

ESTABLISHING A MODALITY FOR CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING

Audrey Heffron, Janet Dilling, and Marc Rogaff

Florida State University¹ and University of South Florida²

KeyWords: Continuity Of Government, Continuity Of Operations Planning, Cog, Coop, Emergency Planning

Abstract

Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) is an effort within individual departments and agencies to assure continuance of their minimum essential functions across a wide range of potential emergencies. This is especially relevant to those emergency or disaster events that may result in the closure of government or industry facilities for an extended period of time. A viable COOP plan establishes policy and guidance to ensure the quick restoration and continuation of an organization's mission essential services and functions in any event which requires the relocation of selected personnel and functions to an alternate facility while the primary facility is untenable.

Introduction

In the wake of September 11th, 2001, federal, state, and local governments within the United States have been grappling with establishing or revamping their Continuity of Government (COG) and Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP). Two of the most critical steps within the process are 1) the identification of mission essential functions (MEF) and their supporting personnel, equipment, and resources; and 2) the identification and establishment of an appropriate Alternate Relocation Point (ARP). Little guidance has been provided, however, to aid individuals involved with COOP in determining what criteria to use in identifying mission essential functions, and in determining what steps are required to actually affect the transfer to an Alternate Relocation Point. Many plans stop with the identification and location of an alternate facility. This paper will present an established process for narrowing down an organization's mission essential functions and for determining supporting resources to execute those functions. Additionally a modality will be offered for the identification, assessment, and implementation of an Alternate Relocation Point.

The primary goal of government at any level is to deliver its mission based services to the public it serves. Planning for a disaster is critical, however it often falls short of this goal (Doughty, 2001). What is required is a broader view of keeping the government agency or organization in a position to maintain its processes and deliver its services without interruption. The essence of COOP planning is to assure that the capability exists to continue essential government functions across a wide range of potential emergencies should the agency's or organization's primary facility(ies) become untenable. An integral part of ARP planning is securing an alternate facility from which to continue mission essential agency functions. The objectives for acquiring an alternate facility include:

¹ Florida Public Affairs Center and the Center for Disaster Risk Policy, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2250

² Institute of Government, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620



1. Ensuring that departments or agencies have a facility from which to continue to perform their essential functions/operations during an emergency;
2. Reducing or mitigating disruptions to operations;
3. Achieving a timely and orderly recovery from an emergency and resuming full service to citizens

(FPC 67, 2001, p.3)

Planning Scenarios and Assumptions

The overall operational objective for most public organizations in relocating to an alternate facility or Alternate Relocation Point (ARP) is to be able to accomplish the move of Mission Essential Function (MEF) personnel with or without warning within 12 hours time and be able to sustain operations for up to 30 days (FPC 65, 1999). An ARP plan is generally predicated on two scenarios that would require its activation. Both scenarios assume an incident or event that would, (or likely would), render parts, or all, of the agency's primary facility(ies) unusable for an extended period of time. Both of these scenarios would require execution or activation of COOP to support ongoing performance of mission essential functions of displaced governmental departments or agencies at an alternate safe location. The scenarios that could activate the ARP plan are those incidents or events (1) where warning is available, and (2) where no warning is available prior to the occurrence.

Should warning be provided, pre-incident movement of agency resources from the primary government facility could occur. This would require a great deal of certainty that the event would actually impact the area and pose a serious threat to the viability of the building. An example of this first scenario could be a tropical weather event (hurricane) with a high degree of certainty in the forecast and a forecast severity that would indicate a probability of damage to the government facility.

The second scenario would be that no warning was provided before the incident and that the resources of the impacted areas of the government facility may or may not be salvageable or moveable after the incident. An example of this second scenario could be a structural fire that would deny the use of the damaged space for an extended amount of time.

One of three primary planning assumptions can generally be made about the primary facility(ies) of the government agency or organization as it relates to COOP activation.

Planning Assumption 1: Agency Facility Alone Affected.

Under this scenario, an agency facility (i.e., building) is closed for normal business activities, but the cause of the disruption has not affected surrounding buildings, utilities, or transportation systems.

Planning Assumption 2: Multiple Co-Located Agency Facilities or Surrounding Area Affected.

Under this scenario, the adjoining government facilities or surrounding area is closed for normal business activities as a result of a catastrophic event.

Planning Assumption 3: The Metropolitan Area Affected.

Under this scenario, the entire metropolitan area would be closed for normal business activities as a result of an actual or threatened situation.

