Interagency Team Meetings

*Interagency Team Meetings are instrumental in aligning goals, strengthening relationships, and providing a forum for knowledge sharing across multiple agencies. These meetings support partner agencies building relationships that will improve communication, collaboration, and coordination during incident response.*

**Purpose**:
Understand the purpose for regional Interagency Team Meetings;
Provide guidance on how to coordinate and conduct by presenting the who, what, when, and where

# Overview

Interagency Team Meetings are a valuable coalition-building strategy to promote the “3 Cs” of traffic incident management (TIM): Communication, Collaboration, and Coordination. Many areas of the country have implemented TIM programs that are supported by a collaborative coalition at the foundation. Effective TIM processes rely on seamless coordination and building relationships and trust among partners, resulting in a stronger, more unified approach to incident management and response. Ongoing Interagency Team Meetings can incorporate outcomes from After-Action Reviews (AAR) and Pre-Event planning meetings by providing a consistent forum to help agencies learn how to work better together and share information among a broad cross-section of responders.

Regions across North Carolina vary in terms of size, urban vs. rural response environments, and responder communities involved in TIM. The guidelines here acknowledge these differences, and they are intended to provide an overarching framework for more frequent and consistent Interagency Team Meetings at the regional level. This document includes successful practices for:

* Providing guidelines for the frequency of meetings,
* Outlining recommended methods to promote information sharing,
* Effective methods of documenting action items, and
* Encouraging consistent agency participation.

# Purpose and Benefits of Interagency Team Meetings

Regional Interagency Team Meetings provide a forum for building relationships, sharing information, and ultimately improving TIM processes that are executed by response agencies in the field. Frequent stakeholder engagement can benefit TIM Programs benefits that include:

* **Face-to-face interactions between key multi-jurisdictional stakeholders** – this allows agencies to better understand roles, responsibilities, processes, and challenges among key partners
* **Consistent and frequent interactions** – building relationships outside of major events helps to improve coordination among agencies during incident response events
* **Collaboration on processes and action items** – this promotes better teamwork toward common goals and objectives, and allows agencies to work to solve problems and address challenges together
* **Fostering an open environment for sharing of ideas** – uninhibited dialogue, without fear of repercussions, allows for candid discussions that often generate the best solutions
* **Up-to-date processes using a consensus-based approach** – involving all agencies in the development of strategies can better align multiple agencies’ processes yielding more consistent and better understood responses
* **Sustain continuity of relationships** – frequent meetings allow new staff to be introduced and better integrated into the team processes and minimize the impacts of staff changes

# Participants

## Recommended Participating Agencies

Interagency Team Meetings should include a broad cross-section of TIM responders. Ideally, agencies will have a consistent representative (or representatives) attending these meetings to promote continuity. There is tremendous benefit to agencies hearing directly from partner agencies and stakeholders that are directly involved in TIM activities.

Recommended participants include:

* Law enforcement (state, county, and local), including responders and dispatch operators
* Emergency management agencies/services (state and county)
* Fire and rescue, including volunteer fire groups (if applicable), responders, and dispatch operations
* State Department of Transportation (DOT), including Incident Management Assistance Patrol (IMAP), Maintenance and/or Construction, Transportation Management Center/Statewide Operations Center (TMC/STOC) (if applicable), and Statewide Incident Management (IM) staff
* Municipal Partners (Traffic Engineering, Public works (county, city))
* Environmental agencies and hazardous material responders
* Towing and recovery operators
* Public Information Officers
* Others as determined by the region

## Strategies to Engage the Right Participants

It is important for the Interagency Team Meetings to involve the correct participants in order to obtain meaningful contributions and the desired benefits. Recruiting and involving those individuals requires an investment. Participants who are new to the meetings will need to understand the value of their participation and gain trust that there is a benefit for their time commitment. It can be helpful to establish multiple TIM champions within a region that can assist in identifying the correct individuals and establishing methods for reaching out. The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Statewide Traffic Operations groups can provide support as TIM Champions. More specifically, Regional TIM Coordinators often have established relationships with key agencies at the state and regional level. The TIM Coordinators can provide support or recruiting regional stakeholders, the development of agendas and topics, and coordinating materials in advance of the meeting.

