COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Continuity of Operations

Background

- Continuity of operations (COOP) during a pandemic requires using existing continuity plans and strategies in more adaptive ways to address unique operational requirements, to include employee health, social distancing, and widespread absenteeism.

- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute or should be considered as guidance in any way.

Key Considerations

- COOP planning during a pandemic must consider how to maintain operations while accounting for employee health and limited resources.

- Identifying and protecting critical infrastructure and essential services is key to keeping communities functioning.

- Working in virtual environments requires consideration of cybersecurity measures and provides opportunities for community engagement.

Lessons Learned Related to Continuity of Operations during COVID-19

Continuity of Operations Planning for Pandemics

- **Potential Best Practice:** Review and/or assess your organization's essential functions and personnel.

  - **Resource:** Use the FEMA Continuity Resource Toolkit and other continuity planning guides found here to identify your essential functions and develop a continuity plan.

  - **Resource:** State and local government and private sector organizations who have not yet been impacted by the coronavirus should participate in a continuity of operations training to guide preparatory planning. The Emergency Management Institute offers two online courses focused on continuity and resilience:

    - An Introduction to Continuity of Operations: IS-1300
      https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-1300

    - Introduction to Continuity of Operations Planning for Pandemic Influenzas: IS-0520
      https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-520

- **Potential Best Practice:** Establish and practice your telework ability in advance. Employers should regularly check in with staff to see what is and is not working during teleworking to assess where new processes and procedures are needed to communicate with and support staff.

- o **Resource:** Consider [these best practices](#) for implementing a telecommuting program.

- • **Potential Best Practice:** As organizations implement expanded telework to maintain business operations, companies should examine IT practices and procedures,[1] and security risks that may arise from a remote workplace.

Critical Infrastructure Considerations for Pandemic Preparedness

- • **Potential Best Practice:** Identify essential workers needed to maintain the critical infrastructure services and functions Americans depend on daily.

  - o **Resource:** Review the Department of Homeland Security's [guidance](#) on essential critical infrastructure workforce and [actions for protecting infrastructure and the supply chain.](#)

- • **Potential Best Practice:** Key critical infrastructure sectors should consider procuring supplies[2] to include cots, sleeping bags, and food[3] if essential workers need to shelter-in-place at work to ensure continued reliable service while avoiding exposure to the virus.

Recommendations for Local Governments Working in Virtual Environments

- • **Potential Best Practice:** Local governments should aim to conduct business remotely while continuing to make time-sensitive decisions.

  - o **Resource:** The International City/County Management Association compiled Key Questions and Factors to Consider as Jurisdictions Shift to Virtual Governance including high- and low-tech options, paring meetings to cover essential business, and identifying and meeting legal requirements.

  - o **Mitigating Action:** Incorporate established techniques[4] for conducting successful government meetings remotely.

- • **Potential Best Practice:** Kenmore, Washington, is using technology to expand virtual options to engage citizens in public meetings[5] to maintain momentum on critical planning efforts.

  - o **Resource:** Utilize multiple venues for engaging the public to include video conferencing, recording meetings, and streaming live meetings on YouTube to facilitate public engagement.

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[1] https://icma.org/blog-posts/it-practices-and-procedures-consider-cases-extended-telecommuting
[2] https://greatriverenergy.com/great-river-energy-responds-to-pandemic/
[3] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-utilities/u-s-power-industry-may-ask-key-employees-to-live-at-work-if-coronavirus-worsens-idUSKBN2171AC
[4] http://mrsc.org/Home/Stay-Informed/MRSC-Insight/March-2020/Tips-for-Government-Bodies-Meeting-Remotely.aspx
[5] https://icma.org/blog-posts/public-meetings-time-covid-19