

## Continuity of Operations Plans

COOP plan is not a one-time project with an established start and end date. Rather, it is a living document whereby it is essential that information and action plans in the COOP plan remain viable and current. It should be tested, at a minimum, once a year.

The information in the COOP plan describes the organization's planning assumptions, objectives and protective measures and thus may contain protected or sensitive information.

The success of the plan however necessitates that key personnel have immediate access. All individuals with defined roles in the plan should be familiar with the COOP. Those who play an active role should continually ensure that adequate resources and capabilities exist for carrying out their roles.

### **What is a COOP?**

A Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) will document how the division or department will perform essential operations during an emergency situation or long-term disruption, which might last from 2 days to several weeks. The plan will identify mission-critical functions, departmental communication methods, and alternate personnel, systems and locations. Each University division needs a COOP to ensure the University can respond effectively to a variety of situations.

### **The COOP planning process focuses on two key questions:**

#### **What operations performed by the department are essential or central to the University community?**

Such operations might include ensuring public safety, maintenance and repair of infrastructure, conducting damage assessments, identifying and leasing alternative facilities and funding disaster recovery efforts. Many of these important functions rely on administration and finance support.

**What resources are required to continue these essential operations during an emergency or disruption?** Can we pay the bills? Can we ensure accountability of students and continue student courses during a disruption?

### **What are the Key Planning Principles When Writing a COOP?**

There are certain key planning principles to keep in mind when writing your department's COOP.

The focus of a COOP should be on *essential functions*, not particular people. Essential functions and those who can fulfill those functions will change, depending on the situation.

The functions of a department do not change in a COOP; departments not normally responsible for food, shelter, security, etc. do not need to plan to assume those responsibilities.

The planning process is the most important aspect of the COOP exercise, even more so than the final product.

A plan will not cover all contingencies. Good planning, however, will allow for good decision making in the midst of a crisis.

### **What are Some Things to Avoid When Writing a COOP?**

Some of the errors people have made when attempting to write a COOP include:

Planning for specific scenarios - For example, instead of planning for what to do in a flood, fire, etc., plan for what to do if your normal building was inaccessible for any reason.

Getting caught up in extremes - It is unlikely that a crisis would result in a catastrophic loss of support. Try to divide the planning process into disparate silos, such as (1) loss of building/workspace, (2) loss of staff and (3) loss of utilities/networking functions.

Planning to the last emergency - While it is important to pay attention to "lessons learned", each incident is different and planning should take a broader scope.

Assuming the existing management hierarchy - It is important to remember that the normal decision-makers for a department may not be available in an emergency. It can be important to designate alternate decision-makers and ensure they are empowered to take action if necessary.

### **Elements of a Viable Continuity of Operations Plan**

*Essential Functions* – The critical activities performed by organizations, especially after a disruption of normal activities.

*Orders of Succession* – Provisions for the assumption of senior university offices during an emergency in the event that any of those officials are unavailable to execute their duties.

*Delegations of Authority* – Identification, by position, of the authorities for making policy determinations and decisions at leadership team levels, field levels, and all other organizational levels. Generally, pre-determined delegations of authority will take effect when normal channels of direction have been disrupted and will lapse when these channels have been reestablished.

*Continuity Facilities* – Locations, other than the primary facility, used to carry out essential functions, particularly in a continuity event. Continuity Facilities, or "Alternate facilities", refers to not only other locations, but also nontraditional options such as working at home. ("Teleworking"), telecommuting, and mobile-office concepts.

*Continuity Communications* – Communications that provide the capability to perform essential functions, in conjunction with other departments, under all conditions.

*Vital Records Management* – the identification, protection and ready availability of electronic and hard copy documents, references, records, information systems, data management software and equipment needed to support essential functions during a continuity situation.

*Human Capital* – during a continuity event, emergency employees and other special categories of employees who are activated by the university to perform assigned response duties.