



Nebraska Council of Regions (NCOR) 2011 Annual Report

February 2012

2011 NCOR Members

Harold "Pete" Peterson – North Central (Chair)

Mark Conrey – Tri-County

Patrick Foust – Northeast

Pat Gerdes – Southwest

Jim Gerweck – Southeast

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Larry Thoren – South Central

Ray Richards – Panhandle

Thomas Schwarten – N-WIN (NSP)

Dave Webb – N-WIN (NPPD)

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Executive Order No. 08-04 (December 17, 2008) established the Nebraska Council of Regions (NCOR), its membership, and key activities. NCOR was created to provide oversight and integration for the eight local public safety communications regions of Nebraska and to coordinate with the Nebraska Wireless Interoperable Network (N-WIN) Council. The Executive Order charged NCOR with providing an annual report containing a current assessment of the Nebraska regional wireless communication network that includes recommendations for further development and operation of the system. This report fulfills that requirement.

Background

The 10-member NCOR board consists of one appointee each from the eight local communications regions, the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), and the N-WIN Council. Meetings are also regularly attended by representatives of the state agencies charged with providing support to the group – Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, Nebraska State Patrol, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. The primary purpose of NCOR is to complete the charges listed in Executive Order No. 08-04. Accordingly, the Nebraska Council of Regions will:

- Provide policy-level direction and coordination related to the planning and decisions regarding regional integration with the Nebraska Wireless Interoperable Network (N-WIN).
- Adopt bylaws for the operation of the NCOR.
- Develop strategies and recommendations to improve operations of the Nebraska wireless communication network, including the use of new technology as it becomes available.
- Promote interoperability for public safety communications within Nebraska.
- Provide for the development of protocols, standard operating procedures, and guidelines for use of the local Nebraska wireless communication network.
- Establish the terms of agreements and enter into agreements for public safety entities to operate with the Nebraska Wireless Interoperability Network (N-WIN), in conjunction with the Office of Chief Information Officer (OCIO), when such arrangements are practical and in the best interests of the State and the regions.

The NCOR Board held 11 meetings in 2011 including a joint meeting with the Nebraska Wireless Interoperable Network. NCOR meeting minutes can be found at:

<http://www.homelandplanning.nebraska.edu/nebraskacouncil.php>

Cooperation with Nebraska Wireless Interoperable Network (N-WIN) Council members was instrumental in the second year of NCOR. In addition to strong N-WIN Council support and participation, three state groups provided support to NCOR in 2011.

The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) provided administrative support to NCOR as needed and served the logistical needs of the group including: 1) arranging for adequate space and a location for meetings and 2) providing copies of meeting materials and sign in sheets. In addition, staff were assigned to assist regions assess technical requirements for the Request for Proposals (RFP). NEMA provides substantial resources for development of the Nebraska Interoperable Communications Network.

The Office of the State Information Officer (OCIO) provided updates on the development of interoperable communication infrastructure and implementation of the statewide radio system in coordination with the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD). OCIO provided technical assistance on the Nebraska Regional Interoperability Network, the mutual aid network, and the development of regional Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans (TICPs). OCIO is also responsible for coordinating the statewide interoperability strategy with NEMA, NCOR and regional leadership groups.

The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center provided planning assistance to NCOR over the past year through agenda development, meeting facilitation, developing draft documents, note-taking, and maintaining a website to centralize communication related to NCOR and regional activities (<http://www.homelandplanning.nebraska.edu>).

2011 Milestones

Nebraska Regional Interoperability Network (NRIN). NRIN is an Internet Protocol (IP) high-speed microwave system to be carried on over 200 towers across Nebraska. It is the backbone that ties all of the other systems together. The network provides data connectivity for public safety voice and data interoperability using the towers, and state and regional network. Public safety data will be disseminated to dispatch centers (also referred to as Public Safety Answer Points or PSAP's) located in counties and cities throughout the state. The NRIN system consists of eight regional, ringed networks that join to make up the statewide ring. The system will carry data linking all aspects of emergency communications, including statewide voice, data, wireless and video data, and will be governed by standard operating procedures put together by local and regional representatives.

