

# Family Reunification Center Full Scale Exercise

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After-Action Report/Improvement Plan  
Exercise Date: May 3, 2018 0800-1200

**SEMINOLE COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seminole County Office of Emergency Management conducted the State's first Family Reunification Center Full Scale Exercise on May 3, 2018. The Seminole County Sheriff's Office, Office of Emergency Management, Seminole-Volusia Medical Examiner, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, American Red Cross, and Florida Crisis Response Team conducted the exercise at Seminole State College main campus Public Safety Complex in Lake Mary.

The full-scale exercise included the opening of a family reunification center after an active shooter event at the Seminole State College Heathrow Campus. The active shooter event at the Heathrow campus was simulated allowing participants to focus on the family reunification center component of response and recovery.

Over 100 volunteers participated acting as students, faculty, and guests. These individuals simulated a bus transfer from the Heathrow campus. A portion of the volunteers played parents and friends coming to pick up and reunify with the students, faculty and guests. Additional student names were created to simulate students that had been transported to area hospitals and those who were deceased at the Heathrow campus. Parents and friends that were attempting to reunify with students at hospitals and those deceased were sent to a separate room where notification could be made by law-enforcement officials.

Two main entry points were established at the public safety building for family reunification. Those entry points included one for students and volunteers, and another entry point for parents and friends seeking to reunify with the students. Inside the Family Reunification Center five areas were established to facilitate the reunification of individuals. Those areas included investigation, parents and family waiting area, student/faculty/guests waiting area, reunification area, and the incident command post.

Successful exercises lead to an ongoing program of process improvements. The main objectives of this exercise included:

- Transport 100 role players from a simulated active shooter event to a debrief point
- Check in and identify the people who were at the scene
- Debrief and collect evidence
- Reunify those at the scene with their families and friends
- Provide grief counseling to those in need
- Identify gaps in the process

This report is intended to assist agencies striving for preparedness excellence by analyzing exercise results and:

- ✓ Identifying strengths to be maintained and built upon.
- ✓ Identifying potential areas for further improvement.
- ✓ Recommending exercise follow-up actions.
- ✓ Implementing a progressive exercise program.

The success of the exercise was determined by group participation in the identification of problem areas and discussion on plans and response tactics. Evaluation was conducted throughout the exercise by Office of Emergency Management staff and individual assessments. Two (2) Hot-Wash sessions were held with law enforcement personnel and volunteers and support staff.

## Major Strengths

The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- Seminole County Sheriff's Office has developed a standard operating procedure for Family Reunification Center.
- Lessons learned from the Pulse nightclub event strengthened planning activities and built on strengths and areas of opportunity from the real-life event.
- Identification of personnel that will work inside family reunification center greatly improved the centers opening.
- Incident Command was immediately established at the center which provided for an overarching management structure.
- Law enforcement, crisis teams, and emergency management staff had a good working relationship.

## Primary Areas for Improvement

During the exercise, several areas for improvement in the ability to respond to the active shooter incident requiring Family Reunification Center activation were identified. The primary areas for improvement, including recommendations, are as follows:

- Depth in staffing in each position is a major weakness inside the Family Reunification Center.
- The Incident Command Post was established but often abandoned making it difficult for individuals to find leadership.
- Resource management and coordination needs strengthening.
- Additional training and education in the National Incident Management System and Incident Command System needed for supervisory and management staff.
- Flow charts may support volunteer and faith-based individuals who have arrived at the Family Reunification Center but don't understand the process.

While the participants and evaluators identified areas for improvement, it should be noted that participants dealt with many objectives of the exercise in an exemplary manner. The participants clearly knew their roles and responsibilities and what were expected of them. Overall, this exercise was a successful learning tool that, if built upon, can prepare the participants for almost any disaster they may face.

*The suggested actions in this report should be viewed as recommendations only. In some cases, Seminole County Office of Emergency Management and Seminole County Sheriff's Office may determine that the benefits of implementation are insufficient to outweigh the costs. In other cases, alternative solutions may be identified. All recommendations are reviewed regularly and appropriate action and the time needed for implementation is determined. In some cases, action may be delayed based on expected changes in resources, identification of new plans or procedures, and technology modifications.*

### **Follow-up should revisit:**

Planners should use the results of this exercise to enhance existing plans and procedures by sharing expectations so they are known by all of the participants.

While all personnel that participated in the exercise performed very well, future exercises should focus on the following items:

- Expand the scenario – possibly transition to Family Assistance Center activities and Citizens Information Hotline activation.
- Additional training and exercising of the link between the Incident Command Post and Emergency Operations Center
- Tabletop exercises that allows new less experienced members shadow higher-ranking team members.
- The public information staff in various departments and agencies needs to have a stand-alone drill to test joint information functions.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the participants involved with this exercise recognized a need for additional training and exercises. The simulated incident involved multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction interaction, which allowed those participants the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the policies and procedures of the EOC, as well as, one another and their available resources during activation.

The Office of Emergency Management and Seminole County Sheriff's Office will use the outcomes of this exercise to continue to enhance knowledge and training among the team members. This will help to improve and expand familiarity during future activations. The Improvement Plan Matrix at the end of this document will allow personnel to visualize where improvement actions can be implemented to continue the cycle of training and exercises.

