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**Pandemic Response Tabletop Exercise**

**Facilitator Guide**

**Business Sensitive**

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# Handling Instructions

1. The title of this document is the *Pandemic Business Continuity Tabletop Exercise: Facilitator Guide.*
2. Information gathered in this document is designated as business sensitive and should be handled as sensitive information that is not to be disclosed.
3. For more information about the tabletop exercise (TTX), please consult the following point(s) of contact:

Name

Position

Contact information

# Section 1: Exercise Overview

## Background

To enhance ongoing COVID-19 response operations and to prepare for widespread contagion in parts or all of the United States, HHS/ASPR/Office of the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary/Exercises, Evaluations, and After Actions Division has developed a tabletop exercise for the private sector, including owners/operators, company legal counsel, communications teams, Human Resources, and other key company leadership.

## Exercise Objectives

* Discuss the role of company leadership in considering and making decisions on potential community mitigation measures.
* Discuss and determine what measures our company can/should implement to ensure business continuity and maintain a viable workforce during an outbreak.
* Discuss and determine how we will develop and adapt our crisis communication strategy as the outbreak evolves.
* Discuss and determine what policy changes may be necessary to support the response to the spread of an infectious disease.
* Discuss risks to our company supply chains and the means to mitigate those risks.

## Scenario

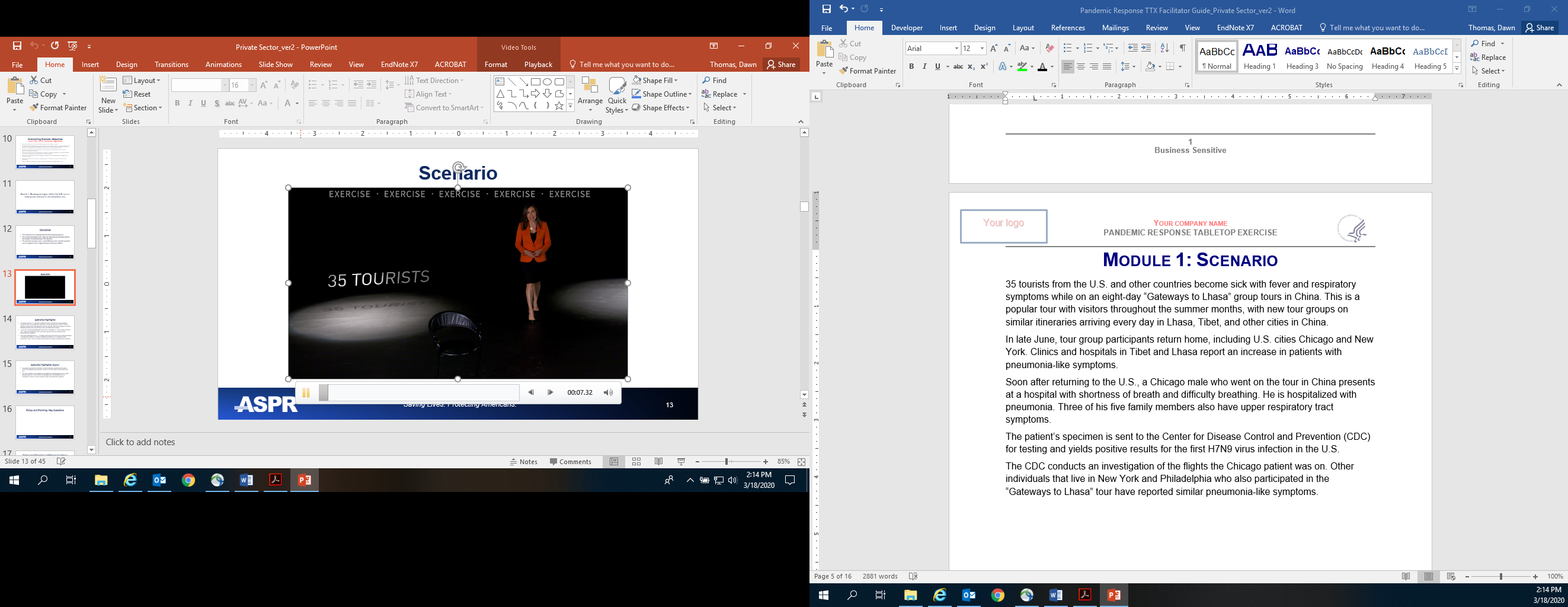
Due to the constantly changing situation with COVID-19, exercise designers chose to use a general pandemic as the basis for this exercise. This ensures that the information provided in the Situation Manual and the conduct slides is current, and does not cause unwarranted assumptions about the disease spread.

