

Kentucky Regional Communications and Interoperability Pilot

Statewide Strategic Planning Session Follow Up Report

**Frankfort, KY
December 14th, 2005**



Executive Summary

The Commonwealth of Kentucky's Office of Homeland Security is partnering with the SAFECOM Program to develop a statewide strategic plan for communications and interoperability. To accomplish this, SAFECOM conducted a series of seven (7) focus group sessions throughout Kentucky to gather the diverse perspectives and experiences of public safety practitioners. On December 14th, 2005 a full day strategic planning session was held that leveraged the information gathered during the focus group sessions. The goal of the meeting was for Kentucky's public safety community to collectively develop a recommended strategy for improving statewide communications and interoperability.

During the session, participants identified the following recommended strategic initiatives:

Near Term

- Achieve near 100% statewide coverage for all first responders' voice and data communications networks
- Implement Existing Statewide Interoperability Efforts
- Optimize 911/Dispatch Services while maintaining community oriented communications dispatch
- Establish a Governance Body to lead the Commonwealth's Interoperability Efforts

Long Term

- Build a Statewide Public Safety Communications and Interoperability System

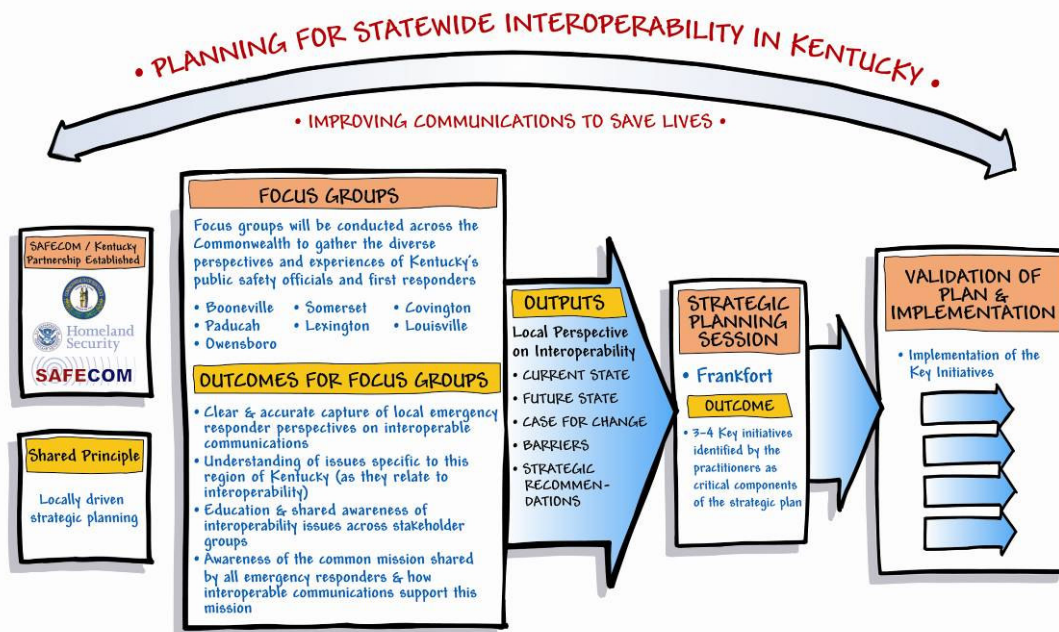
This report details the results of the Strategic Planning Session that was held on December 14th, 2005. In addition to the identification of the above strategic initiatives, participants also discussed the current state, case for change, future state, and barriers to achieve the desired state of communications and interoperability in Kentucky [see Appendix B]. As mentioned above, these insights will contribute to the overall strategic initiatives considered for the Kentucky Statewide Strategic Plan for Communications and Interoperability.

Introduction

The Commonwealth of Kentucky's Office of Homeland Security is partnering with the SAFECOM Program to conduct a regional pilot project that will lead to the development of a statewide strategic plan for communications and interoperability in Kentucky. Using the definition developed by the SAFECOM Program, interoperability refers to the ability of public safety agencies to talk across disciplines and jurisdictions via radio communications systems, exchanging voice and/or data with one another on demand, in real time, when needed, and as authorized. The SAFECOM Program, a public safety practitioner-driven program, provides guidance and assistance for local, tribal, state, and federal public safety agencies working to improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable communications. The involvement of local and state emergency responders is critical to the success of developing a Statewide Strategic Plan for Communications and Interoperability that meets the needs of public safety.