Overall, the exercise was received positively. There were some issues that were addressed and handled by sound problem solving during the exercise and others still pose a challenge to be resolved.

## EXERCISE OVERVIEW

<b>Exercise Name</b>	Seminole State College Family Reunification Center
<b>Exercise Dates</b>	May 3, 2018
<b>Scope</b>	This exercise was a full scale exercise conducted for 4 hours in duration at the Seminole County Seminole State College main campus – Public Safety Complex in Lake Mary, Florida.
<b>Mission Area(s)</b>	Response / Recovery
<b>Threat or Hazard</b>	Active Shooter
<b>Scenario</b>	After a simulated active shooter event at the Seminole State College – Heathrow Campus, a Family Reunification Center was established at the Seminole State College Public Safety Complex on the main campus in Lake Mary but law enforcement personnel. The exercise included the activation of the center, tracking of evacuees, investigation, reunification, death notifications, and crisis counseling.
<b>Sponsor</b>	Seminole County Office of Emergency Management.
<b>Participating Organizations</b>	American Red Cross Florida Crisis Response Team Florida Department of Law Enforcement Seminole County Office of Emergency Management Seminole County Sheriff's Office Seminole State College Seminole-Volusia Medical Examiner
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## ANALYSIS OF CORE CAPABILITIES

Aligning exercise objectives and core capabilities provides a consistent taxonomy for evaluation that transcends individual exercises to support preparedness reporting and trend analysis. Table 1 includes the exercise objectives, aligned core capabilities, and performance ratings for each core capability as observed during the exercise and determined by the evaluation team.

Objective	Core Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
1. Establish and maintain inner and outer perimeter. 2. Establish and implement a protocol for verifying identity. 3. Test the participant's capability to implement physical and technological measures to control ingress and egress into the facilities in accordance with policies and procedures.	Access Control and Identity Verification		X		
4. Evaluate the timely establishment of incident command and local decision making process. 5. Assess agencies' ability to compile information on victims and match them to the appropriate family member. 6. Evaluate the process of crisis counseling, death notification, and family reunification. 7. Designate and establish staging areas and breakout rooms	Operational Coordination	X			
8. Establish a JIC 9. Establish a Lead Public Information 10. Provide timely, accurate, and needed information to the public and those inside the FRC. 11. Fulfill any incoming requests for information	Public Information and Warning		X		
12. Assess participant's ability to gather, recognize, analyze, produce, and disseminate information and intelligence.	Intelligence and Information Sharing		X		

Objective	Core Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
<b>Ratings Definitions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.</li> <li>Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.</li> <li>Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s), but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.</li> <li>Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were not performed in a manner that achieved the objective(s).</li> </ul>					

**Table 1. Summary of Core Capability Performance**

The following sections provide an overview of the performance related to each exercise objective and associated core capability while highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.



## Core Capability 1: Access Control and Identity Verification

**Strengths:** The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

**Strength:** Seminole County Emergency Management and Seminole County Sheriff's Office successfully developed an effective facility management plan to have victims and families enter at opposite sides of the facility so as to mitigate perimeter breaches.

**Strength:** All persons entering the facility were scanned with metal detectors to ensure security of all personnel, and uniformed law enforcement provided a meaningful physical presence at key perimeter points.

**Analysis:** Two major points of entry were established for the Family Reunification Center. The points of entry were manned by security personnel who ensured persons entered the right location. Guards were placed at all other entrances and exits to the building. There was a back exit that was used to help persons leave the facility once the connection was made or notification to next of kin.

### Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

**Area for Improvement 1.1:** All staff working at Family Reunification should be able to be easily identified by a marked garment such as a colored wristband.

**Area for Improvement 1.2:** A process should be developed for connecting families with persons who may have fled the scene of an incident.

**Area for Improvement 1.3:** People leaving the Family Reunification Center should be signed out by an authorized staff member.

## Core Capability 2: Operational Coordination

**Strengths:** The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

**Strength:** A robust ICS-based command structure was established quickly and efficiently at the Family Reunification Center location.

**Strength:** Law Enforcement, Emergency Management, and crisis team personnel developed positive and effective working relationships within the command structure.

**Strength:** A Standard Operating Procedure for Family Reunification Centers was developed utilizing data and practical experience from the exercise.

**Analysis:** An incident management team was established by the Seminole County Sheriff's Office. Other agency quickly melded into the command structure as they showed up at the facility. The IMT moved throughout the building which made it hard for individuals to find them. This caused some confusion – which may happen in a normal event. Once the center is opened for a while and enough staff is present, then the IMT would be able to settle into the Incident Command Post and be available in one location.

## Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

**Area for Improvement 2.1:** A briefing schedule for each room should be established in advance, to be conducted by each Branch Director within the command structure.

**Area for Improvement 2.2:** The Incident Command Post should be continually staffed with a clear chain of command so that people can always find leadership.

**Area for Improvement 2.3:** Roles within the command structure should be more clearly defined and the depth of responsibilities better understood.

