

2020

FV-HERC COVID-19 After-Action Report/ Improvement Plan

DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HSS

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OVERVIEW

Incident Name	COVID-19 Response
Incident Date	This version of the AAR/IP reflects Fox Valley Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalition (FV-HERC) operational response from through October 1, 2020.
Threat or Hazard	Global Pandemic
Situation	The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The outbreak was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020 and a pandemic on March 11. As of October 1, 2020, more than 33 million cases of COVID-19 had been reported resulting in more than 1,009,270 deaths.
Capabilities	Operational Coordination Intelligence and Information Sharing Communications Health & Safety Planning
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December of 2019, the world began to notice a rapid rise in a novel coronavirus, COVID-19. First identified within China, global efforts to contain the spread failed and it rapidly grew internationally. On February 5, 2020, the State of Wisconsin announced the first positive case of COVID-19 from a recent traveler to China. As the pandemic continued, the State of Wisconsin and the Fox Valley Healthcare Emergency Readiness Coalition (FV-HERC) became inundated with COVID-19 positive individuals. The FV-HERC worked with its internal partners, state, and federal agencies to share information, provide resources, and respond to the ongoing hazard.

As the international response to COVID-19 is ongoing, FV-HERC initiated a mid-stream review of internal processes in responding to the incident. To gain insight and appropriately analyze the organizations response efforts, FV-HERC partnered with HSS to author this report by utilizing surveys and debriefs with key stakeholders across the region. This report examines the strengths and areas for improvement for five capabilities as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency:

- Operational Coordination
- Intelligence and Information Sharing
- Communications
- Health & Safety
- Planning

Overall, the FV-HERC effectively responded to the demands of the global pandemic. Identified strengths of the organization included:

- The coalition facilitated a collaborative environment that encompassed a diverse network of members to understand broader impacts of the virus and share best practices.
- FV-HERC provided valuable intelligence and information that was timely, relevant, and actionable. Respondents highlighted the constant updates supported operations in a very fluid environment.
- The PPE stockpile was an invaluable resource for members to lean on when other supplies were not available. As the only HERC in Wisconsin to maintain a stockpile, the FV-HERC was best-in-class to support its members.

Several areas of opportunity were identified to improve FV-HERC's planning and response efforts in the future. The primary areas for improvement were:

- Understanding of and training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Incident Command System (ICS), Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and Unified Command (UC).
- Improving communications between counties and the State of Wisconsin.
- Future planning in Continuity of Operations/Continuity of Government, extended COVID-19 testing strategies, and vaccine administration within the coalition.

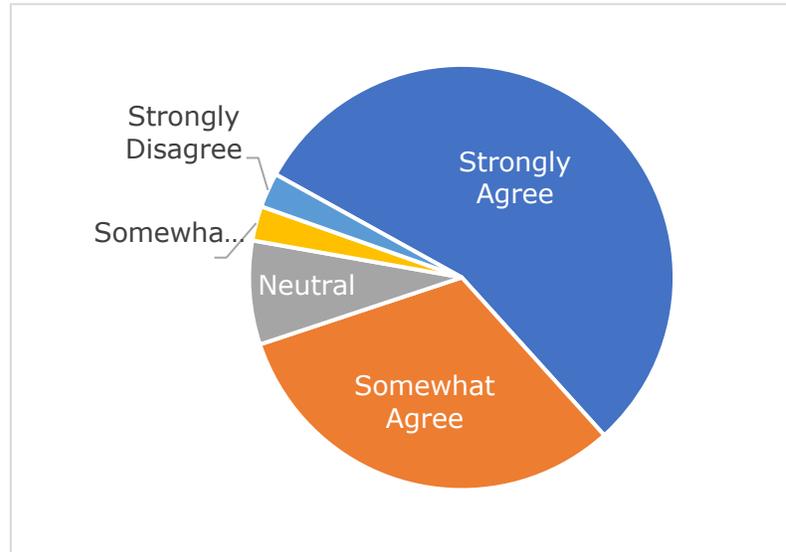
ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES

OPERATIONAL COORDINATION

Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of incident objectives.

Survey Poll: The FV-HERC was effective for coordinating resources to COVID-19.

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	21
Somewhat Agree	12
Neutral	3
Somewhat Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	1



STRENGTHS

Strength 1: Relationship building before the incident facilitated emergency coordination and partnership throughout the incident.