SAFECOM is guided by the input of local and regional public safety practitioners as it works to define and implement interoperability plans and solutions. To that end, SAFECOM conducted 7 focus groups throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky. These sessions were comprised of law enforcement, fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and other agencies that provide critical support during incident response. In addition to the 7 focus group sessions, a final meeting, the strategic planning session, was conducted to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups. The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM brought a locally driven strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and strategic planning session.

Figure 1 – Kentucky Strategic Planning Process Map



The desired outcomes of the strategic planning session were as follows:

- ❑ Public safety's recommendations to the Commonwealth on how to improve voice and data communications across Kentucky
- ❑ An enhanced sense of community among statewide public safety practitioners in Kentucky

Each focus group session was designed as a series of conversations centered on the following issues: interoperability (statewide and regional) as it relates to the current state, the case for why change needs to happen, the envisioned future state, barriers to achieving the future state, and a recommended strategy to pursue. During the Strategic Planning Session, the conversations from all seven focus group sessions were consolidated and presented back to the public safety community for validation. The remaining pages include a detailed overview of the conversations that took place at the Strategic Planning Session in Frankfort, Kentucky, on December 14, 2005.



Detailed Overview – Strategic Planning Session

Current State

The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts regarding current interoperability capabilities and needs in Kentucky. During the focus group sessions, participants were asked to discuss the “what is” of communications and interoperability in Kentucky with regards to response efforts spanning day-to-day operations through catastrophic events.

The Strategic Planning Session participants (a list of participants is included as Appendix A) were presented a consolidated list of their current state conversations, and they validated the following Current State themes specific to communications interoperability in Kentucky:

- *Overall*
 - First responders cannot communicate across jurisdiction and discipline during emergency incidents and day-to-day operations. For example:
 - Many local agencies cannot communicate directly with other agencies day-to-day and during emergencies
 - Often times first responders of the same discipline cannot communicate with one another within the same county
 - Many local law enforcement agencies cannot communicate directly with state and federal agencies
 - Many law enforcement agencies cannot communicate directly with fire departments in the same county
 - The National Guard cannot communicate directly with most local and state first responders
 - Public safety uses an assortment of old and new technologies, which has led to a lack of communications and interoperability
 - Training for public safety communications does not meet practitioner needs, especially as technology becomes more complex
 - DHS grant funding is focused on regional solutions, and public safety agencies have a greater opportunity to get that funding if they work together
 - Spectrum is a finite commodity
 - The public safety community is battling with commercial entities for control of existing frequencies
 - The public safety community is battling each other for control of existing frequencies
 - Mutual aid incidents occur in Kentucky
 - Day-to-day as well as catastrophes
 - Catastrophic risks include: large venues with economic implications, international airports, the New Madrid fault and other natural disasters

- *Technology*
 - First responders in Kentucky are aware of their technological weaknesses and are working together to find a solution
 - Many first responders cannot directly communicate radio-to-radio (within or outside their jurisdictions and disciplines) and need dispatch assistance to be interoperable
 - A lack of ‘real-time,’ direct communications has led to the transmission of less accurate or incorrect information
 - Many dispatch centers are not interoperable and are inefficiently staffed
 - Many agencies use communications systems that are outdated
 - Agencies often purchase new radios to be used on obsolete systems
 - Replacement parts are purchased at places such as “eBay”
 - Radio coverage is inconsistent, and in some areas nonexistent
 - Skip, interference, and footprint overlap complicate interoperability in certain areas
 - Mutual aid frequencies exist, but have a limited capacity and are ineffective in large scale incidents
 - Vendors only offer closed platform systems that have contributed to incompatibility
 - There is inconsistent Enhanced 911 (e911) coverage throughout the state

- *Management & Coordination*
 - Public safety is more willing than ever to overcome conflict and work together, especially in large scale incidents
 - Local, state, and federal agencies are not sharing technical expertise or information on interoperability planning, funding, and goals
 - Frequencies are managed poorly and are used inefficiently statewide
 - Frequencies are poorly managed by oversight bodies at all levels (FCC, State Agencies, and frequency coordinators)
 - There is no good way for local agencies to clear up interference issues
 - There is a disparate use of 10 codes and clear text across jurisdictions and disciplines
 - Decision-makers underestimate the importance of interoperability and are over-reliant on the input of vendors for purchasing decisions
 - There is no single point of accountability for statewide interoperability
 - The Kentucky Wireless Interoperability Executive Committee (KWIEC) exists, but the majority of public safety agencies are unaware of its existence and initiatives
 - Current regulations inhibit the consolidation of PSAPs

