinct levels of interoperability will be addressed and at what phases?

- Day-to-Day – Routine within a jurisdiction (interdisciplinary)
- Day-to-Day – Routine within various jurisdictions (mutual aid)
- Unplanned Critical Incident (interdisciplinary/inter-jurisdictional)
- Planned Major Event (interdisciplinary/inter-jurisdictional)

Section 5: SCOPE (CONT.)

A. Government

The committee will:

- Work toward identifying initiatives that improve *[regional/statewide]* public safety communications interoperability while understanding that there is the possibility that a *[jurisdiction-specific/regional]* initiative could improve the *[statewide/regional]* response.
- Work with Federal and state agencies to prevent duplication of effort. This includes coordination of procurement decisions.
- *[for regional planning]* Ensure that it addresses the various recommendations in the State Interoperability Plan.
- Coordinate with various multi-regional organizations including *[insert multi-agency organizations]*, and keep these organizations updated on the subcommittee's actions.
- Address regional organizations such as *[insert]* that are not directly funded by Department of Homeland Security grants, and identify ways to coordinate activities through sharing of resources or technologies.
- Use its relationship with the *[insert oversight body or office]* to educate public officials to increase awareness and ensure the success of communications interoperability initiatives.

B. Inclusion

The committee will initially focus on *[insert applicable disciplines]* and incorporate additional disciplines in future phases.

C. Level

The committee will initially focus on *[insert level(s) of command]* and incorporate additional levels in future phases.

D. Function

This committee will address the *[technology and/or operational]* components of communications interoperability. Technical means equipment procurement and maintenance. Operational means authorization, SOPs, Incident Command, training.

E. Communications Type

This committee will address *[insert voice and/or data and/or video]* communications interoperability.

F. Usage

This subcommittee has identified four distinct levels of interoperability to address:

- Day-to-Day – Routine within a jurisdiction (interdisciplinary)
- Day-to-Day – Routine inter-jurisdictional (mutual aid)
- Unplanned Critical Incident (interdisciplinary/inter-jurisdictional)
- Planned Major Event (interdisciplinary/inter-jurisdictional)



Section 6: OPERATING PRINCIPLES

This section describes the operating principles, how committee members will interact, the ground rules to be used during meetings, issues to be addressed, and standards for member accountability. Some examples are listed below as guidance.



- ① What are the rules under which this committee will operate?
- ② How will members be held accountable?
- ③ How will the committee be held accountable?
- ④ How will the committee balance regional, jurisdictional, state, and Federal interests?

- A. Consider each *[jurisdiction's/region's]* unique needs—recognize and respect them, and attempt to address them if they negatively impact *[regional/statewide]* communications interoperability capabilities.
- B. Think interdisciplinary.
- C. Use a phased approach. Do not attempt to solve all the problems at once.
- D. Ensure all strategic initiatives fit within the desired future goals and strategy.
- E. Identify matters within the committee's control, and apply resources toward those matters rather than areas that are not within the committee's control.
- F. Coordinate a *[regional/state]* strategy with the other *[regional/state]* interoperability strategies.
- G. Identify a balance between infrastructure and subscriber unit needs.
- H. Distribute the responsibility of managing communications interoperability so that it does not rest on any one individual, agency, or technology.
- I. Ensure the *[region/state]* takes on a collaborative approach in dealing with the issue.
- J. Stay aligned with other *[regional and/or state]* systems.
- K. Avoid acronyms and codes to eliminate confusion or misunderstanding.
- L. Speak with one voice when reporting externally.
- M. Do not lose the sense of urgency that 9/11 brought to this issue.
- N. Keep the issue of communications interoperability in front of politicians as they are elected and administrations change.
- O. Though both voice and data interoperability are within the scope of the committee, work toward achieving voice interoperability solutions across disparate systems in the short term (2-3 years out).
- P. Consider security concerns during the planning of future communications solutions.