Identifying Mission Essential Functions

The identification of mission essential functions (MEF's) are one of the most critical, and most difficult to accomplish, aspects of COOP planning. MEF's are those functions that allow governmental agencies to provide vital services, exercise civil authority, maintain the safety and well being of the general populace, and sustain the industrial/economic base in an emergency (FPC 65, 1999). Identifying employees as either mission essential or non-mission



essential has significant consequences for both the agency and the employee. When COOP is activated, MEF's may be required to relocate at a greater distance from their home. Non-MEF's may be put on administrative leave. Both of these can cause hardships for the employees. Care should be given when determining both functions and the positions that will perform them. The Federal Emergency Management Agency provides the following guidance in identifying essential functions. Agencies should:

- (1) Identify all functions performed by the agency, then determine which must be continued under all circumstances;
- (2) Prioritize these essential functions;
- (3) Establish staffing and resources requirements needed to perform essential functions;
- (4) Identify mission critical data and systems necessary to conduct essential functions;
- (5) Defer functions not deemed essential to immediate agency needs until additional personnel and resources become available; and,
- (6) Integrate supporting activities to ensure that essential functions can be performed as efficiently as possible during emergency relocation.

(FPC 65, 1999, Section 7.1.b)

However, little guidance is provided anywhere on criteria with which to base this prioritization. The following table indicates some factors that might be considered when interviewing or surveying personnel regarding their mission essential functions. Using a simple ranking system where possible will help employees look at their departmental missions and functions more objectively. Some examples of elements to look at are found in Table 1.

Table 1 - MEF Interview or Survey Elements

List customers	(Customer is defined as any public / private / non-profit agency or individual citizen provided service)
Rank function by health and safety of the customer	(Healthcare, Emergency Services)
Rank function by customer access to housing	(Housing, Construction, Shelters)
Rank function by customer access to basic financial support	(Vouchers, Entitlements, Payroll)
Rank function by customer access to basic community services	(Utilities, Roads, Water, 1,2,3,4,etc.)
Indicate functions whose exclusion would absolutely prevent a customer from performing /surviving.	(Fire, Emergency Medical, etc.)
Give a brief description of impacts/consequences if function is not performed or not available. (customer dissatisfaction or financial loss)	(Customer dissatisfaction or financial loss)

After determining mission essential functions, supporting space requirements, equipment, systems, databases and other resources must be determined. Again, little guidance exists on how to determine these requirements. Table 2 below offers some basic guidance to include on a combination of interviews, surveys, worksheets etc. to arrive at basic requirements.



Table 2 - Supporting Requirement Elements

List functions requirements in office supplies? Which could be packaged easily for relocation?	(paper, forms, etc.)
How long would you expect these packaged office supplies items to last?	
Requirements in office support equipment?	(copier, fax, microfiche, etc.)
Of office support equipment items identified, which could be packaged easily for relocation?	
Requirements in information technology.	(computers, telephones, etc.)
Of information technology items identified, which could be packaged easily for relocation?	
Can any of your current computer based processes related to this function be temporarily replaced with paper in an emergency?	
Are there any mission critical software, or specially designed applications used in this function?	
Are there any procedural / security requirements precluding sharing computers in this function?	
Are there any agency vehicles that will be relocated?	(numbers for parking spaces)
How many parking spaces do you anticipate for citizens doing business with your agency?	
Requirements in personnel?	(staff names and/or job descriptions)
If identified personnel are absent, are there identified alternates?	
What are the required/intended space needs?	(square footage for each staff member)
Are there any special furniture and/or equipment considerations by staff or function?	
Does this function's staff need to be physically adjacent to any other agency or department?	(Including physical movement)
Does function require security beyond normal building security?	(After hours, funds transfers, etc.)
Does function require confidential records storage?	
Do records require non-sprinklered or rated environment?	
Do any of this function's critical items require special climatic considerations?	
Other considerations foreseen in relocating this function and critical items and personnel?	

Identifying Alternate Facilities

The determination of an alternate facility(ies) to serve as the designated ARP may be based on several factors. The ARP should be capable of supporting operations in a threat-free environment, as determined by the geographical location of the facility, a favorable assessment of the local threat, and/or the collective protection characteristics of the facility. Ideally, facilities should be identified from existing Agency infrastructure. This should be done to ensure the facility will not have competing interests in the event there is a disaster that simultaneously impacts other like organizations or agencies. One facility should be identified in the local area, and another well outside the potentially impacted area.

