



2019 Blended Threat Resilience Workshop Series

Final Findings Report Brief

TLP: WHITE

About the Workshop Series

The world has seen an increase in blended or complex threats, defined as a physical or cyber danger that has the potential for crossing over to the other side and that may harm life, information, operations, the environment, and/or property. As part of the REN-ISAC's efforts to strengthen the higher education community's ability to respond to these threats, we executed our second Blended Threat Resilience Workshop Series in 2019. Consisting of six events hosted across the U.S., these workshops were interactive sessions where security professionals from a multitude of disciplines confronted a hypothetical threat to their institution and participated in creating a strategic, policy-oriented response.

The 2019 program utilized a threat-informed and peer-approved scenario based on a hypothetical measles strain spreading to a college campus, causing follow-on impacts to students and staff. By using this topic to focus the discussion, participating professionals gained proficiency in responding to blended threats while confronting a specific health situation many campuses are facing now due to COVID-19. Walking through this scenario allowed participants to experience a major incident from different points of view and learn to more effectively cooperate with other security-related fields.

About this Document

To benefit the broader higher education community, REN-ISAC produced the 2019 REN-ISAC Blended Threat Resilience Workshop Series Final Report ([read the full report](#)), which documents the observations gleaned from each event. This document, the Final Findings Report Brief, is a high-level overview that provides the top four best practices revealed during the workshop series.

This document is TLP:WHITE, so we encourage you to share these findings with colleagues, supervisors, and administration at your institution.

Suggested Best Practices

1.) Storing the Disaster Recovery Plan Safely and Maintaining Back-Ups

Ensuring emergency plans are available by a variety of means reduces delays during activation, especially for personnel unfamiliar with the document. Plans should be accessible from more than one storage location or via more than one method to ensure availability when access to a particular service—the internet, a computer, or even power—is unavailable during an emergency. Just as important, staff should be informed and reminded on a regular basis about where to find these backups under those circumstances.

2.) Preparing First Responders for a Highly Contagious Disease Outbreak

Leaders should consider optimal methods for keeping their first responders safe while still serving their campus and community, including pre-positioning personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies to training dispatchers to check for symptoms. Training is a key element of this effort. Staff must understand how to properly don and doff PPE and what questions to ask potentially infectious callers. All of this requires a time investment prior to a potential incident to ensure personnel have proficient “muscle memory” to react safely and confidently.

3.) Providing Self-Care Kits to Students

Selling or providing self-care kits to incoming students allows an institution to ensure students have the basic necessities to handle common diseases or natural disasters during an incident. New students can be a rewarding yet difficult population to reach with preparedness messaging. They are more liable to start and stick with new habits during this transitional period in their life, yet their attention is occupied by a large number of pressing tasks and new distractions inherent to this major transition. Providing preparedness kits can allay student concern and anxiety during an epidemic situation, provide students with a basic level of personal preparedness, and inspire a solid foundation for health preparedness skills necessary for living on their own.

4.) Utilizing Social Media to Track Campus Reactions to an Outbreak

During an ever-changing situation like a disease outbreak, social media can be a powerful tool for situational awareness. Social media managers should consider disease outbreaks as a period of heightened awareness of their social media presence—both for messages directed to them and for relevant conversations about the incident. Communications leaders should further recognize that this conversation not only shapes the university’s messaging but also departmental response efforts. For example, health professionals may want to know popular discussion topics, concerns, and other information gleaned from social media to properly address inaccurate information and dispel disinformation, while IT professionals may want to know if there is a sudden trend in people staying home in order to prepare for an increase in remote network traffic.

Want More Information?

For a full list of best practices, as well as areas of improvement and challenges noted by workshop participants, consult the [2019 REN-ISAC Blended Threat Resilience Workshop Series Final Report](#).

Interested in hosting or participating in one of our future Blended Threat Resiliency Workshops? Contact Sarah Bigham at sarah@ren-isac.net.