

# CONTINUITY PLANNING BASICS

While it's impossible to anticipate all the disaster scenarios, your organization can still be prepared for whatever may happen by putting together a continuity of operations plan.

When you create a continuity plan, you will be taking a close look at your organization in ways that you may never have before. You will look at the various roles within your organization, prioritize what needs to recover first, document how you will communicate with employees and stakeholders, and identify information you will need to have at-hand for your recovery. With this information documented in your continuity plan, you will hopefully have all the tools you will need to keep your organization operating during a crisis.

## **WHAT NEEDS TO BE INCLUDED IN YOUR PLAN?**

While this will differ for every organization, here are some of the basics to think about.

### PRIORITIZED LIST OF FUNCTIONS

#### IDENTIFY CRITICAL FUNCTIONS

To begin building your continuity plan, you should examine all the programs and departments to identify functions within the organization.

#### IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Who does your organization depend on or serve? Think about employees, customers, vendors, regulators, etc.

#### HOW LONG COULD YOUR ORGANIZATION GO WITHOUT EACH FUNCTION?

For each function you've identified, identify how many hours/days/weeks you could go without that process before it significantly impacts each of the stakeholders you've identified.

#### IDENTIFY INTERDEPENDENCIES

Many functions have dependencies on other functions. Does one business process rely on the service/output of another to operate? For example, do your computer systems need to be running in order to provide customer service? Does your manufacturing department depend on the Shipping/Receiving department for raw materials?

#### PRIORITIZE THE ORGANIZATION'S FUNCTIONS

Once you've identified how long you could go without each function as well as your organization's function interdependencies, then prioritize your processes in the order they must be up and running first.

### EMPLOYEE CONTACT INFORMATION

Gather address and telephone information for each employee. Also, gather information about each employee's emergency contact – who will you call if that employee is hurt or missing? Ensure you

have contact information for the employee's emergency contact person. Keep this information up-to-date and available.

#### OTHER CONTACT INFORMATION

Gather contact information for your customers, vendors, regulators, board members, and other stakeholders. While this information may change daily, it is important that you are able to get in touch with your critical customers and vendors. Keep this information up-to-date and available.

#### CREATE CHAINS OF COMMAND

In case one of your leaders is unavailable in an emergency, who will fill that person's shoes? What if that person is also unavailable? In preparing for a crisis, it is important to identify chain of commands ahead of time for all levels of your organization – executive level and department levels. Having a strong chain of command helps to impose order on a potentially disorderly situation. It is important for employees to know who is authorized to give instructions.

#### CREATE EMERGENCY TEAMS

During a disaster, you may need several teams that will only exist during the crisis. For example, your organization should have some sort of incident management team. Based on practices used by emergency service providers, the incident management team should be a maximum of 4 people. This limited number will allow decisions to be made quickly, to respond to the situation at hand. During a disaster, you may need other emergency teams. For example, do you need a team to restore your facility and all that goes with that? Do you need a team to assist with the logistics of ordering replacement equipment, travel arrangements, etc? Identifying these teams and their roles ahead of time will enable you to jump right into recovering your organization.

#### DOCUMENT STEPS TO RECOVER EACH FUNCTION OR PROCESS

Following a disaster, some steps must be done before others in order to recover your functions and processes. Listing the steps in order will help the organizational unit recover and also ensure that something is not forgotten. Also, be sure to document how many people you will need in order to recover the process over time – for example, if everyone can't return to work when this organizational unit begins its recovery, can you make it by with 6 employees in this unit, or do you need 20? How many will you need on day 3, how many at week 2? Also be sure to document how this unit can begin to recover its processes if computer systems are unavailable. Is there a work around procedure these employees can use – for example, could you have a paper form ready to take orders?

#### COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

During an emergency and the recovery effort, you need to maintain communications with your employees, customers, vendors, and other stakeholders. You also need to think about communicating with the media. Ensure that your continuity plan includes methods of communication.

**EMPLOYEES** – Make sure you have a means to get in touch with employees if a disaster were to happen off hours. You could use new technology to send phone calls to all employees at once, or you could use the good-old-fashion call tree. If you use a call tree, make sure

every person knows what to do if one of the people they have to call is unavailable. Make sure you also have a way to communicate with employees to keep them up-to-date on recovery efforts and when and where they should report for work. Also, what if phone lines are down? How will you make sure that the word gets around to all your employees in an emergency situation? Consider this in your plan.

**CUSTOMERS** – The last thing you want is for your customers to be unable to reach you, or worse, to hear about something happening at your facility on the evening news. Make sure you build in steps to contact customers and keep them informed of the situation.

**VENDORS** – Make sure your vendors know if they won't be able to make deliveries to your facility, etc. Contact your critical vendors and keep them informed of the situation. You may also need extra assistance from vendors during recovery, so be sure you include information on how to contact these vendors.

**MEDIA** – Make the media your ally. How the media portrays the situation at hand could either promote or harm your organization's image. Therefore, be prepared to talk to the media if there is a crisis at your facility. Have a specific team designated to talk to the media. Employees need to be aware that if approached by the media, they need to point them to that designated team and should not respond to questions themselves.