All designated ARP's should provide:



- Immediate capability to perform essential functions under various threat conditions, including threats involving weapons of mass destruction;
- Sufficient space and equipment to sustain the relocating organization;
- Interoperable communications with all identified essential internal and external organizations, critical customers, and the public;
- Reliable logistical support, services, and infrastructure systems, including water, electrical power, heating and air conditioning, etc.
- Ability to sustain operations for a period of up to 30 days;
- Consideration for the health, safety, and emotional well-being of relocated employees; and,
- Appropriate physical security and access controls.

Executive and COOP Team Leadership

Once an incident has occurred, the executive level leadership of the agency or jurisdiction will convene to determine whether or not a COOP activation is warranted. In a pre-incident warning situation, the Executive Leadership will meet at a pre-determined location and assess the impending situation. A decision will be made to take action, take no action, or to defer any decisions based on later information and the time necessary to implement those actions prior to the hazard impact.

If the warning provides enough evidence for any actions other than Notification actions to be taken, the COOP Plan will be activated and Move and Setup Actions (described below) will commence.

Two COOP support teams are recommended. A Move Team will coordinate the movement of any pre-designated resources which are tapped for movement to the ARP. Depending on the amount of resources to be moved, commercial movers may be contracted to assist in preparing and transporting designated resources for a move to the ARP. The leader of this team will serve as the single point of contact with the executive leadership in communicating the move status and any difficulties encountered. Agency members of the Move Team should be present in their work areas to coordinate the commercial vendor in moving the proper designated resources. Once complete at the primary facility, the Move Team should accompany the commercial movers to the ARP and coordinate the delivery and setup of these same resources to the proper areas in conjunction with the Setup Team at the ARP.

Setup Actions should be taken simultaneously with Move Actions in preparing the ARP for the Move Team and the designated agency/department employees. The Setup Team should consist of a team leader knowledgeable about the alternate facility, along with agency or alternate facility MEF employees to set up the onsite resources in preparation for the arrival of the Move Team with the additional resources from the primary facility. In any circumstance when the primary facility is assessed to be untenable and too dangerous for Move Actions to be accomplished, Setup Actions will still take place at the ARP.

Time Phased Implementation

A time-phased implementation allows a government entity to break down both the planning and implementation into easily understood phases. This type of implementation also helps to maximize the preservation of life and property in the event any type of hazardous event directly impacts the facility. The extent to which life and property protection is possible, however, will depend on the type of emergency, the amount of warning received, whether personnel are on duty or off-duty and at home or elsewhere, and the extent of actual damage to the agency's facility.

Given the two scenarios and three planning assumptions mentioned earlier, Continuity of Operations Planning can best be accomplished by breaking down the operations process into a



four stage, time phased implementation. The recommended planning and implementation stages are as follows:

- Preparedness
 - The pre-identification of preparedness steps and planning that should be accomplished prior to an incident occurrence.
 - Examples include:
 - Appointment of a COOP Coordinator to coordinate planning, testing, and exercise efforts
 - Identification of ARP and alternates
 - Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Assessment of ARP
 - Structural, mechanical, electrical, Information Technology and Communications Assessment of the ARP and alternates
 - Space Utilization Study and Physical Requirement Study
 - Identification of special COOP leadership and teams
 - Development of alert and notification procedures
 - Compilation of “drive away kits’ by MEF personnel
 - Identification and pre-positioning of critical resources at the ARP
- Activation
 - Activation includes those activities which will occur if an impending event is threatening the facility (activation for a pre-incident occurrence) or if some event has damaged the facility in some way (activation for an actual incident occurrence).
 - Notify ARP of impending activation and actual relocation requirements
 - Activate plans, procedures, and schedules to transfer activities, personnel, records, and equipment to the alternate relocation point (ARP)
 - Notify COOP Move Teams (moving pre-designated documents, resources to the ARP, if applicable)
 - Notify COOP Setup Teams (setting up ARP to receive Move Team and MEF personnel)
 - Notify COOP mission essential personnel
 - Instruct all other non-essential personnel on what they are to do
 - Notify internal and external coordination points of COOP activation and the ARP location
 - Order equipment/supplies, if not already in place
 - Secure the primary facility(ies) and non-moveable equipment and records, to the extent possible
 - Continue essential operations at the primary facility if available, until the ARP is operational
 - Advise ARP manager(s) on the status of ARP personnel
- Alternate Relocation Point Operations
 - Account for relocating personnel and begin performance of mission essential functions. Plan for reconstitution.
 - Provide amplifying guidance to other key staff and non-essential personnel
 - Identify replacements for missing personnel and request augmentation as necessary



