



EAB

# Tabletop Exercise: Emergency Response

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## Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis: Part B

This situation belongs to [EAB's "Tabletop Exercise" Resource Center](#). There, you will find an explanation of the value of these exercises, guides for facilitators and observers, and an after-action report template.

We recommend this situation as the first of a multi-part tabletop exercise featuring Situations Part A and C, which can also be found in the resource center.

# Responding to COVID-19 Crisis: Part B

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Academic affairs leaders soon become aware of another emerging situation.

A graduate biology student called his department chair this morning to share that his advisor Dr. Rossi, and his wife Dr. Nowak, a beloved faculty member in economics, both in their late 50s, have been in an Intensive Care Unit for two days.

Dr. Rossi had e-mailed the student from his hospital bed two days ago with detailed instructions for how he and his fellow graduate students should keep their lab (which features many animals and cultures) running, as they have been for the last several weeks, in a manner that seems to run contrary to university guidance. Dr. Rossi manages several million-dollar grants, and the student explains that it was Dr. Rossi's understanding the lab needed to continue to operate or else the students would lose pay. But the student has now grown uncomfortable with the secrecy, and Dr. Rossi is no longer responsive to texts or e-mails.

Dr. Nowak had won the university's top teaching award twice. Because of a retirement last semester in her department, she is currently teaching three heavily subscribed classes, all of which are graduation requirements for the seniors in them. Unfortunately, as this is occurring, it also becomes clear Dr. Nowak is not the only member of the economics department who has fallen ill – her own department chair and several colleagues are also self-quarantining, not well, and difficult to reach.

Meanwhile, the institution's General Counsel and Vice President of Research are healthy but difficult to reach currently, having taken a few days off to grieve over the loss of close friends.

## Discussion Questions

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After reading the situation above together, participants should endeavor to work through the following questions below in the time they have. **We recommend 30 to 60 minutes.**

- How should the university respond to these events, and the hospitalization of Dr. Rossi and Dr. Nowak? Be specific: who should do what, and in what order? What departments, academic or administrative units, or teams should be involved?
- Issue-spotting: What are the implications of these revelations for Dr. Rossi's laboratory and Dr. Nowak's courses? What are our options to address these situations? Do we have any protocols or contingency plans for laboratories and courses that would normally apply? Should these decisions be made centrally or by each academic unit?
- What are our public health-related responsibilities? Who will be tasked with working with which government entities, and to do what?

## Post-Discussion Debrief

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After working through the above exercise, the facilitator should lead the group through a shorter discussion exploring the below questions in the time they have permitted. **We recommend 15 to 30 minutes.**

Note: We recommend conducting a fuller debrief after the conclusion of a multi-part tabletop exercise, to aid in completion of an after-action report. These questions are designed to prepare the group to contribute more fully at that final stage.

- What is the consensus on how we would react to a situation like the above?
- This case makes us think about succession planning and business continuity. Many university leaders and faculty are unfortunately in the at-risk category that may experience non-mild symptoms and need to receive medical care, or attend to others in that situation. If they are unable to fulfill their roles, our mission ceases, and decision-making will slow.
  - Who is prepared to take over for unavailable instructors, principal investigators, or senior administrators? What classes, laboratories, and leadership functions are most critical, if we must prioritize?
  - In the event no one is available to take over a class or laboratory, what is our plan?
  - What proactive measures can we take now to prepare for the likely situation that at least some members of our community will become unavailable?
- Most of our policies pertaining to the death of a campus constituent presume full attention paid to each one as a unique incident. How does that change if we are dealing with a slowly-unfolding event featuring multiple fatalities in a sustained period of time?
  - How would it shift our communications strategies or our process?
  - What would be our response in the event of the passing of any of the following campus constituents:
    - An adjunct who also teaches at multiple campuses (perhaps in Dr. Nowak's economics department)
    - A staff technician (perhaps who worked in Dr. Rossi's lab)
    - A worker at a dining service on campus, but who is a contract employee of an on-premises food vendor and not an employee
    - A donor and former member of the governing or foundation board
    - A student who dies not via COVID-19 or another illness but rather from an apparent suicide, perhaps from mental health challenges exacerbated by social distancing and anxiety
  - What proactive measures can we take now to prepare for the likely situation that more members of our campus community may pass away than would typically in a short timeframe?