- *Training and Education*
 - There is an increased awareness of the lack of, and need for, joint training and exercises
 - First responders are not adequately trained to use radios, base stations, and other communications equipment to the full extent of their capability
 - Existing policies and procedures to handle incident interoperability are either insufficient, or insufficiently understood
 - Public safety agencies lack the technical expertise necessary to effectively research the purchase of interoperable systems
 - The Commonwealth has not adequately educated public safety on the existence and use of mutual aid channels

- Dispatchers across the state have varying levels of experience and training to interoperate during specific incidents
- There is a lack of training for incident response communications with respect to policies and procedures between agencies
 - The procedures exist in the EOP
 - The training does not address:
 - Who needs to talk to whom?
 - What is the proper communications chain?
- *Political Realm*
 - The public safety community has a “can do” attitude – they work with what they have to communicate
 - Interoperability is not a voter issue; therefore, communications issues are not a high priority to elected officials
 - Few leaders will risk taking responsibility for driving interoperability solutions at the local level
 - Trust issues and turf battles are part of the public safety ‘culture’
- *Resources & Funding*
 - There is great momentum around interoperability in several areas of Kentucky
 - A large amount of money is spent on undefined solutions
 - Grant spending is often postponed due to vendor delays, poor coordination efforts, and/or a lack of direction from the state
 - Grant funding is often limited to the purchase of new equipment and does not include funds for continuing maintenance, upgrades, or operations
 - Increased cell phone and Voice over IP (VoIP) use has led to decreased tax revenue
 - Funding for private ambulance companies is either limited or nonexistent
 - There is insufficient grant funding for adequate training and use of radios and other communications equipment
 - Grant funding has time constraints related to applications and spending – usually 12 months or less

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to the current state of interoperable communications in Kentucky do not occur, in addition to the opportunities that may be missed by not changing. Case for Change statements appeal to the emotions and intellect of individuals and result in action.

The Strategic Planning Session participants were presented with a consolidated list of cases for improving communications and interoperability in Kentucky. They validated the information and determined the following statements as their case for change.

- Incompatible communications systems limit and at times prohibit incident coordination and daily operations, in every community across the Commonwealth
- Incompatible communications systems can require the reliance of runners in dangerous situations as well as result in increased response times, thus leading to additional loss of lives, property, and environmental stability
- Multi-jurisdictional incidents overwhelm communications systems and causes other emergencies to be missed
- In a catastrophic event, Kentucky's inability to communicate will put its elected officials in a negative spotlight, erode community confidence, and puts the public safety community in additional danger (jeopardy)
- The inability to efficiently deal with natural and complex disasters sends a negative message to voters, and could cause businesses and industry to relocate
- Continuing to preserve outdated systems that are difficult to maintain wastes money and delays interoperability
- The cost to correctly fix the problem is much smaller than the value of lives that would be saved with interoperable communications
- Poor communications leads to inefficient use of our assets and costs agencies and taxpayers unnecessary money and time
- The longer we delay solving this problem increases our vicarious liability and risk of lawsuits

Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Kentucky.

Serving in their leadership roles, the Strategic Planning Session participants reviewed and validated a consolidated list of themes that described their intent for the Commonwealth and their region with regards to communications and interoperability. Participants see a world where the public safety community is operating seamlessly, across jurisdictions and disciplines, on a statewide communications system. The following statements are presented as if the desired future state has been realized:

- *Technology*
 - National technical standards for communication and interoperability are adopted and used as the basis for planning, management, training and funding
 - Statewide voice and data communications interoperability exists between public safety jurisdictions and disciplines.
 - Agencies use scalable, redundant communication systems that are digital, secure, and can be augmented with video, satellite imagery, structural occupancy & plans, GPS, and radio-to-telephone bridging
 - Public safety requirements define the solutions and products that vendors build
 - Every citizen of Kentucky has functional and accurate e911 service, as well as reverse 911 capability

- *Management & Coordination*
 - A single organization exists for communications and interoperability deliberations, standards, training, data resources, technical assistance and grant-making
 - The system is inclusive; i.e. hospitals, schools, utilities, etc. are integrated, and use a centralized (or regionalized), scalable, unified incident command structure
 - Clear and consistent statewide standard operating procedures (SoPs) are in place for incident planning, response and review
 - Statewide communications equipment procurement is practitioner-driven and based upon common technical needs and strategy

