Sudden Death of a Student

1. Tabletop Exercise Instructions

1.1. Who Needs to Do What in a Tabletop Exercise?

For a Tabletop Exercise there are three potential roles: Participant, Facilitator, and Evaluator. Both the Participant and the Facilitator are mandatory, while the Evaluator can be thought of as an "outside" participant that can be helpful in larger Tabletop Exercises. While the minimum number of people required is 1 (the Participant and Facilitator as the same person), it is more effective to have a separate Facilitator.

Participant's Role

The Participant is the person who will be involved in the Tabletop Exercise. They should be someone who would be involved in an actual event that the Tabletop Exercise is modeling. Therefore, it is best to gather as many people that have a relation to the modeled event as possible to drive the best outcomes.

Facilitator's Role

The Facilitator is the guide for the Tabletop Exercise. Their role is to read through the initial prompt, drive the conversation to productive answers, and add appropriate Injects as required. They may pose questions to the Participants, either from the Tabletop Exercise document, or of their own, as well as ensure the prompt is clear and scope the prompt as needed. It is best to have a Facilitator that who is familiar with the situation and topics. They do not necessarily need to be someone who would be directly involved to free up Participant slots for those closest to the actual event the Tabletop Exercise is modeling.

Evaluator's Role

The Evaluator is responsible for keeping notes on the progress of the Tabletop Exercise. While not necessary, they can play a key role as an "outside observer" to the Tabletop Exercise. They should not prompt Participants or interfere unless they notice a hazard to the current Participants. Any interjections from them must be though the Facilitator, who has the option to bring up their comment. Evaluators can be complete outsiders to the situation or simulated event, both to free up Participants and to provide more objective evaluation of the Tabletop Exercise. Evaluators are expected to summarize their observations at the end of the Tabletop Exercise.

1.2. What is the Purpose of a Tabletop Exercise?

A Tabletop Exercise is a tool to facilitate role play of a scenario, similar to simulating an experiment before conducting it. While the purpose is tailored to each scenario, broadly speaking the goal is to evaluate current plans and procedures, and to determine risks and hazards. By testing out current plans and procedures (or approximations if there are not currently any), the participants are able to determine their current preparedness level. The injects and questions, either generated by the Facilitator or take from the Tabletop Exercise, are targeted at determining worst case scenarios to help achieve best case preparedness levels.

Simply put it is natural, and even encouraged, to fail miserably in the Tabletop Exercise. For the same reason that it is far cheaper to simulate an experiment before conducting it, it is best to find weaknesses in a

Tabletop Exercise and correct them so if the scenario becomes a reality, you are ready.

1.3. Where Does a Tabletop Exercise Take Place?

A Tabletop Exercise should use a plausible scenario for every simulation. The Facilitator may modify minor details in an exercise to better suit a particular situation, but all expectations should be reasonable. For example, if it is not reasonable or practical to have a duplicate lab elsewhere, then it should not be considered a viable option during the Tabletop Exercise.

As for physical location, a Tabletop Exercise can take place anywhere, even virtually. It is best to choose a location that is quiet and without distractions, to allow a focused and non-threatening environment. However, if physical system or location based questions could occur (such as where is this building's tornado shelter), it may be preferable to conduct a Tabletop Exercise on location to generate the most accurate findings.

1.4. When Should Tabletop Exercises Be Conducted?

The initial Tabletop Exercise can be conducted at will, although it is best to do so before the event it describes happens. Once the exercise has been conducted, it should be determined in the Hot Wash when the exercise should be conducted again. Generally it is best to conduct exercises every year or two, or when there is a major change in policy, personnel, or organization structure, to ensure findings from a previous exercise are not out of date.

1.5. Why are Tabletop Exercises Important?

There are multiple reasons to conduct a Tabletop Exercise. First, it is an excellent method to determine and mitigate human issues associated with unplanned events. Brainstorming plans ahead of time allows you to have the best case preparedness level and clarity when reacting to an event.

Second, it ensures that all of the parties involved in the Tabletop Exercise can voice diverse ideas and viewpoints. Frequently the topics covered are situations we have not or do not want to think about, but by completing the exercise we help to ensure the continuity of our research and safety of those involved.

Third and finally, it should be fun and build camaraderie among the participants.

1.6. How to Conduct a Tabletop Exercise?

The Tabletop Exercise is a facilitated exercise. The Facilitator will read each section, starting with the Incident Notification, followed by each Inject, one after another. At each stop in the scenario, the Participants will then review and discuss the Inject as a group. This group discussion should engage **all** members and everyone should have the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to develop solutions to the issues presented.

The following tips should be observed by all Participants:

- Do not attack others! Remember, the goal is to be open-minded. As long as the suggestion is on topic, brainstorming is about building up ideas, not tearing people down. The Facilitator should do their best to make the environment open and constructive.

- Do not rush! The Incident Notification section should take at least 5 minutes, each Inject 15-30 minutes, and the Hot Wash section 20-30 minutes. Plan time accordingly to make sure each topic can be explored properly.

- Do not cheat! It is okay to fail in the Tabletop Exercise, so do not cheat by looking things up or using outside resources. If you have an existing plan to manage this or a similar issue, you may bring

and follow that. If you do not have a plan, make that an action item in your Hot Wash.