Section 7: MEMBERSHIP

This section should list and describe committee membership and organizational structure. This section should be aligned with operating principles described in the previous section.



- ① What is the leadership structure?
- ② What are the roles and responsibilities?
- ③ Who will be voting members?
- ④ What will be the process for naming alternate voting members if regular voting members cannot attend?
- ⑤ Will there be advisory and ad hoc members?
- ⑥ Is there a “term of office” or is membership open-ended?
- ⑦ How are members elected/re-elected?

Examples are outlined below:

- A. The following disciplines will represent this committee:
 - Law Enforcement
 - Fire Service
 - Emergency Medical Services
 - *[insert others disciplines]*
- B. The following jurisdictions will be represented on this committee: *[insert jurisdictions/regions]*
- C. Voting members are to be responsible for representing their *[jurisdiction/region]*. If a voting member is unable to attend a committee meeting, an alternate voting member from that *[jurisdiction/region]* may be appointed for that meeting. The voting member must notify the committee chair prior to the meeting that an alternate has been designated to represent him/her at the meeting. Without such prior notification, the alternate will not count when determining if a quorum has been established or be allowed to participate in votes during the meeting.
- D. Advisory members are part of the committee by virtue of their position and ensure that all disciplines are represented in the committee. These members are required to attend all committee meetings and provide feedback to the voting members for decision-making purposes. However, they will not vote. Additionally, a number of regional and state agencies provide advisory members to represent the views of their organization and provide coordination for implementing aspects of the *[regional/state]* communications interoperability plan.
- E. The committee may add ad hoc members as necessary. These members may come from local (including surrounding jurisdictions), regional, state, tribal, or Federal public safety agencies or planning organizations. They may sit on the committee on a temporary basis as needed.



Section 7: MEMBERSHIP (CONT.)

Table 1 is an example of official positions created to manage efficient operations of the committee. In addition, examples of terms, requirements, roles, and responsibilities for each position are listed below.

Sample Committee Leadership Roles and Responsibilities				
Position	Executive Sponsors	Committee Chair	Committee Vice Chair	Administrative Support
Term	Determined by Region	1 year – no term limits, but must be re-nominated each year	1 year – does not succeed the chair at end of term	Continuous
Requirements	Determined by Region	Can be any member of the committee (Voting or Advisory)	Can be any member of the committee (Voting or Advisory)	Position is dedicated to the committee
Roles and Responsibilities	<p>Enable committee to perform its objectives by allocating all available resources and mitigating controllable challenges.</p> <p>Consider input from the committee when making all decisions regarding communications interoperability.</p> <p>Provide oversight, guidance, and authority.</p> <p>Ensure coordination with other elements of a regional Homeland Security strategy.</p> <p>Hold committee members accountable for implementation of the communications interoperability strategy.</p>	<p>Provide leadership for the committee.</p> <p>Coordinate with the Executive Sponsor to ensure that the committee has all of the resources required to achieve its mission.</p> <p>Act as a liaison and present the findings and recommendations of the committee to regional decision making bodies or offices.</p> <p>Run decision-making and voting processes of the committee.</p> <p>Ensure that committee meetings adhere to principles set forth in the charter.</p> <p>Determine the agenda of committee meetings.</p> <p>Ensure outreach and communications, as defined in the charter, are implemented.</p> <p>Notify the regional decision-making body or office if a voting member from its jurisdiction does not regularly attend/participate during committee meetings.</p>	<p>Perform the role of committee chair when the chair is not available to attend a meeting.</p>	<p>Provide logistical and secretarial support for committee meetings including:</p> <p>Provide meeting preparation of documents.</p> <p>Provide meeting location.</p> <p>Provide meeting notes and post meeting documentation.</p> <p>Provide meeting materials.</p> <p>Provide food (as necessary).</p> <p>Assist committee chair with coordination of regional leadership.</p> <p>Coordinate with Federal programs.</p>

Table 1

Section 8: DECISION MAKING

This section can outline how the operating principles will be used in a managerial capacity. Though executive members may alternate, rules for membership and accountability should still be enforced.