- *Training & Education*
 - Standardized training for all agencies occurs at all levels with regional and local implementation (i.e., 10 Codes, Clear Text, Shared Language, etc.)
 - Multi-disciplinary training reinforces collaboration and sharing best practices
 - Innovative tools and delivery methods (i.e., web-based education) are used to expand the impact of training
 - Kentucky's public safety community is fully credentialed to national standards

- *Political Realm*
 - Legislators and other elected officials are well-educated on, and responsive to, the complexities and urgency of communications and interoperability issues

- Governmental support for communications and interoperability transcends parties and administrations
- Kentucky's first-responders lead the nation in defining standards to vendors
- *Resources and Funding*
 - State and federal funding is defined, consistent and aimed at both communications equipment acquisition, maintenance, and operations
 - Funding is tied to interoperability and adherence to existing national and state standards

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors that hinder efforts to improve communications and interoperability in Kentucky. In order to achieve the desired future state, it is essential to name the barriers that must be addressed.

As such, the Strategic Planning Session participants reviewed, validated, and ranked the following barriers:

- **Political Motivations** – interoperability is not a voter issue, and many politicians support more visible issues
- **Funding Limitations** – general lack of local funding, and grant funding does not allow for system maintenance, upgrades, and operations
- **Technical Constraints** – vendors have the upper hand in this market, and fail to produce and sell open platform systems that meet practitioner needs; constantly advancing technologies make existing and new systems obsolete quickly
- **Public Safety Culture** – egos and turf battles get in the way of building interoperable solutions
- **Power and Control Issues** – the resistance of agencies to share/give up control of communications systems
- **'Big Hat' vs. 'Little Hat' Dilemma** – many public safety officials choose to defend their individual roles versus considering statewide and regional needs and solutions
- **Diverse Terrain** – mountainous regions of Kentucky have coverage issues and may need more complex solutions

Strategic Recommendations

The purpose of the Strategic Recommendations conversation is to identify the fewest and most compelling strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state. Strategic initiatives cause interoperability and improve communications for first responders.

The Strategic Planning Session participants were presented with a strategy based on their recommendations from the focus group sessions, and they identified and validated the following critical initiatives to improve communications and interoperability statewide:

Near Term

- **Achieve near 100% statewide coverage for all first responders' voice and data communications networks** (“We can’t have interoperability without first having operability”)
 - Determine a baseline of statewide communications
 - Inventory frequencies, towers, and radio assets
 - Drastically improve coverage (incl. in buildings) by constructing/improving existing infrastructure statewide
 - Establish near 100% e911 coverage statewide
- **Implement Existing Statewide Interoperability Efforts**
 - Program current mutual aid channels into all radios and educate public safety on how/when to use them
 - Implement fully the console to console bridge solution
 - Ensure all 1st responders, chief executives, and 1st receivers statewide adopt NIMS
 - Establish a statewide 10-code/clear text standard to be accepted and implemented by all local and state public safety agencies
- **Optimize 911/Dispatch Services while maintaining community oriented communications dispatch**
 - Facilitate merger of those that want to by removing financial disincentives
 - Encourage resource sharing by establishing appropriate incentives
 - Create focus group to develop a model for delivery of services by dispatch centers
- **Establish a Governance Body to Lead the Commonwealth’s Interoperability Efforts**
 - Establish and operate a credible communications & interoperability body
 - Empower that body to develop and enforce standards for equipment, policies, procedures, and training related to communications and interoperability within the public safety community in the Commonwealth of Kentucky

Long Term

- **Build a Statewide Public Safety Communications and Interoperability System**
 - Design, approve, and build a shared statewide public safety infrastructure for voice and data communications
 - Design and conduct a pilot project to address a specific interoperability problem successfully as a basis for the statewide system
 - Create and implement a state mandated radio and communications training program, and practice statewide and regional interoperability exercises regularly

Next Steps

The outcomes from the Strategic Planning Session will serve as the basis for the Statewide Strategic Plan for Communications and Interoperability that SAFECOM will present to the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The key initiatives identified by practitioners across the state will symbolize the documented view of the public safety user community outlining their perspective on efforts that will most improve interoperable communications in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

In addition, and perhaps most significantly, the SAFECOM/Kentucky Partnership is committed to maintaining communications with the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Kentucky progresses.

Appendix A

Invitee's for the December 14, 2005 Strategic Planning Session in Frankfort, Kentucky

Name	Title	Agency	Phone Number	Email
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Bonnie Wilson	Owsley County Emergency Director	Owsley County	606-593-5370	jalin@prtcnet.org
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Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Kentucky Strategic Planning Process

