



## Continuity Of Operations Planning for Congregations & FBOs

What would you do if your house of worship and its facilities, or perhaps your entire community, were rendered inaccessible by a disaster or compromised by a public health emergency? If your staff were unavailable to do their work? Or, if you had no way of reaching and leading your staff or congregation? A continuity of operations plan (COOP) will equip you with a tool to plan and practice strengthening your ability to run your day-to-day operations, as well as serve your congregation & community during disasters or public health emergencies.

### CREATE A CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING (COOP) TEAM

Your team should represent all decision makers managing 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 or public health emergency. See “*Decision Making and Leadership*” in the Checklist on page 2.

### DO A RISK ASSESSMENT & ALL-HAZARDS ANALYSIS

Consider the events that are most likely to impact your house of worship’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, hazardous materials, pandemic and other public health emergencies
- **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 loss of use or the inadvisability of public gatherings or in-person interactions:** Buildings can be left unsafe by disasters or, during public health emergencies, unsafe for vulnerable populations to gather or worship.
- **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 house of worship operate and its programs function?

- **Assess how your house of worship functions administratively,** both internally and externally, to determine which staff, materials, procedures, and equipment are absolutely necessary to maintain operations - on site or remotely.
- **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, food pantry, scouting, childcare, or other essential local organizations using facilities for meetings or services).

What are your critical operations?

- **Identify which operations are critical to get back and running, staying operation and for incident 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. Consider remote operations, methods for virtual liturgies or spiritual care.

What are your critical programs?

- **Identify your critical programs:** Decide which of the programs you have identified are most critical and need to get back up and functional quickly during the post-disaster period. Prioritize programs that contribute to life safety.
- **Develop an emergency action plan, including the steps 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):
  - Continue to effectively communicate with and provide for the religious needs of your congregants
  - Pay employees or coordinate volunteers
  - Continue your access to food and other social service supplies

### 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 is not accessible.**

- Define incident command systems roles, responsibilities, and management procedures in advance.
- Educate your staff and leadership on all plans and frequently review and practice/exercise those plans frequently.
- Plan for how to communicate with your congregation, leaders, and staff in an emergency—with or without phones or internet

**Your written plan should incorporate modules the following 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.
- **Risk Communication Plan:** Detail who will be contacted, under what circumstances, how, and for what purpose.
- **Continuity of Tenant or Outreach 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.
- **Remote Operations:** For all or some of the above..

## DEVELOP INTEGRATION OF DISASTER RESPONSE AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS/MINISTRY PLANS

Include plans to activate and sustain any disaster relief or recovery services that are not part of your regular programs. Ensure that this plan does not conflict with your continuity of operations plan.

## SHARING AND REGULARLY PRACTICING/EXERCISE YOUR PLAN

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.

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

Facilities	Alternate spaces on the same property or alternative sites. Include remote locations and capabilities for working offside and offer worship and pastoral care virtually
Security	How will you protect your staff, congregants and volunteers as well as items of religious or historical significance to your house of worship, faith tradition or greater society?
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 and their unmet needs, not just your congregants, but people with access and functional needs, 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? Is there a hierarchy or procedure for leadership continuity when senior leaders can’t lead. Consider who is making decisions, communicating with your congregants and partners, or completing emergency decisions.

### OTHER RESOURCES

- NYDIS’ Writing a COOP Training for Congregations: [www.nydisnet.eventbrite.com](http://www.nydisnet.eventbrite.com)
- CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Faith-Based Organizations: <https://bit.ly/39pHuJX>
- CDC Faith-Based and Community Organizations Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Checklist: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/pdf/faithbasedcommunitychecklist.pdf>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) business recovery: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) (See “Business”)
- FEMA — Disaster preparedness best practices: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- National Disaster Interfaiths Network — Training & Tip Sheets for U.S. Religious Leaders : [www.n-din.org](http://www.n-din.org)
- Guide — Alliance for Human Services: COOP for Non-Profit Human Service Providers
- Guide — Church World Service (CWS): Emergency Planning Guide: [www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org)