In some cases, it may be necessary to meet with prospective partner agency managers or executives to garner support for their agency’s participation. These discussions should focus on:

* Objectives and strategic focus areas for the Interagency Team Meetings
* Meeting importance and how the meeting can contribute to an improved level of coordination among many agencies
* Specific benefits from their agency’s participation
* Appropriate staff that should be designated to participate
* Expected time commitments and meeting frequency for participants

In preparation for individual meetings, it may be necessary to reach out to specific invitees to reinforce the value of their attendance. Their value can include both sharing their knowledge related to a specific topic and learning about other agencies’ perspectives on the same topic.

## Meeting Leadership

The continuity and schedule consistency of the team meetings should be managed by a local champion. Recommended champions within the Divisions include:

* Divisions 5, 7&9 (provided through 1 person), 10, 13&14: Incident Management Engineer (IME) or Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Engineer Designee
* Divisions 3, 4, 6: IME, Safety Engineer, or Division Traffic Engineer (DTE) Designee
* Divisions 1, 2, 11, 12: DTE or DTE Designee (Deputy or Assistance DTE, safety engineer, or county maintenance engineer)

The champion should coordinate with partners to identify chairpersons for each of the team meetings. This chairperson should be a strong champion for TIM in the region and of an authority level to promote participation and engagement of peer agencies. The chairperson can vary between meetings, and the role can be served by the champion or the TIM Coordinator as necessary.

The chairperson will be responsible for developing the agenda, facilitating the meeting, identifying speakers, and soliciting feedback from the team regarding specific agenda items that may be of interest to them.

Administrative support, either from the chairperson’s agency or another agency, is highly recommended. This administrative support can take care of meeting logistics, meeting scheduling, taking notes and developing minutes, distributing agendas, circulating a sign-in sheet, making sure presentations are uploaded and audio-visual equipment is working properly, and help to coordinate communications to the broader team. Administrative support staff will work closely with the chairperson on logistics and special topics and can coordinate with outside speakers or special presenters for meetings. Administrative support also can help to maintain accurate contact information for the interagency team group.

# Meeting Topics

Specific topics can be tailored to regional needs and unique events, or seasonal priorities such as summer travel or weather. While consistency of the meeting frequency is important for relationship building, the chairperson should ensure that agendas are always valuable to the attendees and do not become mundane. The topics should provide content that is of value to the attendees and the chairperson should structure topic discussions appropriately for the meeting attendees in order to keep them engaged within the conversation. Potential agenda topics include:

* Current TIM initiatives or focus areas
* Trending data (crashes, speeds, volumes, developments, etc.) for the area, highlighting opportunities for proactive action and/or improvement
* Training updates: TIM Responder Training updates, upcoming training opportunities, training needs
* Upcoming events, such as major roadwork/construction or planned special events; seasonal traffic planning
* Debriefings from major incidents
* Update/review of TIM performance measures
* Lessons learned/process reviews
* “Spotlight” topic or project (new system, new equipment, new/updated processes)
* Future topics or information needs
* Staff changes within partner agencies
* Policy changes or even general overview of partner agency responsibilities
* Other topics to be determined by the region

# Meeting Structure and Facilitation

## Meeting Agenda

Having an established agenda is critical, but agenda topics should remain current and relative to participants’ interests in order to provide continuous value to the attendees. The chairperson should lead the development of the agenda and coordinate feedback on topics and time needs with participants. Using this input, the agenda should be crafted with adequate time allotments so that each topic can be discussed. The chairperson should distribute agendas in advance and provide copies at the meeting.

A sample Interagency Team Meeting Agenda is included in the Appendix of this chapter.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Effective Team Meetings should include the identification of two critical roles: chairperson and notetaker. It is recommended that the chairperson not be notetaker since the chairperson is tasked with managing the discussion and pace of the meeting.

* The designated chairperson should lead each meeting.
* The chairperson should provide the agenda at the meeting.
* The chairperson is responsible for keeping the meeting on topic and on-time.
* Attendees should introduce themselves by name and agency.
* The notetaker should supply the sign-in sheet and capture attendance.
* The notetaker should capture meeting notes and action items.
* The notetaker should provide the meeting minutes to the chairperson for review.
* Participants designated by the chairperson should be prepared to contribute on specific agenda items such as incident debriefings or updates on planned events and activities.
* All participants should be encouraged to share lessons learned, provide input to processes, and engage in action items identified during the meeting.