Strength 2: The coalition facilitated a collaborative environment that encompassed a diverse network of members to understand broader impacts of the virus and share best practices.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 1: EXTENDED OPERATIONS PREPAREDNESS

Members of the FV-HERC identified that many of their departments are understaffed, with little to no redundancy. While these staffing levels may be optimal for normal day-to-day operations, events that require extensive operations over a long period of time are hard to sustain. In many cases, uncompensated overtime, little-to-no PTO, and minimal executive support, has led to staff burnout that may continue to have wide-ranging effects after the conclusion of the COVID-19 threat.

Emergency response staff were augmented with personnel who are not traditional responders within an emergency response or EOC environment. While in most cases these individuals completed on-line ICS training, they lacked continued training, exercise opportunities, and/or real-world activations. While short-term events have a significantly smaller impact on the day-to-day responsibilities of these non-traditional response personnel, an extended event required balancing between emergency and normal

responsibilities that in some cases was ineffectively planned for. Due to the lack of NIMS reinforcement opportunities, many lacked the familiarity, understanding, and training in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Incident Command System (ICS), Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and Unified Command (UC) concepts and responsibilities. These impediments impacted the overall operational effectiveness and would continue to impact future operations as the event progresses in subsequent months.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: NIMS TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The familiarity of non-emergency staff with NIMS, ICS, EOC, and UC activities was varied across the region. Online training is available through the Federal Emergency Management's (FEMA) Center for Domestic Preparedness for free and can be a valuable tool to refer members to who may be unaware. However, some individuals may learn better in a classroom setting with hands-on instruction from experienced instructors who can provide appropriate context, examples, and answer questions as they come up. FV-HERC should consider providing training classroom opportunities to enhance non-traditional emergency staff.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2: REGIONAL EXERCISING

Exercising is effective at testing plans, socializing emergency concepts, and reinforcing training. FV-HERC should consider providing exercise opportunities that focus on a wide-scale hazard to assess both internal and external capabilities in responding. The current FV-HERC training and exercise plan should be reviewed to coordinate trainings and exercises in a progressive manner. The exercises should ensure that both Continuity of Operations/Government plans and NIMS institutionalization were effectively developed and implemented.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 2: FV-HERC STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The FV-HERC, similar to other HERCs within Wisconsin are viewed as response entities by the state and federal government. The focus between operational, planning, and/or support needs should be resolved to effectively direct the activities of the HERC moving forward. If an operational/response focus continues to be the direction of the state and federal governments, the HERC will require additional resources to fulfill that mission and support its members and community.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: WORK WITH STATE TO COORDINATE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

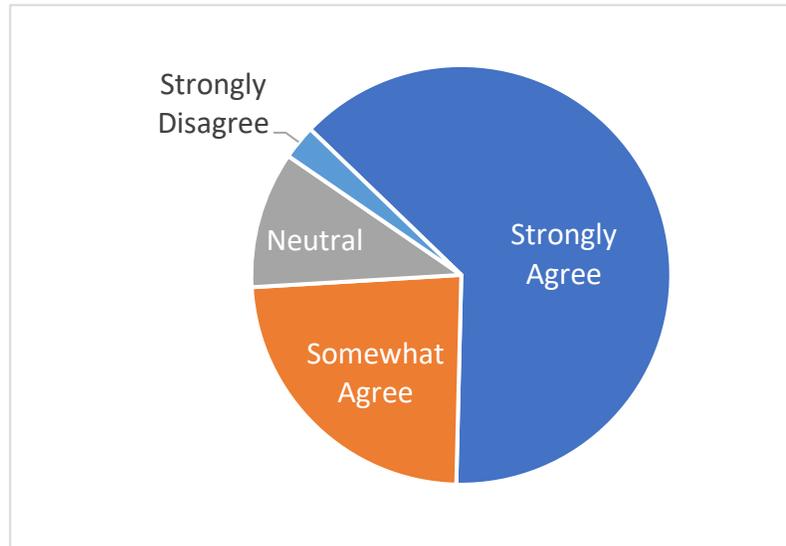
The FV-HERC should partner with the other HERCs throughout Wisconsin to have open discussions with the state regarding the continued direction and operational focus of the coalitions. The discussion should include operational priorities, day-to-day & emergency responsibilities/expectations, and the necessary resources to be successful in that direction. The HERCs may also want to consider a formal transition recommendation to a support/preparedness entity. Ultimately the direction of these discussions will need to be agreed upon between the HERCs and the State as a collective.

INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION SHARING

Provide timely, accurate, and actionable information resulting from the planning, direction, collection, exploitation, processing, analysis, production, dissemination, evaluation, and feedback of available information. Provide all decision makers with decision-relevant information regarding COVID-19, any cascading effects, and the status of the response.

Survey Poll: FV-HERC provided timely, accurate, and actionable information.

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	24
Somewhat Agree	9
Neutral	4
Somewhat Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	1



STRENGTHS

Strength 1: The coalition provided valuable intelligence and information that was timely, relevant, and actionable. Respondents highlighted the constant updates that supported operations in a very fluid environment.

Strength 2: FV-HERC weekly calls provided an open-environment to share information when many other external entities calls only provided a brief out and no ability to discuss.

Strength 3: FV-HERC post-meeting reports effectively summarized developments shared during the call for those unable to attend.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 1: SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

The FV-HERC provided valuable situational awareness throughout the rise of COVID-19. However, members were bombarded with information from the media, international organizations, federal agencies, state governments, and other external groups. This inundation of information caused confusion to the most up-to-date guidance and statistics. Some HERC members such as health systems spanned multiple geo-political jurisdictions that at times provided contradictory or incompatible direction. While the FV-HERC was not responsible for these issues, the HERC can provide a supporting role in organizing the information and reestablishing baseline situational awareness moving forward.

Some respondents felt that provided response information was skewed towards Hospitals and Public Health and was not as relevant to other groups also responding. While a pandemic is a hazard more geared towards those sectors, understanding the information

and intelligence needs of all members will better serve the organization as it looks to gather information, process it, and disseminate across the region.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The FV-HERC should consider developing a solution or work with the State of Wisconsin to develop an information management system. The solution could act as a repository of past and present situational awareness for verified partners. Through this system, the HERC could share, post, and update the most recent information without concern that the information would get lost in e-mail. Members could transition from reactive reception of information to proactive searching from an authoritative source.

In conjunction with the State of Wisconsin, the FV-HERC could push for the information management system to include a process to track outstanding issues and requests for information. Throughout the event, respondents noted that the state failed to close the loop on a number of informative issues that were not addressed in an appropriate timeframe or not addressed at all. Through the utilization of an information management system, updates could at least be provided to ensure these long-term issues are being worked on and effectively tracked.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2: INFORMATION SHARING

The FV-HERC should consider reinstating the weekly newsletter that was provided at the beginning of the rise of COVID-19. The newsletter was widely hailed as an effective information tool to level set at the end of the week. By developing and providing the newsletter, members could reestablish baseline situational awareness moving forward.

As an enhancement, the newsletter could have breakout sections for non-healthcare/public health information. By breaking out the various sections, the newsletter would ensure that other groups were considered in the development of the newsletter even when pertinent updates may not be available. In lieu of a full information management system, these newsletters should be saved in a repository accessible by the FV-HERC members.

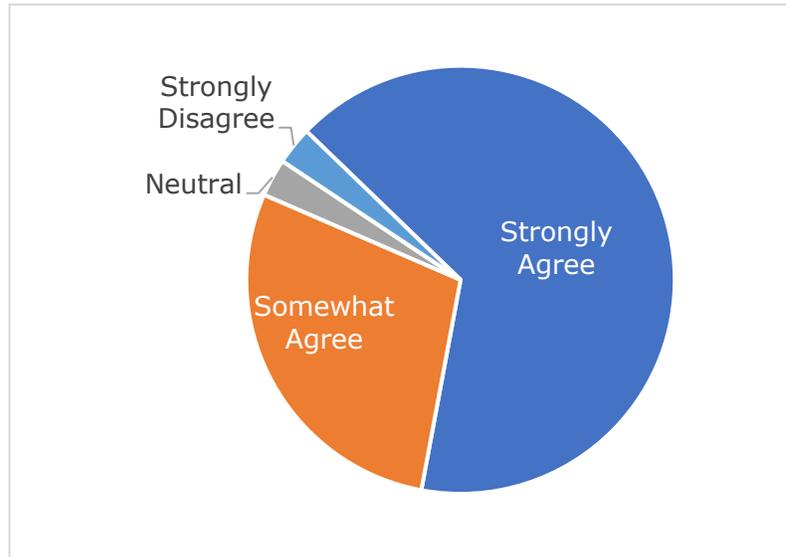
Information shared with members even in healthcare settings should highlight non-clinical guidance such as office space, commercial, and/or home (including clinical services in a patient's home) environments. While previous operating guidance focused on the clinical areas, many members operate in an alternative environment. By sharing the guidance for these areas, members are better prepared in responding to and augmenting currently operational postures.