## Discussion Questions

Discussion questions are intended to help guide the exercise participants’ discussion. These questions are not meant to constitute a definitive list of issues, nor is there a requirement to address every question. Working with their organization’s leadership, facilitators should choose not only what additional questions to address, but what follow up questions they would like to bring to the group to prompt discussion. Questions should be appropriate for the position and area of the people in the room, and should conform to the time constraints you have for your exercise.

# Module 1: Scenario

Reminder: The events described below are fictional and intended only for the purpose of participating in this exercise. This exercise scenario uses a novel influenza virus, but this scenario can be applied to other Highly Infectious Diseases (HIDs).



* 35 tourists from the U.S. and other countries become sick with fever and respiratory symptoms while on an eight-day “Gateways to Lhasa” group tours in China. This is a popular tour with visitors throughout the summer months, with new tour groups on similar itineraries arriving every day in Lhasa, Tibet, and other cities in China.
* In late June, tour group participants return home, including U.S. cities Chicago and New York. Clinics and hospitals in Tibet and Lhasa report an increase in patients with pneumonia-like symptoms.
* Soon after returning to the U.S., a Chicago male who went on the tour in China presents at a hospital with shortness of breath and difficulty breathing. He is hospitalized with pneumonia. Three of his five family members also have upper respiratory tract symptoms.
* The Chicago patient’s specimen is sent to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for testing and yields positive results for the first H7N9 virus infection in the U.S.
* The CDC conducts an investigation of the flights the Chicago patient was on. Other individuals that live in New York and Philadelphia who also participated in the “Gateways to Lhasa” tour have reported similar pneumonia-like symptoms.

# Module 1: Discussion Questions

Key questions are numbered (1, 2, 3) and **bold**. Follow up questions that you can use to spark and guide the discussion are lettered (a, b, c) and *in italics*.

## Issue 1: Policy and Planning

1. **What are your immediate plans and actions?**
   1. *Does your organization have an approved and tested emergency plan and/or business continuity plan?* 
      1. *Have you tested or exercised the plan within the past year?*
      2. *Is there a section/annex focused specifically on a severe outbreak?*
      3. *Does the emergency plan address potential business continuity impacts from a severe outbreak (e.g., significant reductions in your workforce over an extended period, supply chain disruptions)?*
   2. *Do you have plans in place to provide extra levels of cleaning to shared office spaces? Do you have enough supplies (cleaning products, gloves, etc.) to do this?*
   3. *Have you defined the mission essential functions, goods, and services (including IT) that your organization requires to sustain its own operations and mission (i.e., the things you must be able to do to remain in business)?*
      1. *Have you identified you organization’s critical information systems and data bases?* *How are they maintained normally? Who and how will they be maintained during an emergency?*
   4. *Do you have corporate policies and plans to support mitigation strategies, such as teleworking or flexible work schedules?*
      1. *If teleworking or flexible work schedules are not options for your business, what other strategies could you take to protect your workforce?*
      2. *Can employees stagger lunch and break schedules to maintain social distancing in shared spaces?*
      3. *Have you ensured IT systems that make teleworking possible can handle a larger than normal load?*
   5. *What actions, if any, are you taking to test operational aspects of your business continuity plan?*
2. **What critical resources or supplies are you most concerned about being effected by a disruption in your supply chain?**
   1. *What are your current inventory levels for those critical resources and supplies?*
   2. *How long could you continue to operate with major disruptions in those supply chains?*
   3. *Do you have necessary supplies stockpiled; if so how long do you estimate your stock pile sustaining your business needs?*
   4. *Have you identified and prioritized your suppliers and critical products and services?*
   5. *Do you have emergency contracts established, including 2nd and 3rd order backups, if possible, with key vendors and suppliers?*
   6. *Have you worked with your suppliers to understand their level of preparedness for a severe outbreak and the actions they might take to maintain supply chain resiliency?*
   7. *What proactive actions can you take to mitigate the impacts of potential supply chain disruptions?*
3. **Does your organization have legal and/or regulatory requirements/ obligations that you must comply with, even during a public health emergency?**
   1. *Do you have the people, systems, and processes in place to ensure legal and regulatory compliance?*
   2. *Can you request temporary relief from these laws/regulations during a public health emergency?*
      1. *What specific laws or regulations might you request temporary relief from?*
      2. *What is the process for doing so?*
      3. *What are the key indicators or triggers that will you use to request legal or regulatory relief?*
4. **How would your organization financially sustain a significant reduction of business?**
   1. *What potential funding mechanisms could you use, if any, to keep your organization afloat?*
   2. *Do you have insurance for financial loss? Is pandemic a covered item?*
   3. *How long can those mechanisms sustain your business?*
5. **What potential policy issues are you most concerned about and what immediate actions can you take, if any, to address them?**