Questions
to consider:

- ① What will be the decision-making process for the committee's regular business as well as amendments to the governance charter itself?
- ② How will the committee bring an issue to a vote?
- ③ How will the committee account for alternate voting members?
- ④ What will quorum requirements be?
- ⑤ What will each member be accountable for?
- ⑥ What are the reporting requirements and procedures?
- ⑦ How much notice is required before a vote on regular business or charter amendments? Is the notice period the same for both?

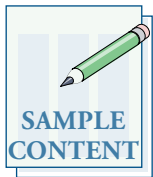
A. Committee Decision Making Process

- Each *[jurisdiction/region]* has one vote to be cast by its voting member. If the voting member is unable to attend, the alternate voting member will cast the vote for the *[jurisdiction/region]*.
- Simple majority rules. All decisions and recommendations approved by a simple majority will be considered a decision or recommendation of the committee when presented to the *[authorizing body or office]* for consideration. As much as possible, the majority opinion will be reflected. Committee members are free to express to their *[authorizing body or office]* how they voted/stood on the position.
- A two-thirds majority vote is required for charter amendments.
- Quorum will be met when *[#]* out of the *[#]* voting members (or their designated alternates) are present. If a sufficient quorum is not achieved, votes will be tabled.

B. Committee members will be held accountable through their *[authorizing body or office]*. The *[authorizing body or office]* has the final decision in all matters related to committee participation

C. Decisions and recommendations of the committee will be reported to the *[authorizing body or office]* through the committee chair.

D. This committee will report status, actions, and recommendations to a larger audience through following a communications plan developed in partnership with *[authorizing body or office]* management. This communications plan will be developed independent of this charter.



SAMPLE
CONTENT

Section 9: LOGISTICS

This section should describe the administrative responsibilities of the committee. Though these considerations may appear minor when creating a charter, a well-thought-out schedule with expectations can save time and money.



- ① How often will the committee meet?
- ② Where are meetings to be held (schedule for meetings to be hosted each jurisdiction/region)?
- ③ What are the expectations of the hosting jurisdiction/region?
- ④ Is there a record of contact information of committee members and meeting facility locations?



- A. The committee initially will meet biweekly in order to establish a *[regional/statewide]* communications interoperability plan. Once the plan is completed and approved, this committee will meet as necessary to implement the initiatives set forth in the plan.
- B. Committee meetings will take place every other Friday for two hours, from 10 a.m. to noon.
- C. The committee will meet at facilities provided by each *[jurisdiction/region]* on a rotating basis. A list of each *[jurisdiction's/region's]* facilities is provided at the end of this document. The location for the next meeting will be determined at each meeting based upon availability from the list.

Conclusion

For any area or region to improve communications interoperability, collaboration and participation of pertinent public safety stakeholders in a governing body is essential. A formal governance structure provides a unified front across multiple jurisdictions and disciplines within a particular political constituency, which can aid the funding, effectiveness, and overall support for communications interoperability. A charter is important because it defines the group's purpose, mission statement, authority, desired outcomes, operating principles, and management. It is SAFECOM's hope that this guide for a creating a charter for a multi-agency interoperability committee helps practitioners establish the partnerships and authority necessary to achieve an effective governance structure.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) in 2004 to strengthen and integrate interoperability and compatibility efforts in order to improve local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response and preparedness. Managed by the Science and Technology Directorate, OIC is assisting in the coordination of interoperability efforts across DHS. OIC programs and initiatives address critical interoperability and compatibility issues. Priority areas include communications, equipment, and training. As communication programs of OIC, SAFECOM and DM, with its Federal partners, provides research, development, testing and evaluation, guidance, tools, and templates on communications-related issues to local, tribal, state, and Federal emergency response agencies.



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