COMMUNICATIONS

Deliver coordinated, prompt, reliable, and actionable information to the whole organization through the use of clear, consistent, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate methods to effectively relay information regarding COVID-19, as well as the actions being taken and the assistance being made available, as appropriate.

Survey Poll: FV-HERC effectively delivered coordinated, prompt, reliable, and actionable information to the coalition throughout the COVID-19 response.

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	23
Somewhat Agree	10
Neutral	1
Somewhat Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	1



STRENGTHS

Strength 1: The coalition was able to rapidly provide communication materials in a constantly evolving environment.

Strength 2: FV-HERC participated as a member in a multitude of calls and shared insightful information with the entire member base, when possible.

Strength 3: FV-HERC caucus calls were valued in the collaborative environment it created.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 1: COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Information and communication materials were primarily driven by the State of Wisconsin with little input from local jurisdictions or the state. With little insight into the processes of the state, information was at times rescinded, delayed, or non-existent. Anecdotally, this was highlighted in school guidance that came out just days before the scheduled start of the 2020-2021 school year. While the FV-HERC may not have a major impact on the resolution of these issues, it can partner with its members to support the improvement of communication processes.

Within NIMS doctrine, the Joint Information System (JIS) is a process to effectively share information amongst multi-disciplinary, cross-jurisdictional Public Information Officers (PIOs). Due to the hazards that typically impact the Fox Valley Region, many of these activities have been unnecessary. Due to this, many respondents felt under-prepared to implement a JIS or felt that their PIO was not adequately trained for the exhaustive response required to COVID-19.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: COMMUNICATIONS TRAINING

The FV-HERC should provide training opportunities in both the Joint Information System process and PIO position-specific training. By providing these opportunities in a joint environment, the counterparts across member agencies can join to conceptualize the processes required for more effective regional communications.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2: REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

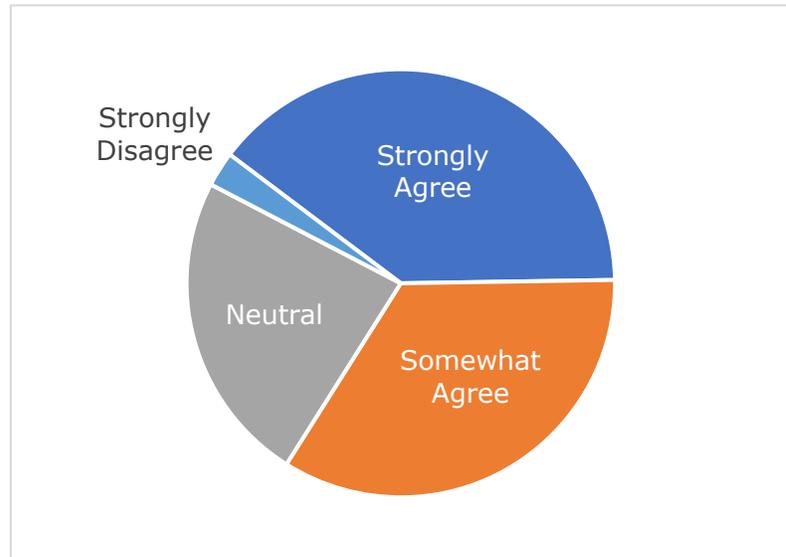
Absent the aforementioned training as an opportunity to conceptualize a regional communications process, the FV-HERC can facilitate an opportunity to enhance regional communications. While the tri-county area commonly works together, a collaborative environment extending outside of that group would be advantageous for future wide-scale events. FV-HERC could assist as an overarching entity to drive the maturation of regional communications especially county-to-county through hosting a workshop or review/improvement process of communication procedures.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Conduct appropriate measures to ensure the protection of the health and safety of the patients, visitors, staff, the public, and other stakeholders.