**Area for Improvement 2.4:** Strengthening of coordination in resource management is needed.

## Core Capability 3: Public Information and Warning

**Strengths:** The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

- **Strength:** Seminole County Sheriff's Office took effective lead of public information, with all press conferences conducted through them.
- **Strength:** Public information personnel quickly adapted JIC location parameters to suit changing facility needs within the FRC.
- **Strength:** Seminole State College received ample assistance from agency PIOs to deal with questions from families and media.

**Analysis:** A joint information system was established at the facility. There were multiple media that attempted to gain access to the facility but because of good facility controls they were sent to a media rally point. One member of the media did make it into the facility, but this would have become a legal matter as the individual lied to gain access and hindered part of the investigation.

## Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

**Area for Improvement 3.1:** Family Reunification Center personnel should be prepared to field questions regarding individuals who were not part of the incident or may have fled the scene.

**Area for Improvement 3.2:** Information needs to be disseminated to FRC staff through a dedicated PIO or liaison officer.

**Area for Improvement 3.3:** Flow charts or other informational graphics may be needed to brief volunteers unfamiliar with the Family Reunification Center procedures.

**Area for Improvement 3.4:** PIOs are needed to handle media inquiries and prevent unnecessary harassment of law enforcement and the public.

## Core Capability 4: Intelligence and Information Sharing

**Strengths:** The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

**Strength:** Interview room did an exceptional job identifying families and sharing information with Incident Command.

**Strength:** Incident Command briefs were thorough and received well by all agencies.

**Analysis:** An intelligence section was established at the Family Reunification Center. This section would have been working closely with the EOC and on-scene intelligence to try to identify victim locations. Just one interview room was established, but it was clear more would be needed in the event of a real emergency.

### Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

**Area for Improvement 4.1:** JIC personnel should pursue more proactive information gathering from FRC instead of just waiting for briefings.

**Area for Improvement 4.2:** Public and families were not receiving adequate information and updates at the FRC.

## APPENDIX A: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Mission Area	Core Capability	Corrective Action	Capability Element <sup>1</sup>	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Common to All Areas	Access Control and Identity Verification	All staff working at Family Reunification should be able to be easily identified by a marked garment such as a colored wristband.	Training	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		December, 2018
		A process should be developed for connecting families with persons who may have fled the scene of an incident.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		December, 2018
		People leaving the Family Reunification Center should be signed out by an authorized staff member.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		October, 2018
	Operational Coordination	A briefing schedule for each room should be established in advance, to be conducted by each Branch Director within the command structure.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		December, 2018
		The Incident Command Post should be continually staffed with a	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		September, 2018

<sup>1</sup> Capability Elements are: Planning, Organization, Equipment, Training, or Exercise.

		clear chain of command so that people can always find leadership.					
		Roles within the command structure should be more clearly defined and the depth of responsibilities better understood.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		September, 2018
		Strengthening of coordination in resource management is needed.	Planning	Seminole County Office of Emergency Management	Operations		December, 2018
	<b>Public Information and Warning</b>	Family Reunification Center personnel should be prepared to field questions regarding individuals who were not part of the incident or may have fled the scene.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Community Relations		December, 2018
		Information needs to be disseminated to FRC staff through a dedicated PIO or liaison officer.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Community Relations		December, 2018
		Flow charts or other informational graphics may be needed to brief volunteers unfamiliar with the Family Reunification Center procedures.	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Community Relations		December, 2018
		PIOs are needed to handle media inquiries and prevent unnecessary harassment of law	Planning	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Community Relations		December, 2018

		enforcement and the public.					
	<b>Intelligence and Information Sharing</b>	JIC personnel should pursue more proactive information gathering from FRC instead of just waiting for briefings.	Training	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Community Relations		December, 2018
		Public and families were not receiving adequate information and updates at the FRC.	Exercise	Seminole County Sheriff's Office	Special Operations		December 2018

Mission Area	Core Capability	Corrective Action	Capability Element <sup>2</sup>	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Response	Infrastructure Systems	4.1: Continue to encourage all employees and citizens to enroll in the electronic text notification system.	Planning				
	Mass Care Services	5.1: Identify employees that would be assigned to an emergency shelter for support.	Planning				
		5.2: Offer training before hurricane season for County employees, school board, and health department staff.	Training				
		5.3: Offer training to volunteer organizations that may be interested in adopting a shelter during a disaster.	Training				
	Situational Assessment	N/A					

<sup>2</sup> Capability Elements are: Planning, Organization, Equipment, Training, or Exercise.

Mission Area	Core Capability	Corrective Action	Capability Element <sup>3</sup>	Primary Responsible Organization	Organization POC	Start Date	Completion Date
Recovery	Economic Recovery	7.1 Continue to market the ESF-18 program. Encourage chambers of commerce and economic development divisions from each municipality to be engaged in the process.	Planning				
	Health and Social Services	8.1 Strengthen the Critical Incident Stress Management program and plan.	Planning				

<sup>3</sup> Capability Elements are: Planning, Organization, Equipment, Training, or Exercise.



## APPENDIX B: EXERCISE PARTICIPANTS

Participating Organizations