- Do not forget solutions! While the problem or issue may be jarring, it is imperative that solutions come out of the Tabletop Exercise. Therefore, focus on solutions and recommendations to achieve best case preparedness.

- Do not fight scenario! While the Facilitator may have made some slight modifications to make the Tabletop Exercise fit your organization, Participants should follow the scenario. It might seem funny or unreasonable, but each of these exercises is based on a real event. Therefore, resist the temptation to change the narrative.

2. Exercise

2.1. Exercise Objectives

This exercise was developed to focus on the following objectives:

- Identify resources that can assist other students cope with the loss of a student,

- Identify the objective harm the loss of any individual student could cause to the research, and

- Develop processes and procedures to ensure that if a loss of life should occur, that grieving is the primary concern.

2.2. Incident Notification

You are sitting in your office when you receive a phone call from campus police. Immediately, you pick up the phone. A calm voice on the other end informs you that your graduate student, *<name>* , died in a car accident off campus last night (Feel free to choose a specific students' name, and repeat for each student you have, as the answers may change). You are stunned.

2.3. Inject #1

About 20 minutes after the phone call another student from the lab comes into your office. One of their questions is if you have heard from the student, as they were expecting them to be in by now. You know that you will need to let the other members of your lab know about the student's passing.

Based on the information introduced in Inject #1, discuss potential issues and key concepts that arise from this Inject. Then, identify additional decisions, communication flows, questions, and/or resources that would need to be addressed. The questions below are provided to help guide the discussion around general key points. However, these questions are not intended to define a rigid list of concerns that need to be addressed, nor will all of them be applicable to your individual situation.

1   What procedure, if any, are you required to follow to inform the members of the lab of the student's passing? What resources are available on campus to help students that are grieving? Is it possible, or are you required to, have them be present when you inform the group? How can you contact them?

2   Do you have the ability to authorize bereavement leave? Does it make sense to suspend work for a fixed amount of time to facilitate mourning? If not, what options exist to lower the overall burden on the members of the lab?

3   Are you required to provide a standard statement for those looking to reach the deceased student? If so, what language are you required to have? Will all lab members be able to respond, and if so how will you provide them with the statement?

4   Who should you contact, if anyone, within your group, department, institution, etc., to bring this situation to their attention? Is there any coordination that they would expect from you?

5   Do you have any obligations to report the students passing to your institution by law or policy? If so, who would you need to contact?

2.4. Inject #2

The next day a student working on a research project comes to ask you about what to do with the deceased student's belongings. They need to access items at the student's work station.

Based on the information introduced in Inject #2, discuss potential issues and key concepts that arise from this Inject. Then, identify additional decisions, communication flows, questions, and/or resources that would need to be addressed. The questions below are provided to help guide the discussion around general key points. However, these questions are not intended to define a rigid list of concerns that need to be addressed, nor will all of them be applicable to your individual situation.

1   What policy, procedure, or laws are you required to follow in securing the student's physical belongings? Who do you need to contact about this?

2   What policy, procedure, or laws are you required to follow in securing the student's digital assets? Do these responsibilities change between central IT, distributed IT, or local files in a lab or institute shared storage? Who do you need to contact about this?

3   Who is allowed, if anyone, to access the physical belongings of the student? Are you required to deny access to the student's work space? If this is in a shared space, what requirements do you have in preventing access?

4   After the student's passing, who will collect the student's physical access credentials, such as keys or access cards? Are you required to have locks or other physical access controls changed? If so, who do you need to contact about this?

2.5. Inject #3

If prior to starting this table top exercise, you had a cross-training, documentation, and research continuity plan for the student in question, you may skip this section. After the student has been laid to rest according to their religious or secular customs, you have to sort out who will carry on their tasks. You have to balance the emotions of the remaining lab members while also ensuring continuity of research.

Based on the information introduced in Inject #3, discuss potential issues and key concepts that arise from this Inject. Then, identify additional decisions, communication flows, questions, and/or resources that would need to be addressed. The questions below are provided to help guide the discussion around general key points. However, these questions are not intended to define a rigid list of concerns that need to be addressed, nor will all of them be applicable to your individual situation.

1   Who in the lab has the same skill sets and abilities as the deceased student? What documentation, if any, created by that student that can be used to move forward?

2   If you have the funding to bring in another lab member to replace the deceased student, what is required for this? Are there any applicable laws or policies that dictate how long to wait before replacing the deceased student's position? Even if there are none, how long should you wait?

3   What grants, projects, papers, academic assignments (RA,TA), etc., if any, was the student participating in? What obligation do you have, if any, to replace their workload or contributions? What is time frame?

4   Was the student receiving any communications that need to be updated to go to a new lab member? If so, which communications and who will need to receive them? Who do you need to contact,

internally or externally, to make these updates?

2.6. Hot Wash

Questions to Consider

- Based on your discussions, what *should* happen in a best case scenario?
- Based on your discussions, what *would* happen if this event took place tomorrow?
- Having both of these discussions in mind, what *difference* exists between your current preparedness level and the best case preparedness level?
- Having completed the exercise, what went well that you would *continue* in the future? In what areas were you *unprepared?* What would you *stop* doing to improve your outcome? What can you *start* doing today to improve your outcome in a future exercise or real event?
- If you *did not* have a plan for this situation, what are your action items and timeline to create one? If you *did* have a plan, what are your action items and timeline to update it?
- When will we conduct this exercise *again?*