Using the National Health Security Index:
Tips from the Field

A variety of stakeholders have suggested a series of strategies for using the Index to improve health security and preparedness efforts. Conversations with stakeholders from public health, emergency management, state legislatures, and health care identified these examples of Index use, which you may find appropriate for your organization or community.

General Suggestions for Using the Index

1. **Begin by understanding the measures, subdomains, and domains or how the Index is constructed.** The Index includes six domains that research and experience have shown to be important in protecting people from consequences of disasters and emergencies.

   a. More detailed information about the Index Methodology can be found at *http://nhspi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NHSPI-2017-Methodology-PDF.pdf*.

   b. The Index Program Office offers technical assistance to understand the Index construction; contact *HealthSecurity@uky.edu*.

2. **Identify ways that your organization could improve its health security and preparedness capacity and capabilities***.* Stakeholders can use Index results to identify and prioritize areas for improvement. For example, state public health, emergency management, and other professionals can review Index scores at the domain and subdomain levels to identify areas in which the state is strong (above the national average) or challenged (below the national average) and prioritize domains, subdomains, and measures for improvement with state stakeholders. Once areas for improvement have been prioritized, state level professionals can take additional actions to assure improvements occurs.

3. **Focus on communicating and improving scores for the domains and subdomains rather than focusing only on specific measures**. The Index is not designed to be a check list for health security and preparedness. Some of the strongest conversations to improve on preparedness can happen at the domain and subdomain level.

   a. Begin discussions to understand where your organization's and partners' limited capacity to improve may be best utilized. The Index Methodology includes weighting of measures within subdomains and weighting of subdomains within domains. Preparedness experts created the weighting schemes to emphasize the most important areas for improvement.

   b. If you review the Index Methodology and measures weighting (see link in the first suggestion above), you can focus efforts on subdomains with higher weights to strengthen subdomain performance.

The Health Security Index measures can be used to prepare for, respond to, and recover from large-scale health threats, specifically to:

1. Communicate the importance of preparedness to key stakeholders, raising awareness, knowledge and understanding of core preparedness capabilities;

2. Convene key stakeholders and initiate discussion across organizations on preparedness roles and responsibilities;

3. Identify strengths and opportunities related to preparedness capabilities and resources;

4. Develop shared priorities and plans for improving preparedness across organizations and stakeholders;

5. Strengthen coordination and partnerships among organizations and sectors working to improve preparedness;

6. Advocate and secure resources for improving preparedness and health security;

7. Provide technical assistance and support to stakeholders seeking to strengthen their contributions to health security; and

8. Monitor progress and make updates and corrections to improvement plans and strategies.

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Specific Strategy Examples

Emergency Management Scenario

Strategy: Monitor progress and make updates and corrections to improvement plans and strategies
A strategy, often used by emergency management professionals, is to have informal discussions with colleagues at conferences or through phone calls. These professionals use the Index to identify domains and subdomains for improvement; identify states that perform better in these areas; and then contact colleagues in the better performing states to understand the actions those professionals took to achieve higher performance. Index domains that are particularly important to emergency management professionals are Community Planning and Engagement and Incident and Information Management.

To improve in planning, emergency management professionals could review their state scores in the subdomain on Management of Volunteers During Emergencies. If their state score is below the national average in this subdomain, the emergency manager could review other state scores to identify a state with a score that is higher than the national average and then have a conversation with the emergency management professional in the higher performing state to identify actions to improve their state's score.

Public Health Scenarios

Strategy: Develop shared priorities and plans for improving preparedness across multiple sectors and stakeholders
Public health professionals use this approach to improvement as well as more formal strategies, such as a quality improvement process. A quality improvement approach also would identify areas for improvement on Index domains and subdomains by comparing state scores against national averages. Then, state level stakeholders could use quality improvement processes, such as root cause analysis, to understand why state scores are lower than the national average. Once root causes have been established, public health professionals could identify evidence-based strategies to improve in the identified domain or subdomain.

A key Index domain/subdomain for public health is Surveillance and Monitoring/Surveillance and Epidemiologic Investigation. A state with subdomain scores lower than the national average could review the 13 specific measures of this subdomain and identify actions that the agency could take to improve measure scores and subsequently subdomain and domain scores.

Strategy: Monitor progress and make updates and corrections to improvement plans and strategies
Some states have built on these approaches by creating performance management systems, including dashboards, around domains and/or subdomains. A performance management system incorporates quality improvement approaches along with performance standards (Index domains and subdomains), performance measures (Index measures) and performance reporting. State level professionals could establish a basic performance management system from the Index domains and subdomains to create a process for regular monitoring and reporting on preparedness planning efforts. For more information about performance management systems, please visit www.phf.org.

Quality improvement efforts along with performance management systems to monitor and report on preparedness goals can be used to facilitate preparedness partnerships. For example, a preparedness performance management system that uses the Index for performance standards and measures could be a platform for regular review of partner roles and responsibilities, as well as plans and protocols. Other opportunities include using a preparedness performance management system as an organizing framework for

preparedness exercises and After Action Reviews, as well as informing state technical assistance efforts to local agencies.

Strategy: Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to preparedness capabilities and resources
The Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health and Emergency Preparedness and Hospital Preparedness Program Aligned Cooperative Agreements Request for Applications has incorporated Index use. For example, the Index has been identified as one source of information for identifying strategic priorities. For additional information as to how Index use is encouraged in these programs, please see https://www.grants.gov/view-opportunity.html?oppId=290860.

General Scenario for State Agencies

Strategy: Advocate and secure resources for improving preparedness and health security
States have used the Index in other ways. For example, one state is using the Index as part of a legislative study. A few states have included Index scores as a Strategic Planning goal and measure. Other states are using the Index as a tool to communicate with legislators about the importance of consistent and sufficient preparedness funding to support public health infrastructure, such as the state lab.

Community Organization Scenario

Strategy: Advocate and secure resources for improving preparedness and health security
Other Index stakeholders and audiences are using the Index in a variety of ways. For example, an advocacy organization is using the Index to work with communities to improve preparedness efforts and to improve its own planning efforts. Agencies, community organizations, non-profits, and churches could use the Index for grant proposal background or requirements.

Foundation Scenario

Strategy: Strengthen coordination and partnerships among organizations and sectors working to improve preparedness
Other funders, such as foundations, could use the Index to bolster their own initiatives or align resources. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sees the Index as part of its Public and Community Health portfolio, which is designed to strengthen and align systems around the common goal of better health. For more information, please see http://www.rwjf.org/en/our-focus-areas/topics/public-and-community-health.html.

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