## Issue 2: Incident Management

1. **Who is responsible for managing your organization’s response to a severe outbreak?**
   1. *Is it possible to surge personnel or resources to these individuals or groups?*
   2. *Has this individual (or team) received training within the past year on their roles and responsibilities?*
   3. *What is your approach to managing incident response if your organization has different branches or offices, or if it is comprised of multiple subsidiaries?*
   4. *If it is decentralized—meaning that each office or branch is authorized to make their own decisions--, how will you coordinate to ensure consistent practices and messaging to your employees, customers, and critical vendors/suppliers?*
   5. *If you have union employees, are representatives from the union included in your team?*
   6. *Are your IT and OT systems secured? Are firewalls properly configured? Are your patches up to date? Can you implement multi-factor authentication? How are these equipment and systems managed during this incident?*
2. **What are the most significant challenges you anticipate with respect to managing your organization’s response to the incident and what immediate actions can you take, if any, to address them?**
3. **How will you work with state and/or local government to designate your business as essential, allowing you to stay open through lockdowns, curfews, etc.?**
   1. *What steps are you taking to ensure your employees will be able to get to work should lockdowns or curfews be imposed but you are designated as essential?*

## Issue 3: Crisis Communications

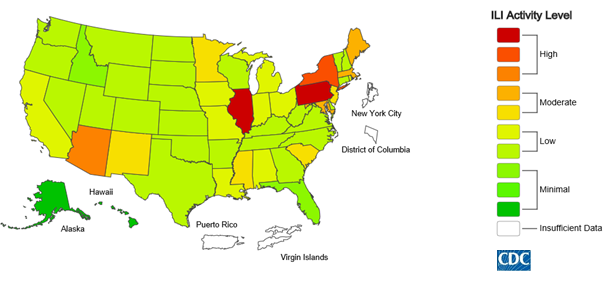
1. **What critical messages will you need to communicate to staff, customers, and vendors/suppliers?**
2. *What are the strategic goals of your communications strategy at this stage?*
3. *Is your communication staff coordinating for established Joint Information Centers (JIC) or with local public responders?*
4. *Do you have a dedicated person or team to develop messaging for, and to receive and triage information requests from, your employees, customers, and vendors/suppliers?* 
   1. *If the message is IT/OT specific, does the dedicated communications team have IT/OT personnel for subject matter expertise?*
5. *What is the process for clearing public messages and risk communications for release?*
6. *Are any of these messages pre-scripted, or can you develop them before the outbreak worsens?*
7. *Have you reminded employees to be careful about social engineering and phishing scams?*
   1. *Do you have pre-scripted messages to put out quickly?*

## Issue 4: Healthcare System Surge

1. **(For health care organizations) What are your primary concerns with respect to accommodating a large increase in patient numbers or patients with highly specialized health care needs?**
2. *Might a large increase in patient records overwhelm your IT systems?*
3. **(For health care organizations) Does your organization maintain a stockpile of medical supplies and resources (e.g., PPE, respirators)? Are the stockpiles ready for deployment?**

# Module 2: Scenario

Reminder: The events described below are fictional and intended only for the purpose of participating in this exercise. This exercise scenario uses a novel influenza virus, but this scenario can be applied to other Highly Infectious Diseases (HIDs).



* Human transmission has now occurred in 5 countries, including the U.S., China, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Australia. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic alert.
* CDC has issued a Level 3 Travel Health Notice to the public to not travel to countries with confirmed H7N9 cases.
* On July 7, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declares a public health emergency.
* At the end of July, 20 countries have reported a total of 6,225 H7N9 cases [Americas (3,032), Europe (660), Eastern Mediterranean (152), South-East Asia (594) and Western Pacific (1,787)]. Many additional cases are suspected. WHO has now declared the 2019 H7N9 Pandemic.
* By mid-August, there are 12,100 H7N9 cases in the U.S and 18,000 worldwide. The City of Chicago has the most confirmed H7N9 cases of 1,400 and the State of Illinois has 1,600 confirmed cases.
* There is mass fear among the public and people are practicing social distancing. Large events have been canceled, schools are closed, and employees are working from home to stay safe.
* Absenteeism is now causing extreme issues to critical infrastructure systems, including water, power, medical facilities, and supply chains.

