



Continuity Of Operations Planning

What would you do if your house of worship and its facilities, or perhaps your entire community, were rendered inaccessible by a disaster? If your staff were unavailable to do their work? Or, if you had no way of reaching your staff or congregation? A continuity of operations plan (COOP) can significantly strengthen your ability to serve your community during and after disasters.

TIP SHEET

08

CREATE A CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING (COOP) TEAM

Your team should represent all aspects of your facilities and programs: religious leaders, administration, facilities managers, and program coordinators. Be sure to include those with expertise vital to daily functions. Find out if there are members of your faith community with risk management or business continuity experience. Note: The team you assemble to create this plan can be different from the team designated to lead during a disaster. See *“Decision Making and Leadership”* in the Checklist below.

DO A RISK ASSESSMENT & ALL-HAZARDS ANALYSIS

Consider the events that are most likely to impact your congregation’s facilities and programs.

- **All-hazards:** Your community needs to be prepared for any or all of the following: hurricanes, flooding, fire, terrorism, utility disruptions, and hazardous materials.
- **Consider your vulnerabilities:** Are you next to a sensitive location? Are there chemicals stored nearby? Is your organization subject to bias crimes? Are you in a flood zone? Don’t forget influenza and bio-hazards.
- **Plan for utility disruptions:** Loss of power, heat, and water, as well as the loss of the use of your facility. (These could result from a number of different hazards.)

PERFORM AN OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

How does your congregation function?

- **Assess how your congregation functions**, both internally and externally, to determine which staff, materials, procedures, and equipment are absolutely necessary to maintain operations.
- **Identify all of your programs and outreach ministries:** Ritual/Prayer services, religious instruction, study groups, congregation-sponsored community programs (such as soup kitchens, social services), and guest programs (such as AA, Boy Scouts, and other local organizations using facilities for programs and meetings).

What are your critical operations?

- **Identify which operations are critical to survival and recovery:** Include emergency payroll, expedited financial decision-making, and accounting systems to track and document costs in the event of a disaster. Establish procedures for succession of management, including at least one person who is not at the house of worship, if possible.

What are your critical programs?

- **Identify your critical programs:** Prioritize the programs you have identified and decide which are most critical and need to function quickly during the post-disaster period.
- **Identify actions and processes associated with these critical programs:** Inventory the separate processes that allow each critical program to function. For example, in order to run your soup kitchen, you must (among other things):
 - Pay employees or coordinate volunteers
 - Continue your access to food and other social service supplies
 - Ensure you have a facility
 - Conduct outreach

PERFORM AN IMPACT ANALYSIS

Identify impacts of hazards on your critical programs and their associated processes. Determine what is already in place to help protect your resources:

- **Records:** Secure files, computer back-ups, contracts, agreements, etc.
- **Insurance:** Explore disaster-related insurance options
- **Physical resources:** Assess your facility’s hard security
- **Plans:** Review plans for fire safety, building evacuation, etc.
- **Support and resources:** Survey what is available from your regional/national religious offices

DEVELOP A CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLAN

Make a plan for what you will do if your facility, staff and communications systems are not accessible.

- Define crisis management procedures and individual responsibilities in advance.
- Talk with your staff or leadership and frequently review and practice what you intend to do during and after an emergency.
- Plan for how to communicate with your congregation in an emergency—including if your community is evacuated.

Your document should address three types of activities:

- **Emergency Action Plan:** Include actions that should be taken just before (if there is warning) or immediately after a disaster to prevent loss of life and property and to promote fast recovery. Make a checklist.
- **Communications Plan:** Detail who will be contacted, under what circumstances, how, and for what purpose.
- **Continuity of Social Services:** Provide for continuation, growth, or suspension of existing daily programs.
- **Continuity of Ritual Life and Spiritual Care:** Provide for continuation, growth, or suspension of religious activities.

DEVELOP INTEGRATION OF DISASTER RESPONSE AND CONTINUITY OF MINISTRY PLANS

Include any services you offer during disasters that are not part of your regular programs. Ensure that this plan does not conflict with your continuity of operations plan.

CHECKLIST: AREAS OF CONSIDERATION FOR DEVELOPING PLANS AND TAKING PLANNING ACTIONS

Facilities	Alternate sites
Security	How will you protect your staff, congregants and volunteers as well as items of religious significance to your congregation?
Insurance	Documentation needed for claims, scope of coverage, discounts for preparedness
Regulations & Codes	Governmental & religious laws that apply to your emergency actions
Equipment & Supplies	Such as computers, “Go-Bag” supplies, life safety, sprinklers, etc.
Records	How to store, update, and back-up important records. Include: payroll, lease, deeds
Communication	How, when, what, and with whom are you communicating?
Timing	Consider how your actions need to change at different times of the day/week/year
People	Think about who is in your community, not just your congregants, but people with disabilities, elderly, non-English speaking individuals, etc. How will you execute your plans if many of your staff/congregants are affected?
Decision Making & Leadership	What kind of organizational structure will you use? Consider who is making decisions, communicating with your congregants and partners, and completing emergency actions

SHARING AND PRACTICING

Plans must be shared and practiced with all congregants and, when possible, with other faith communities and the government or VOAD. Perform various drills or table-top exercises to ensure your plans address all situations.

OTHER RESOURCES

- NYC Emergency Management (NYCEM) — Community Emergency Planning Toolkit: https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/em/downloads/pdf/community_toolkit/community_planning_toolkit_2019.pdf
- NYCEM — Ready New York For Business: <https://on.nyc.gov/2RwHTTs>
- NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene — Responding to Emergencies: <https://on.nyc.gov/33AKIbK>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Faith-Based Community Preparedness: <https://bit.ly/2E2R0Is>
- FEMA — Disaster preparedness best practices: www.ready.gov
- Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS): <https://ibhs.org/guidance/business-continuity/>
- National Disaster Interfaiths Network — Training & Tip Sheets for U.S. Religious Leaders : www.n-din.org
- NPCCNY — Disaster Planning: <https://www.nonprofitnewyork.org/disaster-plan/>