Survey Poll: FV-HERC effectively provided information/education in appropriate measures to aid in the protection of the health and safety of employees and the public.

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	15
Somewhat Agree	13
Neutral	9
Somewhat Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	1



STRENGTHS

Strength 1: FV-HERC was able to expedite information requests and responses for Personal Protective Equipment, Contact Tracing, and COVID-19 Testing.

Strength 2: FV-HERC facilitated resource sharing requests between members to streamline asset and information sharing.

Strength 3: The PPE stockpile was an invaluable resource for members to lean on when other supplies were not available. As the only HERC in Wisconsin to maintain a stockpile, the FV-HERC was best-in-class to support its members.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 1: INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

While the HERC maintains a stockpile available to its members, the stockpile could be further secured and accounted for. Though other members of other HERCs looked outside of the HERC to find resources, the FV-HERC could improve upon the way it maintains the stockpile. Through the implementation of inventory controls and process institutionalization, the FV-HERC could ensure that the stockpile remains available while fairly distributing in future emergencies.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: INVENTORY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

FV-HERC should look to implement an inventory management system to effectively monitor and track the current inventory. While there are a multitude of solutions available for inventory management, a simple Excel spreadsheet could probably suffice to document the relevant information of items with the inventory. The technology and various processes that

make up an inventory management system should be documented and shared across the region for effective institutionalization.

As a part of the inventory management system, the FV-HERC should design and implement the processes to request assets from the stockpile. The processes should be designed to ensure equitable access to the stockpile and ensure the most severe needs are met when assets of the stockpile are requested.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2: REVIEW INVENTORY

With the threat of additional surges and continued national and international shortages of PPE, review PPE and equipment inventories. Proactively resupply as resources allow and prepare for the possibility of another surge. If possible, create or resupply, any emergency preparedness inventories that may have been depleted.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 2: OFF-SITE ACCESSIBILITY

Most members of the FV-HERC have specific operating environments (clinical areas, EOCs, Fire Houses) with specialized equipment, it is important to ensure digital files and systems can be accessed remotely. Some rural areas within the region lack access to broadband internet or various internal systems are inaccessible from an external location. In the event of a facility access disruption event, it would be ideal that FV-HERC members are able to access files relevant to response and recovery outside of the normal workplace.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: REMOTE DATA ACCESS

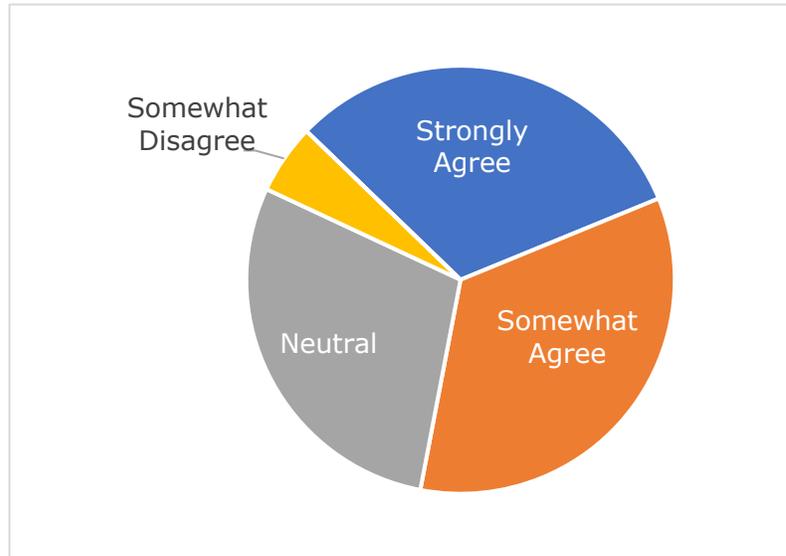
FV-HERC and its members should investigate alternative means to ensure they can work remotely. A number of solutions could be investigated and analyzed based off the resources available to the member and possible supported by the region. Mobile solutions such as broadband hotspots or satellite internet provide access in any remote location. Alternatively, solutions such as work from home or cohabitating a neighboring facility may also be satisfactory to maintain response. However, all of these solutions require the data to be accessible outside of an intranet environment. Members should work with their internal Information Technology teams to facilitate remote work accessibility to various internal and contracted external systems.

PLANNING

Conduct a systematic process in the development of executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical-level approaches to meet defined objectives.

