



## Business Continuity Planning and Emergency Preparedness for Non-Profit Organizations

A well-developed Business Continuity Plan / Emergency Preparedness Plan consist of the 'Where' and the 'How' of your agency meeting the needs of its clients. Your plan focuses on the steps you would take to survive and recover from a disaster.

It is vital to arm your agency with a tool to withstand any disaster, by creating a Business Continuity and Emergency Preparedness Plan. A disaster is any event that causes your agency's resources to be flexed beyond capacity. The disaster could be as common as a computer crash, a power outage or snow fall or it can be as extreme as a tsunami, tornado or fire. There are typically three scenarios that you should have established plans for:

1. A temporary disruption of service (power/water/heat) to your organization which prohibits delivery of programs and services or in which your immediate business operations are affected.
2. Localized disaster: Your office or your building is rendered uninhabitable and resources are lost, service is permanently disrupted for a known period of time.
3. Geographic disaster: a larger area is impacted and your organizations office, resources and service delivery is irretrievably affected for an unknown period of time.

### Accounting for Staff and Services

The nation has seen some incredible displays of Mother Nature over the last decade. All have let impact on family and friends... and organizations. It is well noted that after Katrina hit New Orleans, and the levies failed, a majority of the non-profit agencies who served the community never returned. If those agencies had created an Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity Plan, and had conducted regular drills on such a plan, many would have been well positioned to return to full functioning order in short time.

What are the critical success factors of a well developed plan? In any disaster, a well prepared organization needs to account for its **staff** and **supplies**.

**Staff:** Your staff are the lifeblood of your mission. Developing a plan that centers on the 'how' and 'where' of staff operations are the first step in preparation.

All staff should be involved in the creation of your organization's Business Continuity and Emergency Preparedness Plan. The more input by staff, the better your agency will be at adapting to a change in



operations. Communication and clearly defined expectations, which staff has been a part of developing, means smoother implementation of the disaster plan when executed.

The first consideration is that all of your staff will need to be able to perform their job without worry of their personal well being, or the well being of their loved ones, during and post the disaster. It is best practice then, to have all staff create a **personal preparedness plan** as part of their participation in the organizations preparedness activities. A staff member with a personal preparedness plan will be able to focus on their job, knowing that their loved ones, family pets and other responsibilities are safe and attended. Resources abound to help with developing a personal preparedness plan; here are two reputable resources from the Red Cross and the US Government Emergency program: <http://www.ready.gov/> and <http://www.redcross.org> .

The emergency preparedness plan developed with staff, should address disaster **preparations**. If given a relatively safe amount of time, what gets 'saved' from the impending ruin? Consider files, computer hard-drives, other products or materials necessary to continue operations remotely or in a new location. Who is responsible for gathering and transporting these items and where are these housed post disaster? Outline your organizations communication strategy pre- disaster, as well as gathering and meeting spots for staff and clients.

Determine what the client impact would be in a disaster and define a strategy with staff on how their roles could continue to be performed given the disaster scenario. If your staff provide healthcare services to school children, your plan should include knowledge and collaboration with the affected schools, so that these services can continue.

Consider too the financial impact on your organization. If there are fees for your service from clients, how will you process them or operate without them? What are your banking procedures and what are your financial institutions emergency operation plans. How will staff be able to carry out their roles representative of these concerns.

**Supplies:** Resources are the life blood of your agency. Power, paper, connectivity, and mobility can be limited due to a disaster. Your plan must account for all of the resources you need in operation. Creating **Mutual Aid Agreements** with important suppliers is an important step. A mutual aid agreement is a written agreement between agencies or jurisdictions in which you both agree to assist each other on request, by furnishing personnel and equipment. We know of a hospital that has an arrangement with a local radio station that owns a fleet of Hummers, to assist with transport in time of emergency. Creativity is a plus when planning for the worst. Go through your essential vendors/resource suppliers and begin to host dialogue about emergency plans, working toward a Mutual Aid Agreement of your own.



Your agency must also plan for additional client needs, beyond the scope of your mission. You may need to operate beyond regular hours, providing warm food, water and other essentials during or after the event. A well-defined Business Continuity and Emergency Preparedness Plan should account for these issues and anticipate additional supplies and services that might be needed. As part of your preparation, determine and secure your operational location post disaster. Communicate in advance, these disaster locations and let your clients know how to get a hold of you post disaster. This preparation will pay off in minimal loss of service delivery once the disaster has passed.

### Make it Active

Finally your plan needs to be a living, dynamic document. It needs to be drilled regularly and updated to reflect any changes that your organization may face. Drills can be a fun way to test your plan and allow for staff to “walk in the shoes” of co-workers. Make it an occasion, but make sure that any piece of the plan that needs to be corrected is assigned to a staff member and given a date to be completed.

For further information or to speak about how our experienced consultants can help your organization develop a Business Continuity and Emergency Preparedness Plan and drilling protocols, contact Harvest Development Group at [roots@harvestdevelopmentgrp.com](mailto:roots@harvestdevelopmentgrp.com) or 860-575-5132.