Resource Ordering and Status System

Implementation Considerations

Working Copy

January 23, 2003

Implementation Considerations

Awareness of several business issues is critical to the successful implementation of ROSS. Business issues can be split into two broad categories:

- Standard ROSS business and computer terminology.
- Manual to automation transition issues.

Standard ROSS Business and Computer Terminology

The ROSS application has been developed with ongoing, and often arduous, analysis of the current processes of resource ordering and status keeping. Many of the common processes that we have taken for granted have now been dissected into their component parts, and have, for the first time, been named. In "teaching" the ROSS system to understand how dispatchers currently do business, subject matter experts (SMEs) have had to standardize terminology which has been used differently throughout the dispatch community. SMEs have also had to define some new terms that better describe the automated processes this tool makes available to us.

These terms, as well as additional terms are defined in a ROSS Glossary, which accompanies the ROSS User Guide.

Manual to Automated Dispatching Transition

Because each office has a unique set of customers, staffing, IRM support, agency missions and constraints, and its own mixture of manual and/or automated resource ordering and status systems, each office will encounter a unique set of challenges as it makes the transition to the automated world of ROSS.

The transition from a long tradition of manual ordering and status keeping to an automated network of programs and systems brings changes, both obvious and hidden. Below are some points that users and managers should consider:

<u>Cost Issues:</u>

- As with any change to our business process, and certainly with the application of technology, the cost of doing business seems to take us by surprise. The need for disaster recovery, faster printers, better screens for the graphics, and a host of other needs not yet imagined will continue to challenge our imaginations.
- Expect telephone costs to start dropping as dispatchers gain confidence in the system to transmit needed information.

<u>Dispatch Office Issues:</u>

- In cases where several dispatch centers form a cooperative (within a region, mutual aid sphere, or other collaborative group), and share a common communication media (e.g., Loop Teletype, Intercom,

Dispatch Net), expect the non-automated dispatch centers to become disenfranchised as the other centers move towards automation. As the traffic moves from voice to the computer, the non-computer users will not be hearing incident activity or resource commitments around them. A new methodology of awareness must be derived, taught, and used.

- Establish a policy and process for getting a ROSS username and password and a policy for the use and misuse of the username and password.
- Establish a policy and process for contractors to get access to the web and/or phone interface.
- Who will status resources under ROSS (contractor and/or dispatch office) and when will status be changed? For example, if a resource will become available within 6 hours, is it now shown as available or unavailable?
- Resources are statused differently throughout the country. Implementing an automated resource status tool will require each area and office to determine the way in which they will use ROSS to best meet their needs.
- Determine who will use ROSS and who won't. Motivate non-users.
- Establish a policy and process for how a geographic area or multi-tiered dispatch office will deal with some offices using ROSS and some not using ROSS. For example, such things as the process of information flow may be different. Instead of a dispatcher reading the information off the card to someone, the ROSS dispatcher may ask questions of the non-ROSS dispatcher. What incident, what do they want, where do they want it?
- If an office is using a different application that collects data that is in ROSS, what is the process and timing for getting or entering that data (i.e., a CAD system).
- Determine who will have which ROSS role (e.g. basic user, dispatcher, dispatch manager, data administrator, etc.).
- Supervisors need to know what roles each dispatch recorder has, since there is potential that a dispatcher would have access to screens where they could cause problems because of minimal training.
- Determine the changes that need to be incorporated in national, area and local mobilization guides.
- With the qualifications of each person being entered into ROSS, what is the best way for management to ensure that each person's skills are best used (e.g., in the highest position for which they are qualified)?
- If blocks of request numbers are given out, the user will need to monitor this, because if the last number used is S-50, and an incident creates request number S-211, ROSS will "think" the next number to generate is S-212, rather than S-51 so the user will need to enter S-51.
- Establish dispatch office procedures regarding ROSS and Initial Attack (IA) and decide if ROSS will be used in IA.

- Since an action in ROSS can happen very quickly, each office needs to determine the business policy regarding who can perform each action. For example, since sending a pending request to another office is just a click on the PC, the dispatch office may want to establish a policy on who and how that determination is made.
- Provide a qualification hierarchy job aid for the dispatcher to find qualified people. For example, if a support dispatcher is needed and you don't have any, search for a coordinator, or some other position qualified at a higher level.
- Different ROSS roles may need to be included in position descriptions.
- Computers, printers, and network access (with backup) will be needed when setting up an expanded dispatch. Have process established with IRM shop to get this done.

Geographic Area Issues:

- Each geographic area will need to consider whether or not it should create additional IDs to more easily track resource availability at various agency levels such as state regions or districts, counties, fire departments, etc. If new ID's are needed, they should follow their geographic area's process for getting the Unit ID into the system of record (at NICC).
- Each geographic area (or any dispatch offices with offices below them in the organizational hierarchy) will need to determine the selection area for the units within its area. Selection areas might initially mirror the current established ordering channels and later be opened up to take advantage of the capability in ROSS to view available resources.
- Each area will need to work out how incidents (using a manual process) and dispatch offices (using ROSS) will best interact with caches for resource ordering.
- Each geographic area should identify a process for requesting NICC to make changes to data (i.e., an additional catalog item).