Survey Poll: FV-HERC plans, policies, and procedures were effective at providing executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical-level approaches to meet defined objectives.

Response	Count
Strongly Agree	12
Somewhat Agree	13
Neutral	11
Somewhat Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0



STRENGTHS

Strength 1: FV-HERC was appreciated for its ability to collating planning materials across the region, anonymizing them, and sharing amongst members to define best practices.

Strength 2: FV-HERC processes and procedures were pertinent and adequate for an unprecedented situation.

Strength 3: FV-HERC remained flexible and adapted plans and procedures to new relevant guidance.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 1: RESPONSE PLANNING

As the response to COVID-19 continues, the operational landscape continues to evolve. Most facilities use an outdoor testing area to conduct and process testing samples. As the FV-HERC area moves into autumn and winter, alternative solutions will be required to continue operations in a safe and accessible environment. Considerations need to be made now to prepare for weather impacts on future testing.

As of October 1, 2020, four companies have entered their COVID-19 vaccine into the final stage of clinical trials. While a practical wide release of vaccine will not be available at first, it is imperative FV-HERC begin to prepare plans to effectively vaccinate on a large scale in the relatively near future.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: LONG-TERM TESTING PLANS

FV-HERC should support member preparedness efforts in preparing long-term testing strategies with a focus on regional coordination. These plans should account for weather

conditions, possible modifications to available testing supplies, and resource sharing amongst FV-HERC members.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 2: VACCINE ADMINISTRATION PLANS

FV-HERC should support members' preparedness efforts in preparing vaccine administration plans. These plans will require potential prioritization of vaccines to individuals that are considered most vulnerable, and the effective deployment of vaccine resources across the region. These plans should consider a public messaging strategy to promote vaccine confidence, counter misinformation, and target outreach to vulnerable and high-risk populations.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 3: CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS/GOVERNMENT PLANNING

FV-HERC should support the development of Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) planning efforts. Support could include training focused on extended operations that last a minimum of three months and may have atypical impacts including little to no external support, limited supply replenishment, and concurrent emergency & normal operations. Through this process, members will be better positioned to understand what day-to-day operations can be suspended (and for how long), which "non-essential staff" can be repurposed into the emergency response, and the adequate training and exercise needs for emergency staff.

Additionally, the coalition could consider developing COOP and COG planning templates or extend planning support services to members. Some respondents identified that due to the rural make-up of their jurisdiction, they could be a department of one that relies heavily on augmenting with personnel from other departments or relying on external partners. The coalition should also consider broader COOP planning when members would rely on the HERC but the HERC itself is inundated with a response.

AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT 2: CHECKPOINT AND POST-INCIDENT REVIEW

COVID-19 continues to impact the entire world. To further improve the resiliency of the FV-HERC region, its members must learn from the strengths and areas of improvement of their individual and regional response. Activities such as After-Action Report/Improvement Planning at multiple checkpoint intervals and post-incident will be integral to drive improvement to all-hazards preparedness moving forward both at the jurisdictional and HERC levels.

CORRECTIVE ACTION 1: AFTER-ACTION REVIEW/IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Post-incident, the FV-HERC should conduct an additional in-depth review of all the activities and actions taken throughout the response. This will be critical to understand the positive results of the response, as well as areas that can be improved for future incidents. A complete After-Action Report and Improvement Plan should account for all stakeholders across the region, including external stakeholders, to continue process improvement moving forward.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Capability	Area for Improvement	Corrective Action	Primary Responsible Department	Start Date	Completion Date
Operational Coordination	Extended Operations Preparedness	NIMS Training Opportunities	FVHERC		
		Regional Exercising	FVHERC		
	FV-HERC Direction	Work with State to Resolve Direction Issues			
		Exercise Program			
Intelligence and Information Sharing	Situational Awareness	Information Management System	FVHERC		
		Information Sharing			
Communications	Communication Processes	Communications Training	FVHERC		
		Regional Communications	FVHERC		
Health and Safety	Inventory Management	Inventory Management System			
		Review Inventory			
	Off-site Accessibility	Remote Data Access			
Planning	Response Planning	Long-term Testing Plans	PH partners		
		Mass-Vaccination plans	PH partners		
		Continuity of Operations/Government Planning			
	Checkpoint and Post-Incident Review	After-Action Review/Improvement Planning	FVHERC		