

Pre-Disaster Planning & Continuity of Operations

What is a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?

A Continuity of Operations Plan addresses emergencies from an all-hazards approach. The plan establishes policy and guidance to ensure that critical functions continue and that personnel and resources are relocated to an alternate facility in case of emergencies.

COOPs are important for all communities whether the community is a large city, a small town, a county, or state. Pre-disaster planning, including COOP, makes recovery from disaster much smoother because you have already made decisions on how to respond to and recover from an emergency before the event happens so your community does not need to try to plan and recover at the same time.

COOP Planning considers three potential outages, plus catastrophic failure, which when these events occur, may lead to the activation of the COOP:

1. **People-driven outage** - People cannot come to work for some reason (e.g., a pandemic such as COVID-19, a major flood, a winter storm).
2. **Facility-driven outage** - Facility failure prevents access to a facility (e.g., flood, tornado, terrorist attack).
3. **Technology-driven outage** - Technology failure prevents workers from being able to do their jobs (e.g., data failure or cyber-attack).
4. **Catastrophic failure** - Event that requires “regroup and restart” in a new place outside of your original location (e.g., the 2013 great flood that destroyed a wide-scale area).

What goes into a COOP?

To complete a COOP Plan you should complete three basic assessments:

1. **Building Assessment**
 - How many people are in the building?
 - What equipment is in the building?
 - Where is the building located?
 - Who is the building contact?
2. **Personnel/Department Assessment**
 - How many people are in the department?
 - What buildings are they located in?
 - How many people can work remotely?
 - How many workstations are essential and cannot be remote?
 - Regulatory/Statutory requirements for that department (statutory requirements may mean certain tasks have to be completed in a set amount of time or a specific manner.)
3. **Equipment Assessment**
 - What are the equipment needs for the department or building?

COOP Templates and Resources:

- [Coresiliency.com/coop-planning-resources](https://coresiliency.com/coop-planning-resources)
- [Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)
- [FEMA Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)
- [FEMA Continuity of Operations Plan Instruction](#)
- [Non-Federal Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)
- [City Continuity of Operations Plan Template](#)
- [Department Assessment Template](#)
- [Devolution of Operations Plan Template](#)

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Going Further: Continuity of Government

Preparing a Continuity of Government plan as part of the COOP Plan is often overlooked, but this is key for communities who experience a disaster. Continuity of Government ensures that a plan is in place for who will lead the community and various departments and who will have decision making authority in the case that the usual person is injured or unavailable.

The plan should list essential personnel, such as heads of department and elected officials, and list their statutory replacement requirements. This is particularly important for elected officials, as elected officials often have statutory regulations that govern who can cover for them or replace them in the event of a disaster. Additionally, the Continuity of Government process should highlight waivers or other processes that can allow for changes of procurement policy in event of a disaster.

Q & A:

Q: How does it work with policy group integration into Incident Management Teams and Emergency Operations Centers?

A (from Lori Hodges): I ensure that the Policy Group is kept separate from the Incident Management Teams and the EOC. This is for several reasons. The most important reason is that I need the Policy Group to focus on strategic direction and not get involved in tactical decision-making. I meet with the Policy Group as needed to address policy level concerns, budget considerations, and countywide strategies. I also keep them informed of everything that is going on so they do not feel out of the loop. If there are public meetings or news conferences, we ensure they know so that they may attend and provide comments, and we meet with the Board of Commissioners in public meetings regularly during events to give updates and answer questions.

Additional Colorado-Specific Resources:

- [Colorado Recovery and Resiliency Collaborative](#)
- [Local Government Guide to Recovery](#)

Lessons from Jamestown

The Town of Jamestown was devastated by the 2013 Great Flood in Colorado. The town was cut off from the rest of the State as roads and buildings were destroyed and one member of the community tragically lost his life. Over 300 people were evacuated by helicopter. The Mayor remained in Town to manage the incident.

Mayor Tara Schoedinger highlighted the challenges she faced through her experience in Jamestown, such as

- Having no communications due to power and phone service being cut off (no cell service in Town).
- Trying to pay bills with no online access to accounting software, no postal service, and the Town Clerk working remotely in a neighboring community.
- Not having intergovernmental agreements in place pre-disaster with neighboring communities which could have been a barrier to funding.

This webinar (and others) are available at:

<https://www.coresiliency.com/adaptations-and-futures-webinar-series>



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