

## Business Continuity for Non-Profit Organizations

What would your clients do if your organization were suddenly closed due to a fire, flood, tornado, criminal investigation due to alleged employee abuse of a client, or another unexpected event?

Nonprofit organizations need to be prepared to deal with these situations just as any other business. The answers to the following questions could influence your organization's ability to deliver service to clients and ultimately to remain a viable operation.

- Could your organization quickly resume operations if your facilities were damaged, destroyed or were inaccessible?
- Could you continue to operate if one or more key personnel were unable to work?
- What would you do in the event of a widespread disaster?
- How would you respond to unfounded allegations of wrongdoing in your organization and the publicity this would generate?

Business continuity planning can enable your organization to not only survive in the event of a crisis but also continue to provide its vital services to clients.

So, how do you go about preparing a business continuity plan?

There are several key features to the process:

- Obtain commitment from your organization's top management. This includes both support for the process and involvement in its development. This is essential as these are the people who will be responsible for coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of the plan should a disaster occur.
- Form a planning committee that includes representation from all functional areas of your organization. This step of the process includes informing all of your managers and staff of the process you are undertaking.
- Identify the potential threats and risks. Even if these risks seem to present only a remote possibility that could arise you should determine the possible consequences. Identified risks and the disruptions they could cause should be ranked in order of severity. Your plan needs to address "worst case" situations.
- Prioritize those business activities and functions vital to your organization. Identify key personnel and be sure all essential activities and procedures have detailed written documentation.
- Investigate practical alternatives for the essential functions you have identified. Develop strategies to communicate to staff, clients, suppliers, vendors, etc. Prepare for emergencies before they occur. Establish and follow a schedule for backing up essential data and moving the back up copies to a secure remote location on a regular basis.
- Develop your plan and put it in writing. Form an emergency management team to carry out the plan. This is an action plan so it must be easy to understand when you are in a crisis situation.

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- Test your plan. Develop criteria and procedures to test your plan and periodically conduct a thorough step-by-step walk through. Once you have tested your plan make adjustments for problems you may have found.
- Finally, remember that your business continuity plan is a vital part of your organization and as such it needs to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Business continuity planning is not a luxury but a necessity for your organization. It can help your organization survive in the event of disruptive events and continue to provide its vital services to clients without interruption.

Consult a qualified professional continuity planning consultant if you need assistance in developing a plan for your nonprofit organization. You can also find a wealth of information on the Internet. FEMA's website ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)) contains several articles on business continuity.

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