Communications Services, Inc. (CSI) is the company assessing coverage and installing microwave dishes and other equipment on towers. In 2011 implementation focused primarily on the Panhandle and North Central regions. Work included approving the system design, identifying and assessing tower locations, identifying alternatives when planned towers were not feasible, negotiating rates for usage of towers and other structures, identifying storage and staging locations for equipment, ordering equipment for the tower sites and installing equipment. Each potential installation site must undergo a review for environmental impact prior to installation of any equipment. NEMA has coordinated this effort to ensure each site is promptly submitted for review.

Work began in the Southwest, South Central and Southeast regions to identify and assess towers for NRIN. NCOR developed a process to share lessons learned from the experience of the first two implementation Regions to assist other Regions as the Network develops statewide. NCOR and NEMA also began work to identify potential uses/users of NRIN and to identify governance, management, monitoring, and maintenance structures for the successful operation of NRIN. A committee of NCOR began work on identifying sustainability costs that could be shared with local officials and developed an interlocal agreement template that could be used by local groups to share costs and determine responsibilities for local networks.

Mutual Aid Radio System. The *Nebraska Mutual Aid Radio System* will allow public safety responders to communicate regionally and statewide on an as-needed/on-demand basis using common protocols and radio frequencies. The Nebraska Mutual Aid Radio System is a planned network of analog radio base stations using common, nationally accepted frequencies to provide radio coverage across the state controlled by local/regional system operators. This initiative will involve installation of equipment and connections that will require maintenance and upkeep support from local governments. Nebraska Emergency Management Agency is working closely with the Nebraska Office of the Chief Information Officer and Nebraska's Council of Regions (representatives from each of Nebraska's eight planning, exercise and training regions) to implement this initiative.

NCOR developed specifications for mutual aid and incorporated these into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The SOPs include terminology and guidelines for use, channels for mutual aid, procedures for use and discontinuation, problem identification and resolution, base frequencies, equipment requirements, procedures for heavy traffic conditions, and controls and measures. NCOR approved the SOPs in early 2011.

The mutual aid overlay/base station project has moved forward with the assistance of NEMA technical personnel. Regions and local areas assessed their needs related to upgrading public safety answering point equipment and connections to work with the statewide network for the purpose of achieving interoperability.

Three pilot programs for mutual aid continued implementation in 2011 – Tri-County Region, South Central Region and North Central. The other regions developed initial mutual aid plans, and NEMA submitted Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation Applications (EHPs). The OCIO helped regions with the technical aspects of their projects.

Paraclete. *Paraclete* © is a computer software system that enables local, regional, and state emergency responders to communicate with one another using disparate radio systems in the event of a local emergency. Responders coming to the aid of a neighboring community during a local incident may use different radio frequencies. Paraclete provides a mechanism for dispatchers to bring the frequencies together so the responder on scene can communicate as though everyone were on the same

frequency. In addition, the Paraclete system contains a sophisticated database that can be customized by local officials with area resources that are needed to handle the various emergency scenarios that may face local and regional public safety agencies. Local officials can pre-determine which frequencies to place in the Paraclete system so dispatchers using it can quickly connect them. In an emergency every second counts. The quick, clear communication in the field made possible by this system could save lives. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency purchased the license for Paraclete software for the entire state of Nebraska with the OCIO paying for its on-going maintenance. Decisions about where Paraclete equipment should be located have been made by local emergency management and communications personnel in consultation with the State personnel working on this initiative.

NEMA designed a process for resolving technical issues with Paraclete, developing a user manual and providing training for dispatchers, supervisors, and emergency managers across the state. NEMA added additional training and technical assistance staff to provide support to the PET Regions. As the use of Paraclete expands, the ability to share information will be important in ensuring success of mutual aid.

Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans (TICPs)/State Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP). TICPs detail first responder radio interoperability communications operational plans, jurisdictional agency contact information, radio frequency and infrastructure, interoperability process, network systems and includes information on governance, mutual aid agreements, Memorandum of Understandings (MOU), and other information regarding the region's radio interoperability. All eight regions and the urban Omaha area updated their TICPs in 2011.

The Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) is a locally-driven, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-disciplinary statewide plan to enhance emergency communications. The SCIP outlines and defines the current and future vision for communications interoperability within the State and aligns emergency response agencies with the goals, objectives, and initiatives for achieving that vision. A SCIP workshop was held in June 2011. NEMA, OCIO and the University Public Policy Center developed standard language for the SCIP and developed a draft of the plan.