Hardware Issues:

- Fault Tolerance/Disaster Recovery. One of the biggest points to consider is what happens when access to the automated system fails. Considering all the components that make up an automated system, from local network equipment, WAN provider, power suppliers, etc., a failure from any one of the links in the chain can be a showstopper.
- Switching from the automated system back to a manual system for new orders and requests is not a huge problem as long as everyone understands the protocols. The big issue is how do the dispatchers recreate the open orders so work can continue on existing business. Additionally, resource status must be recreated in minimal time. This may have more significant impact on the GACCs than a local unit, but it's certainly a concern that needs to be mitigated.
- Procedures for dealing with outages are outlined in the ROSS Disaster Recovery Plan. Each office should edit this document so that it has all

of the correct information included for their area. In brief, users should know that any office could cover for another in the event of a local outage.

- Practice between local dispatch offices and between local offices and the GACCs is essential to the process so every office will know what to do when something happens.

IRM Support Issues:

- IRM support will be a flag to watch. In many offices, the required IRM support competes with other IRM priorities, and a status of "mission critical" may not produce the clout most dispatchers desire.
- There is a chance that local IRM costs may increase, depending on the level of current automation and network capabilities. Client hardware, connectivity, training, and system amortization are ongoing costs seldom covered in many budgets.

User Issues:

- Users can expect a degree of frustration in transitioning to an automated system. For example: Stabilizing the local network or connectivity to NITC. In most cases, the dispatch personnel become the "gurus" and must troubleshoot and repair problems on their own.
- Learning to navigate in a computer program that lends itself to a different strategic view of incident orders. Users no longer have all the cards lying on the counter, so task-management functions are different.
- The training curve, both for the permanent and temporary dispatchers, is fairly high. Training retention will be a big issue for temporary staff. If they become skilled and comfortable with ROSS they can be given more roles and thus access to more screens.

ROSS Application Issues:

Data:

- Data standards and data entry standards need to be followed. This will result in a cleaner database.
- ROSS documentation will be permanent once it is saved.
- Unique organizations, locations, resource items and local catalog items of an area or office will need to be entered in ROSS during the ROSS Administration phase in order to use ROSS for resource ordering and status keeping.
- Event categories in ROSS have been defined by NWCG as the NIFSIP (National Interagency Fire Statistics Information Project) standards.
- Catalog categories have been established up front (e.g., under NFES items, clothing might be a category which allows the user to more quickly find Nomex fire shirts). Proposed new categories will be evaluated using the ROSS/business community change management process.

Finance Codes:

- Multiple financial codes (e.g. job codes, account numbers, charge codes) can be assigned to an incident. ROSS also allows a financial code to be tied to an individual resource item or request number.

Forms:

- Several forms have been incorporated in ROSS: Temporary Flight Restriction Request, Infrared Aircraft Scanner Request, and Food Service Request.

Groups:

- Group configurations are an option in ROSS. In order to allow users to order groups (e.g., teams) at the click of the mouse, and yet track each member of the group, ROSS uses one request number for the group and assigns numbers to the group members (e.g., O-1 for the whole team, and O-1.1, 1.2, etc. for team members). Users will need to learn this new functionality.

Hazards:

- A hazard can be associated with an incident. When the incident is closed out, the hazard disappears (but it is still tracked in the system). A user can also remove a hazard while the incident is still active. Permanent hazards should be created during the ROSS Admin phase.

Incident Number

- The Incident Number includes the host Unit ID and a computer generated sequential 6-digit number (for example, KY-DBF-000001). This number can also be set to begin at a pre-designated number by the dispatch manager.

Organizations:

- Dispatch offices and resource providers will need to have a dispatch affiliation designated in ROSS in order to place orders. The dispatch hierarchy in each geographic area is critical for the successful use of ROSS. Time spent in diagramming and defining the hierarchy before entering organizations will be time well spent.
- ROSS automatically determines an events jurisdiction when a resource order is generated, based on organizations and affiliations entered during the ROSS Administration phase.

Reports:

- There will always be a desire for information or statistics that “canned reports” will not address. The learning curve for ad hoc reporting may be steep. One key to success will be to educate managers on the types of reports available.

Resource Information:

- All documentation is part of the resource item record so can be seen as the order moves throughout the process.

- Expect instant information about placed, filled, UTF, reassigned, and released resources.
- Expect to have more information at your fingertips than ever before; the status of resources will be a huge plus.
- ROSS allows users to track personnel assigned to aircraft and equipment.
- A maximum length of assignment can be designated for each resource in ROSS. This is done by going in to the Availability Tab and setting the availability dates. It is for information purposes only and not used in any calculations in the application.
- If a roster is built for an engine or aircraft, for example, the ROSS user can determine at the time the resource is released whether or not to keep the roster for future use.
- Requests for NFES items will be filled on a fill/close basis by ROSS default. If ROSS users have a need to track these items, they will need to enter updated information into ROSS.
- NICC will flag national critical items. GACCs can identify critical items for their area.
- Identifying the resource item as a "Quick Fill" will speed up the resource ordering process.

Requests:

- Assigning request numbers: a ROSS user can change a request number from the automatically generated number, but not if that number already exists. A user can assign blocks of numbers to an incident management team, procurement unit or buying team.

Selection Area:

- The ability to expand the sphere of a local dispatch selection area.

Travel:

- ROSS will allow resources to be assigned to an incident with no travel, with an ETD/ETA, or with a travel itinerary.