# Module 2: Discussion Questions

## Issue 1: Policy and Planning

1. **What key indicators or triggers are you relying on to decide when to implement your emergency plan and/or business continuity plan?**
   1. *Who has authority in your organization to activate business continuity protocols?*
   2. *If this entity is a single person; is a succession plan in place should they become incapacitated?*
   3. *If staffing and/or resource shortages are too severe to continue your mission essential functions, how would you manage the degradation of these essential functions?*
   4. *What activities can you undertake during the response to begin recovery planning?*
2. **What is your organization’s policy regarding employee absenteeism and sick leave?**
3. *Is the policy flexible to account for changing guidance from public health authorities?*
4. *How will your organization handle employees who have not accumulated sick leave or paid time off, but who are sick or otherwise can’t work (e.g., caring for sick family member or under voluntary quarantine)?*
5. *What accommodations, if any, can you make for staff who are unable to work due to the nature of their job or because of transportation system shutdowns?*
6. *What steps might you take to ensure childcare for essential workers?*
7. *How are you tracking employee absenteeism and health status without violating patient privacy laws (e.g., HIPAA)*
8. *What are your legal rights with respect to keeping sick or high risk employees (i.e., those at high risk of exposure) away from work?*
9. **Does your organization have policies and procedures if employees or customers contract an infectious disease while working at or visiting your place of business?**
10. *Is your organization legally liable?*
11. *Are employees entitled to worker’s compensation if they become sick while at work?*
12. *Does your organization have a policy or protocol to provide essential health care services to uninsured or underinsured employees and/or temporary employees (e.g. gig workforce)?*
13. *Does your organization have a plan to inform other employees of a confirmed infectious disease case in a specific facility?*
14. *How will you handle social media or traditional media if this story breaks out in public channels?*
15. **What actions can you take to protect your employees in the workplace?**
16. *Do you have policies in place for available options if a vendor or customer enters and appears sick?*
17. *Are there additional levels of cleaning to shared office spaces? Do you still have enough supplies (cleaning products, gloves, etc.) to do this?*
18. **What actions can you take, if any, to adjust your operations in response to disruptions in your critical supply chains?**
19. *What essential information will you use to monitor the status of your critical supply chains?*
20. *How are you working with other government entities and private sector partners to address ongoing supply chain challenges?*
21. *Who at the Federal or state level are you coordinating this information with? If not, why?*
22. **Will your insurance provide financial support/relief if you suffer financial losses as a result of a severe outbreak?**

## Issue 2: Incident Management

1. **How has your incident management approach changed as the incident becomes more severe?**
   1. *What are your strategic goals at this stage of the response?*
   2. *What essential information are you relying on to determine how you should be responding?*
   3. *Do you have redundancy in key incident management positions in the event that members of your core team become sick or are otherwise unable to fulfill their responsibilities?*
2. **What social distancing measures (e.g., staggering workstations, canceling social events, alternating work shifts) have you implemented at this point?**
   1. *What else are you considering in the coming days/week?*
   2. *Have you defined triggers for making those decisions?*
   3. *Have you provided additional online collaboration tools to encourage teleworking and meeting virtually?*
      1. *What measures do you have in place to provide security of the information/data employees might need access to or will develop while working virtually?*
3. **How might you deal with absenteeism rates of 15 – 25%?**
   1. *Have people been cross-trained to perform mission essential functions that are typically their responsibility?*
   2. *Have you considered reductions in business hours?*
   3. *Have you considered changes in shift durations?*
   4. *What other actions could you take to continue functioning with a reduced workforce?*
4. **Are you coordinating with other companies within your community and/or business sector?**
   1. *Is there an effort to align actions?*
5. **How are you coordinating with government entities to ensure your response is consistent with current government guidance, to support the government’s response, and to represent your interests and the needs of elected officials and decision-makers?**