## Outcomes and Action Items

Each meeting should include action items, next steps, and specific outcomes. It is important for the notetaker to focus on capturing the resolutions and action items moving forward. Candid discussion can be good to arrive at valuable resolutions, but nuances of that discussion should not always be meticulously documented. This can sometimes be perceived as accusatory towards individuals. The resolutions are the important takeaways for moving the program forward. Participants should be encouraged to “own” actions; it is not the responsibility of the chairperson to take responsibility for all action items raised at the meetings. Team members should maintain a professional level of accountability for owners and their associated action items.

# Meeting Logistics

## Location/Facility

Recommended locations and considerations for Interagency Team Meetings include:

* Agency facilities with a conference/training room large enough to accommodate the number of attendees anticipated
* Rotating the meeting location to different agencies (as space allows) provides team members an opportunity to see operating environments and increase their situational awareness for the partner agency.
* Adequate free parking on-site or in close walking distance to the facility
* Audio-visual equipment for showing slides, photos, and presentations
* Teleconference capability for attendees needing to dial in for virtual meetings

Room set-up should encourage conversation among participants and allow for easy viewing of any presentation materials. If possible, a U-shape seating arrangement should be used to promote face-to-face interaction.

## Virtual Meetings

Face-to-face meetings provide the most benefit to establishing strong relationships across the region, but in some rare instances it may be necessary for stakeholders to attend a meeting virtually. Conference calls can be acceptable in certain instances, but video should be encouraged when feasible. When schedules prevent a stakeholder from attending in person, their virtual attendance can still provide value to the regional program.

## Meeting Duration and Times

Interagency Team Meetings should be kept to no more than two hours. Longer meeting times could discourage consistent participation. Agendas should be structured to fit within this timeframe. If an agenda happens to be lighter for a specific meeting, the times should be adjusted to reflect the appropriate time needed.

Interagency Team Meetings should be scheduled to allow for participant travel, avoiding peak-period start or end times, and not impacting lunch schedules. Responders, IMAP drivers, and TMC operators are likely busier during weekday peak travel times. Recommended meeting times are between 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM or 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM.

## Meeting Materials

Each meeting should include an agenda (also provided to attendees in advance), copies of the previous meeting minutes, audio-visual equipment (projector, laptop/computer), and a screen. Handouts of any special presentations should be provided.

# Guidelines for Meeting Frequency

The objective of establishing Interagency Team Meetings is to promote more frequent interactions among responders outside of specific incidents. Frequency of these meetings could be twice per year, quarterly, bimonthly, or monthly. The frequency will need to be determined by the regional stakeholders, and likely will be influenced by:

* Urban vs. rural response areas
* Complexity of the region (multiple special events, high seasonal traffic volumes on certain corridors)
* Current level of coordination among TIM responder agencies
* Commitment level of agencies to consistent participation

As a guideline, rural regions that have had limited interaction among responders or who are dependent on large numbers of volunteer responders might want to consider meetings twice per year or on a quarterly basis. This would provide opportunities for interaction, allow enough time in between meetings for meaningful “new business” topics, and allow time for progress on action items. Regions that experience more frequent interactions due to incidents, events, and active work zones, or that are already coordinating at some level should consider more frequent meetings, such as monthly or every other month. This will help to keep action items on track and allow timely information to be shared.

**Sample Interagency Team Meeting Agenda Template**

Time:

Date:

Location:

1. Roll Call and Introductions

2. Review and Update on Action Items from Previous Meeting

* Status
* Accomplishments
* Challenges
* Next steps or additional resources needed to complete actions

3. Current Interagency Team Initiatives and Focus Areas

4. Coordinating for Upcoming Events

 *(Examples: major road work/construction, large-scale special event)*

5. Training Update

* Upcoming TIM training schedule
* TIM training resources available
* TIM training needs

6. Major Incident Debriefing/Lessons Learned

* Recent incident #1 – outcomes, lessons learned
* Recent incident #2 – outcomes, lessons learned

7. Spotlight Topic

 *(Examples: new systems, new processes, new stakeholders)*

8. Open Discussion

9. Review/Summarize Action Items

10. Adjourn