- Commence full execution of essential operations at ARP(s)
 - Update the internal and external coordination points of the ARP location, operational and communications status, and anticipated duration of relocation, if known
 - Develop plans and schedules to phase down ARP operations and return activities, personnel, records, and equipment to the primary facility when appropriate
- Reconstitution
 - This phase provides for termination of operations at the ARP and provides for reconstitution at the primary facility, or if no longer available, an alternative site.
 - Inform all personnel, including non-essential personnel, that the threat of or actual event no longer exists, and provide instructions for resumption of normal operations
 - Supervise an orderly return to the normal operating facility(ies), or movement to other temporary or permanent facility(ies) using a phased approach if conditions necessitate
 - Report status of relocation to internal and external points of contact (POC) and coordination points
 - Conduct an after-action review of COOP operations and effectiveness of plans and procedures as soon as possible, identify areas for correction, and development of a corrective action plan.

Multi-Year Strategies and Interim “Bridging” Plans

Agency’s should further develop and maintain COOP capabilities using a multi-year strategy and program management plan. This plan should outline the process the agency’s should follow to designate essential functions and resources, define short and long-term COOP goals and objectives, forecast budgetary requirements, anticipate and address issues and potential obstacles, and establish planning milestones.

Upon the date of official adoption of a COOP plan, many of the capabilities to support government operations at the ARP may not be in place. Mission essential resources as identified in the Plan which do not currently exist within agency inventories or cannot be supported via current utility and information technology infrastructure may need to be purchased or contracted. Current funding cycles and opportunities may provide monies to support some of the inventory and infrastructure needs in the short term, however, it could be an extended period of time before the minimum capabilities exist. These minimum capabilities may include such things as:

- Telephone capabilities at workstations
- Power capabilities at workstations
- Computer capabilities (non-networked) at workstations
- ARP infrastructure improvements to support these capabilities

There most likely will be a cost of implementing the Architectural/Interiors, Structural Hardening, Mechanical/Electrical, and Information Technology systems upgrades that may have been identified in the early identification, selection, and assessment of the ARP. Therefore the multi-year strategy becomes critical to address the implementation of facility upgrades. In addition, a bridging plan, which outlines modifications that may be required to operate at the ARP before upgrades or pre-positioning has occurred can help ensure a successful COOP activation.



Author Biographies

Audrey Heffron is Director of Business Operations and a member of the research faculty at the Florida Public Affairs Center and the Center for Disaster Risk Policy at Florida State University. She specializes in emergency management, service based leadership, and training development. Formerly with FEMA and the Americorps National Civilian Community Corps, Ms. Heffron has served on several national boards including a national task force on Volunteer Response During Disasters. Ms. Heffron is a graduate of Wells College, The University College of Oxford, and Florida State University.

Janet Dilling is the Director of the Florida Public Affairs Center and the Center for Disaster Risk Policy at Florida State University where she specializes in emergency management, program evaluation and organizational development. With over twenty years experience in government and emergency management, she has been active on numerous state, regional, and national boards and task forces. Janet is also the Director of the Emergency Management Graduate Certificate Program at Florida State University where she is a principal faculty member for the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy's emergency management curriculum.

Marc J. Rogoff, Ph.D. serves as Assistant Director of the Florida Institute of Government at the University of South Florida. His interests are focused on strategic planning for emerging public policy issues including water resource management, land use, solid waste programs, and transportation. He can be reached at 4202 East Fowler Avenue, Tampa, FL 33620. (813)974-1317 mrogoff@chumal.cas.usf.edu.

References

Acquisition of Alternate Facilities for Continuity of Operations (COOP), Federal Preparedness Circular 67, Federal Emergency Management Agency, (2001).

Administrative Leave, State of Florida Rule 60L-34.007, (2001).

Doughty, K. (2001). *Business Continuity Planning*. Boca Raton, FL: Auerbach.

Federal Executive Branch Continuity of Operations (COOP), Federal Preparedness Circular 65, Federal Emergency Management Agency, (1999).

Rogoff, M., Harrell, V., Dilling, J., Gispert, L., Wade H., Khator S., Lange S., and R. Bitterli. (2003). Continuity of Government Operations – Developing an Alternate Relocation Plan. *Public Works Magazine*. January 2003. United States.

