Contingency Considerations When Facing Reductions in Emergency Communications Budgets

Recent national events, such as the health crisis and geopolitical tensions, have caused budget reductions across the public safety community. To help state, local, tribal, and territorial government agencies maintain or adjust their budgets in a time of constrained funding, SAFECOM and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) developed this fact sheet to provide a series of contingency considerations to justify investment in four mission-critical resource categories: personnel, operating costs, equipment, and software. While these considerations are intended to "keep the lights on," each section features a light blue box with "nice to have" items should additional funding become available. While agencies cannot control all financial impacts, this fact sheet identifies elements that agencies can directly influence, use to advocate for additional funding, or use to defend critical expenses.

How Do SWICs Contribute to Funding Decisions?

Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) are experts on their states' emergency communications and can accurately prioritize funding during periods of reduced budgets

SWICs act as a liaison to the Federal Government on issues concerning statewide interoperability, including funding challenges

Without a designated, full-time SWIC or SWIC Program, states are not eligible for certain federal grants

Personnel

Personnel are essential and should be protected during budget cuts to ensure continued daily mission-critical operations and emergency management.

- Preparing justifications for current roles or revising positions' hours, additional duties, and pay schedules, can help maintain essential staffing levels, preserve mission-critical functions, and ensure reliable customer service
- Furloughing or reducing hours of some staff may result in overtime for other staff, negating cost savings
- Maintaining current staff is often more effective and efficient than replacing or training new personnel. If staff are furloughed or leave their positions, they may be difficult to replace due to hiring freezes and market competition
- Creating restoration plans is necessary for an eventual "return to normal"
- Encouraging virtual attendance at conferences can reduce travel costs, while still fulfilling position, governance, education, and networking goals
- Planning for employees to attend trainings necessary to maintaining job-essential certifications

With additional funds, agencies can consider supporting optional trainings and exercises to build personnel knowledge, supporting in-person meetings (once advisable), and hiring backup personnel for anticipated absences

Operating Costs

- Setting aside funding for incidentals and consumables, such as fuel purchases, is necessary for incident response
- Renegotiating contract terms (e.g., interest rates) with vendors can modify payment schedules
- Terminating or defaulting on contracts can result in late or legal fees, increasing costs in the long-term
- Defaulting on contracts (e.g., subscriptions, rent, leases, licenses) can negatively impact credit scores making it more difficult to secure certain funding mechanisms (e.g., bonds, public-private partnerships) in the future

With additional funds, agencies can consider funding backup fuel reserves, purchasing replacement parts, and investing in secondary or backup sites

Equipment

- Sustaining operable communications requires funding both system-level support (e.g., managing software, access, outages) and maintenance activities (e.g., repairs, batteries)

- Funding system upgrades ensures available support, as older systems may outlast available technical assistance, reducing vendor options and increasing operational costs

- Servicing outdated equipment becomes increasingly difficult and expensive due to shortages in replacement parts or available labor. The sooner agencies begin maintenance support, the less costly it will be over time

- Developing a prioritized list of maintenance activities that connects necessary or preventative repairs to mission-critical support

- Reviewing contractual obligations for leased or rented resources to understand costs and responsibilities (e.g., maintenance and upgrades) for equipment and infrastructure

- Participating with partner agencies in the Shared Communications/Shared Infrastructure approach to reduce capital investments and ongoing costs

> With additional funds, agencies can consider one-time investments for interoperability solutions (e.g., FirstNet, Next Generation 911); Identity, Credential, and Access Management advancements; standards-based compliance (e.g., Project 25, LTE); and encryption

Software

- Maintaining operability, interoperability, security, and continuity often necessitates software updates

- Continuing payments are often required to retain vendor support and system access for software programs that are paid in a series of installments, rather than a one-time purchase

- Forgoing software maintenance or associated software licenses can increase cybersecurity vulnerabilities, impairing an agency's ability to effectively communicate

> With additional funds, agencies can consider funding risk assessments, cybersecurity solutions, preventive upgrades, backup systems, and mitigation exercises

Additional Resources

Agencies can reference the following materials to advocate for emergency communications funding and mitigate current and future funding challenges.

System Lifecyle Planning Guide, Compendium, Fact Sheet, and Planning Tool

SAFECOM Guidance on Emergency Communications Grants

Emergency Communications Systems Value Analysis Guide and Brochure

Funding Mechanisms Guide for Public Safety Communications

Next Steps

SAFECOM and NCSWIC are analyzing contingency planning considerations to create a comprehensive guide that breaks considerations into three levels of funding: "keep the lights on," "nice to have," and "return to normal." While SAFECOM and NCSWIC develop the extensive guide, please direct questions or feedback to SAFECOMGovernance@cisa.dhs.gov or visit cisa.gov/safecom/funding.

1 KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

2 NICE TO HAVE

3 RETURN TO NORMAL

LEAST FUNDING   MOST FUNDING