## Issue 3: Crisis Communications

1. **How has your approach to risk communication changed as the incident becomes more severe?**
   1. *How will you communicate your organizational operating status to employees and customers?*
   2. *How will you monitor employee and customer sentiment as the incident and your response progresses?*
   3. *How will you identify and counter misinformation about your organization?*
2. **How are you communicating social distancing guidance you have put into place?**

## Issue 4: Healthcare System Surge

1. **(For health care organizations) What key indicators or triggers are you using to decide when to activate your surge plan?**
2. **(For health care organizations) How will you implement a change from conventional to contingency or crisis standards of care?**
   1. *How will you message this transition to your employees, patients, and the public?*
   2. *How are you collecting and reporting this information to your leadership and key external partners?*
3. **(For health care organizations) How are you coordinating with public health authorities to request support?**
4. **(For health care organizations) As health care supply chains are stressed and critical resource shortages arise, what essential information are you relying on to make decisions about resource prioritization and allocation?**
5. **(For non-health care organizations) Are there any ways that your company can reduce the burden on the health care system?**
   1. *Do you have in-house medical supplies and staff? Would they be able to obtain testing kits?*

# Module 3: Scenario

Reminder: The events described below are fictional and intended only for the purpose of participating in this exercise. This exercise scenario uses a novel influenza virus, but this scenario can be applied to other Highly Infectious Diseases (HIDs).

* The overall impact of the pandemic on government and businesses in the U.S. have been unprecedented.
  + Government agencies were forced to scale back services to their most essential functions and government employees worked from home or implementing flexible work schedules to minimize human contact.
  + Limited travel has resulted in devastating impacts to the transportation sector and tourism.
  + It will take time for factories and manufacturing companies to get back online and return to normal operations.
  + Community businesses (i.e. restaurants, shops) have also been greatly impacted and experienced significant decline in business.
  + There were widespread cancellations of meetings, conferences, large gatherings, and some private sector businesses have been forced to close.
* There has now been a lift on the more severe protective measures. People are now going back to school, work, and entering public spaces like restaurants.
* Although there is a significant decline in cases, there is some anxiety among the public to return back to normal operations. However, people are excited to reconnect with family, peers, and coworkers.
* Overall, the nation and the world will need to deal with the consequences to businesses on a massive scale (i.e. offering mental health support, replacing staff who may no longer be available to work).
* A second wave of infections could arrive in the coming months, so everyone should be prepared to respond based on the lessons learned from the first wave of infections.

# Module 3: Discussion Questions

## Issue 1: Policy and Planning

1. **What is your strategy for reconstituting mission essential functions?**
   1. *What key indicators or triggers will you use to decide when to reconstitute your mission essential functions?*
   2. *Who is responsible for making this decision?*
   3. *Are your recovery plans regionalized or sufficiently flexible to account for differences in incident severity across geographic areas?*
2. **How will you identify and fill key staffing vacancies in the short-term?**
   1. *How will you address employees who have long-term recovery needs, including mental and behavioral health needs?*
   2. *What actions will you take to better prepare your staff for a potential second wave?*
3. **How will your organization coordinate with vendors and supplies to address critical resource and supply shortfalls?**
   1. *What changes will you implement to better prepare for shortfalls in anticipation of a second wave*
4. **How would you fund recovery efforts?**
   1. *What legal or regulatory relief, if any, would you request (or want to see enacted) to aid your organization’s recovery?*
   2. *How will you maintain sufficient funds to manage social distancing requirements during a second wave?*
   3. *Do you have insurance that would cover this? If so, how could economic impacts be attributed to the event for liability purposes?*
5. **Do you have a mechanism in place to identify and document key lessons learned in order to help prepare for possible subsequent waves of a severe outbreak?**
   1. *What activities will you continue to maintain in anticipation of a second wave*
   2. *How will you address shortfalls identified during the response so that they are not repeated during a second wave*

## Issue 2: Incident Management

1. **How will your incident management structure change as you transition to return to normal operations?**
2. *What role will your incident management team maintain in preparation for a second wave?*
3. *Who is responsible for overseeing recovery and reconstitution activities and planning?*
4. *What key indicators or factors will you use to decide when to demobilize your incident management team?*

## Issue 3: Crisis Communications

1. **How does your approach to risk communication change as you transition back to normal operations?**
2. *What messages will you develop in anticipation of a second wave?*
3. *What are the strategic goals of your communications strategy in this stage?*
4. *How will you message your recovery strategy and priorities to employees, customers, and critical vendors/suppliers?*