#### **DOCUMENTATION & CROSS TRAINING**

Are there functions within your organization that only one or two people perform? If so, do others know how to carry out those functions if that person(s) is unavailable during a disaster? Document how to carry out important functions. Include this documentation in your plan, or store it off-site and ensure that information about where to find the documentation is in the plan. Also, consider cross-training your employees.

#### **VITAL DOCUMENTS**

Do you have other documents – such as templates that are used daily, procedural manuals, etc –that you need to have access to in the event of a disaster? Ensure that copies of these documents (paper, electronic or both) are stored off-site. Include information about where to find these vital documents in the plan.

#### **SUPPLIES**

Do you have specific supplies that you will need in order to continue operating that are not easily obtainable? For example, do you have a specific paper stock that you need to print on? If so, you might want to consider having a small amount of these critical supplies off-site. Include information about where these supplies are stored in the plan.

#### **DATA, TELEPHONE SYSTEMS & COMPUTER SYSTEMS**

An organization's data is among its most important assets. Make sure your data is backed up regularly and stored off-site. Also ensure you have a plan for recovering your data and your computer systems. Depending on your organization, this could be a separate plan in itself.

Ensure you have a recovery plan for your telecommunications. You may have telecommunication systems that need to be backed up. If so, back up regularly and store the back-up off-site. Depending on your organization and the importance of receiving phone calls, you may need to have a plan to roll over your phones to another site or phone number.

## **WHAT ELSE TO CONSIDER FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONTINUITY PLAN?**

### **MAKE SURE YOUR EMPLOYEES KNOW THE EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

Also, do you have a procedure to account for all employees immediately following the evacuation? Do your employees know they need to bring their coats, keys and laptops during an evacuation? Do you have a buddy system, so if one employee is away from his/her desk, another employee can take that person's things?

### **MAKE SURE YOUR EMPLOYEES KNOW THE STEPS TO MITIGATE DISASTERS**

Do your employees know where fire extinguishers are located? Do your employees know if there is a virus on their computer?

### **WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOU CANNOT RECOVER AT YOUR FACILITY?**

If you are a small organization, could you recover from someone's home? If you are a larger organization, you may want to contract services with a hot-site vendor such as SunGard Recovery Services, IBM, RentSys, etc. Some organizations also make reciprocal agreements with other organizations that if they cannot recover at their own facility, workspace will be available at the other organization's location.

### **PANDEMIC – YOUR CONTINUITY PLAN NEEDS TO INCLUDE A PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN**

Create strategies to minimize spread of disease – for example, limit face to face contact – use conference calls instead of meetings; limit travel and visits to customers, vendors, etc. You could provide flexible shifts to minimize the number of employees in your facility at any one time. Step up cleaning and promote stricter hygiene policies. Have a stock of cleaning supplies ready – there could be shortages in case of pandemic.

Can your employees work from home? You could allow some of your employees to work from home.

If a pandemic were to occur, experts are predicting that as much as 30-40% of the workforce could be out at any one time. This may also come in 2 – 3 waves. If you have a real reduction in your organization's workforce, you could suspend non-critical processes. Use the prioritized list of your processes – those at the bottom of the list could be suspended first. Available staff may need to shift roles in order to ensure the most critical processes continue to operate.

Something else to think about during a pandemic – there may be a greater or lesser demand for your product or service. For example, if your business is making cakes, you will most likely have a drop

in demand and therefore a potential drop in revenue. How will your business contend with this? However, if your business is providing meals to the elderly in a region, you may see an increased demand for your services. How will you contend with this increased demand when you are also facing a reduction in staff able to report to work?

#### **ESTABLISH HR POLICIES AHEAD OF TIME**

A good time to think about your HR policies is now, rather than time of disaster. You should be prepared to answer questions such as “Will I be paid during a disaster?” While everyone would like the answer to this question to be “Yes”, it may be more complicated. Think about your policies ahead of time to deal with as many scenarios as possible.

What if you’ve had a fire at your building, and you only have the capacity for critical staff for critical functions to return to work— Do you continue to pay those employees that are sitting at the sidelines? What if it is for an extended period of time? What if you ask an employee to work at an alternate location, but that employee doesn’t want to? Do you continue to pay him or her?

You will also have think about your leave policies. What if you have employees that must be home for an extended period of time during a pandemic because they are sick? What if they have to be home to care for loved ones that are sick? What if they just don’t report to work because they are scared of being around other people? What type of leave will be used?

#### **ENCOURAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES TO CREATE DISASTER PLANS AT HOME**

A dangerous assumption to make in creating your continuity plan is that your employees will be immediately available to help get the organization back on its feet. Some may, but depending on the disaster, some employees will have other responsibilities at home. However, the more prepared the employee is at home, the sooner that employee will be able to assist the organization. Therefore, encourage your employees to create disaster plans at home. Great resources to help employees in this effort are: [www.ready.com](http://www.ready.com) [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

### **SUMMARY**

Don’t think of your organization’s continuity plan as a document that just lies on a shelf collecting dust. In order for your organization to recover as quickly as possible, your organization’s management and staff must be familiar with the plan and where to find information. Also, think of your continuity plan as a living document. Keep it as updated as possible, and as your organization changes, your continuity plan must also change.