National Emergency Communications Plan Goal 2. This Department of Homeland Security Office of Emergency Communications goal requires states to submit a report to demonstrate response-level communications capabilities within one hour of an event. Goal 2 required the regions to select an incident involving multiple entities and communications that occurred in that area and for the region then to describe how primary operating communications were handled throughout the incident. Capability data was collected through an on-line reporting process which allows for self-assessment in five categories (governance, standard operating procedures, technology, training and exercises, and usage). A Goal 2 workshop was held in June. NEMA provided technical assistance on completing this goal, and each county met compliance in 2011.

Narrowbanding. All frequency license holders are required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to comply with narrowbanding requirements by December 2012. Narrowband means that the channel is so narrow that its frequency response is considered “flat” and channels may not exceed 12.5 kHz. The OCIO provided assistance to regions in identifying frequency owners in each area that required a movement to the narrowbanded frequency. NCOR developed a checklist to assist each region in meeting narrowbanding requirements. NCOR sponsored a webinar on narrowbanding that was hosted by the Public Policy Center. In addition, a newsletter was dedicated to narrowbanding.

State Emergency Communication Commission (SECC). In 2011, the SECC became a subcommittee of NCOR. The members are volunteers whose memberships are currently part of their jobs. The FCC calls for every state to have a subcommittee for State Emergency Communications. The SECC brings broadcasters and cable together to create an effective system for emergency personnel to access communications systems in times of emergency. The SECC developed operating procedures in 2011 and continues updating the Emergency Alert System State Plan. A Federal 50/50 Emergency Management Planning Grant (EMPG) was assigned by NEMA for purchasing Emergency Alert System (EAS) equipment throughout the state of Nebraska. The Nebraska Broadcasters Association and the SECC facilitated applications from and payment to broadcast stations. The National Cable Telecom Cooperative helped work with cable companies in Nebraska. Approximately \$240,000 was distributed for the project. Virtually all broadcast and cable systems in Nebraska now have the required equipment to connect to the FEMA Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) Aggregator for EAS messages. The Federal deadline to have it working is June 30, 2012.

Public Information Communication. In 2011, NCOR initiated a number of efforts to inform stakeholders about interoperable communications. Members of NCOR developed a training curriculum on public safety communications that will be offered to stakeholders in 2012. A series of four webinars was developed to inform public officials, radio users, dispatchers, and emergency managers. All webinars were posted on-line for ongoing access. Newsletters were also developed and distributed to provide essential information about interoperable communications.

Challenges

Two primary challenges to the work of NCOR are highlighted in this report. The first challenge is related to the evolving need for close coordination with the official state support agencies for NCOR (NEMA and OCIO). In order for the NCOR Board to set priorities, understand needs across the state and manage grant funding, operational and technical assistance is needed from both NEMA and the OCIO. Both support agencies have worked on ways to improve consistent communication with NCOR.

A second challenge has been communicating with public officials and the public about the need for an as-needed, on-demand interoperable communications network. This has been particularly challenging given the complexity of the network components and

the unknowns regarding costs and sustainability. NCOR is currently working to inform public officials, first responders, and emergency managers about the benefits and responsibilities associated with the Nebraska Interoperable Communications Network.

Recommendations

NCOR plans to continue with current projects, monitoring and ensuring that they are smoothly underway before moving on to other identified priorities in 2012. One of the highest priorities is achieving the build-out of the Nebraska Regional Interoperability Network. Regions will coordinate with the contractor to determine which local sites will be connected to the network. Ongoing coordination with NEMA and the OCIO will also continue to ensure equipment is purchased and installed for base stations and that appropriate personnel are included in Paraclete training. NCOR recommends that the state support agencies work with Regions in 2012 to create common training and exercise expectations for users of the wireless networks.

NCOR plans to continue its work to inform public officials about the Nebraska Interoperable Communications Network and to engage in discussion about sustainability of the network. With state and local partners, NCOR will develop and implement a system design for governance, management, monitoring and maintenance of the network. NCOR will also start focusing on integration and sustainability of mutual aid and Paraclete. NCOR plans to complete training for public officials and other stakeholders in early 2012.

NCOR anticipates its members will participate in an update of the 2012 Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP). This collaborative effort with state agencies forms the basis for local tactical interoperable communications planning (TICP). Current discussions are also taking place surrounding the integration of NCOR and N-WIN through the Executive Order.