

6: Code Response DNA

The planning team develops a rough draft of the basic plan, functional annexes, hazard-specific annexes, or other parts of the plan as appropriate. [14]

-FEMA Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101, 4-16

The key to NASA's success in reaching the moon was that all the participants were impressed not only with their role...but more importantly with how their role interfaced or interacted with other roles....The problem of getting to the moon was solved by many experts performing in their own separate fields of expertise but all with the same goal in mind. [53]

Goal

Detail the specific actions, responsibilities and needs for each piece of how you will accomplish the chosen Course of Action.

Mission

Without clear task ownership, a well-managed information flow and a logical path to allocate resources, response decision-making will be uncoordinated. Therefore, planners should detail how the chosen Course of Action will be achieved. Measurable operational objectives should be set which describe **what** must be achieved, with one clear owner for each objective. These objectives should be broken into strategies, general plans for **how** they will be accomplished, and then actions/tactics, specific elements that can be used to allocate resources. Collecting resource and information needs for each element will increase the likelihood that these elements can be accomplished successfully. This information **codes the response DNA**; it will increase coordination and improve decisions by allowing leaders to improvise based on a deep understanding of the mechanics of the problems and its solution.

Operational Approach

- Everything you write is part of one jurisdictional plan – not an agency plan – that should include all **capabilities** by which the community responds to, recovers from, and mitigates crises[21]. Your focus should be to make the larger, all-hazards community system work. [32]
- Remember that anyone not given **clear tasks** will make them up (and likely duplicate someone else)[13].
- Design your plan to increase the improvisation capacity of your response network[29] and help it learn [21]. That's better than setting fixed contingency plans; these can decrease the motivation to solve problems which drives planning [51].



Write the Process ≠ Plan	1
Raise Wicked Problems	2
Capabilities Not Analogies	3
Coordinate don't Command	4
Strategize to Improvise	5
Write Reality	6
Be One Community	7
Slow the Burn	8
No myths	9
Think Management	10

🧠 The wrinkle is, not all “**capabilities**” are the same in all hazards (e.g., *Evacuation* means something very different in a coastal storm and a nuclear event)[1].

🧠 To allocate **clear tasks**, use this litmus test: Does each piece of your Operations Section (or similar) should correspond to an operational objective?

Objectives

1. With your *Planning Directive* and your final *Course of Action* in hand, hold a series of 2-3 hour *Plan Development Workshops* (possibly one for each major objective). Make sure that attendees are response leaders. Discuss all specific activities needed to achieve your end state and negotiate ownership [15] of these activities.
2. Code your material into the  **SOARS Framework Worksheet**[54]. This is the DNA of your plan – it shows Ownership of all of the Activities needed to reach the End State within your chosen Course of Action. *Note:* I added the *Operational Approach* and *Strategy* elements to address some of the work done in Plan Design and give leaders more flexible choices.
3. Hold *Plan Writing Workshops* to draft edits to the plan. Make sure the right senior managers (who would actually lead the response) are included[15] as writers for the pieces they would manage. Planning by users increases ownership[22].
4. Avoid joint ownership of Objectives; your Incident Commander needs to know where to direct her instructions.
5. Address policy issues that arise. Prepare solutions to tough problems even if political leaders won't listen. In a disaster, existing practices will destabilize and windows will open to change your system for the better. Usually, though, only predesigned ideas are ready to use the window when it appears[55] [31].
6. Compile this material. Use the  **Scenario or Functional Plan Template** to frame the big picture response. Most important here: A Concept of Operations using Mission Narrative techniques (described above) so outside readers can understand. Then, use the  **Operational Objectives Template** to document ownership/resources/information needs for each Objective/Strategy/Action using SOARS.

All Hazards? Really? All of 'em?

Plans work best when they focus on core functions (“capabilities”) that can work across different scenarios[37]. Three caveats. First, the functions must be evidence-based. Leaders with “9/12 syndrome” argued that lessons learned prior to 9/11 no longer applied. This has proved incorrect[56]. Second, “all hazards” does not mean “one-size-fits-all”. The functions need to be created in your jurisdiction by the people that will manage them[13]. Otherwise, “capability planning” is just checking grant boxes. Third, capabilities need to be “ground truthed” based on different planning scenarios with vastly different demands[1]. Think of how Evacuation is different in a coastal storm and a dirty bomb. Otherwise, “all-hazard” plans don’t account for flexibility [51] and will make leaders believe a plan exists when in fact it doesn’t.

 “Editing” often turns into “people adding new stuff to the plan”. Your job is to streamline keep the focus on creating a plan that will concretely help manage the incident.

  The  **SOARS Framework** works like this:

Strategic Objective (Goals)	WHY you’re doing what you’re doing
Operational Approach	Leadership guidance on the WAY to achieve the Goal.
Operational Objective Strategy	WHAT the response must do General choice for leadership on HOW to reach an Objective. A container describing sets of Activities.
Activities (Tactics)	A set of actions to describe HOW to reach an objective (best contained within a Strategy.)
Responsible Party	Discrete piece of the response that owns an Activity (WHO)
SOPs	Measurable tasks (WHEN, WHERE) that detail resources to accomplish Activities.

 Maybe 90% of your objectives can be found in “capabilities” documents national/ international standards[15] based on years of research into disasters. We always do pretty much the same stuff, you know? Even if it feels surprising. The issue is you can’t just copy these – you have to organically build them in your jurisdiction. They need some blood and sweat behind them to work.