State and Local Government Continuity of Operations Planning: Overview

PURPOSE
Presents an overview of Best Practices in the area of continuity of operations (COOP) planning for state and local governments.

SUMMARY
State and local governments must have plans for maintaining critical services during incidents that threaten to disrupt normal operations, such as terrorism, natural disasters, and day-to-day events such as employee absence or power outages. A COOP plan describes an organization's essential functions, associated personnel and resources, and processes for protecting and maintaining those functions, personnel, and resources.

DESCRIPTION
About This Series of Best Practices
This series of Best Practices provides general information and guidelines on developing a state or local COOP plan. The documents cover the essential elements of the COOP plan: delegations of authority, orders of succession, protection of vital records, communications plans, and alternate location planning. These Best Practices give planners methods, illustrations, and examples on how to approach continuity planning for their organization, agency, and/or jurisdiction.

Guidelines and Standards
The information reflected in these documents accompanies and supports guidance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal and state agencies, templates, and standards. The federal government is encouraging COOP planning for all levels of governance:

- In May 2004, FEMA released Interim Guidance COOP Planning for State and Local Governments. This guidance provides the basis for COOP planning at the state and local levels.
- FEMA released revised guidance on federal COOP planning, Federal Preparedness Circular 65 (FPC 65), in June 2004. Although intended for federal agencies, FPC 65 provides useful parameters for COOP planning at the state and local level.
- Presidential Decision Directive 67 and Executive Order 12656 require that federal agencies develop continuity of operations plans for essential operations.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has developed NFPA 1600, Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs, which provides useful standards for continuity programs at any level of government and also for private organizations.
State and local COOP plans exist in many parts of the country, often as a result of COOP-specific federal funding. Maryland, Florida, and North Dakota have released useful planning guides for state and local agencies.

**Background**

COOP planning is a good business practice that all organizations should undertake. Many day-to-day incidents threaten normal government agency operations, such as employee absence, workplace violence, power outages, and other common events. Departments and agencies must be able to maintain minimum essential functions without power, primary facilities, key personnel, and other critical resources.

The threat of terrorism poses new challenges to state and local governments. Terrorists may focus their efforts on the disruption of essential government and/or economic functions. Critical infrastructure such as communications, water, transportation, and energy may be targeted, incapacitating many government agencies.

According to the FEMA, “State and local governments should consider developing or updating contingency plans for the continuity of operations (COOP) of vital government functions. Jurisdictions must be prepared to continue their minimum essential functions throughout the spectrum of possible threats from natural disasters through acts of terrorism. COOP planning facilitates the performance of State and local government and services during an emergency that may disrupt normal operations.”

**History**

COOP, and the related concept of continuity of government (COG), was first required during the Cold War as the federal government considered the possibility of a nuclear attack disrupting constitutional government and local, state, and federal government operations. Many states also considered COOP and COG as part of civil defense efforts. COOP and COG have received renewed attention today given the threats posed by chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, agricultural, and explosives terrorism.

**Definitions and Terminology**

The following terms will be used throughout these Best Practice documents:

- **COOP.** According to FEMA, COOP is “an internal effort within individual components of a government to ensure the capability exists to continue essential component functions across a wide range of potential emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents, and technological or attack-related emergencies.”

- **COG.** According to FEMA, COG is “measures taken by a government to continue to perform required functions during and after a severe emergency. COG is a coordinated effort within each branch of the government to continue its minimum essential responsibilities in a catastrophic emergency.”

- **Essential Functions.** According to FEMA, essential functions are "those functions, stated or implied, that state departments and local jurisdictions are required to perform by stature or executive order or are otherwise necessary 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.”

- **Critical Services.** According to the All Hands Network, critical services are “processes or supporting data which could not be interrupted or unavailable for any significant period (generally 0-24 hours) without jeopardizing operation of the organization. Time frames depend on the organization but these generally represent activities that are vital to the operation of the organization.”

It must be noted that while these terms are defined as such for consistency, “essential functions” and “critical services” are used interchangeably by various government and private sources to mean different things, or sometimes, the same thing. Similarly, COOP and COG are terms that are frequently used interchangeably.

**BEST PRACTICES OUTLINE**
This Best Practice series consists of the following documents:

- Overview
- Developing a Continuity of Operations Plan
- Risk Assessment
- Elements of a Continuity of Operations Plan
  - Identifying Essential Functions
  - Delegations of Authority
  - Orders of Succession
  - Communications
  - Vital Records and Data
  - Alternate Operating Locations
- Tests, Training, and Exercises

**REFERENCES**


**Links**


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