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BEST PRACTICE

State and Local Government Continuity of Operations Planning: Orders of Succession

PURPOSE

Suggests guidelines for developing orders of succession for key personnel within a government agency.

SUMMARY

A continuity of operations (COOP) plan must include lines of succession for key positions to ensure continuity of leadership and continued support for essential functions and critical services.

DESCRIPTION

COOP planners must identify those positions that are necessary for the operation and continuity of essential functions and the most appropriate personnel to backfill those positions.

Identify Positions Essential Functions

Identifying key personnel must be closely intertwined with identifying essential functions. The processes can be done concurrently, as many of the methods used to identify essential functions are useful for determining the key personnel that are required to maintain critical services.

Agencies should associate key positions with identified essential functions. The methodologies discussed in the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Best Practice "[State and Local Government COOP Planning: Identifying Essential Functions](#)," such as surveys, interviews, and meetings, are tools for determining the key positions supporting essential functions. COOP planners should include some of the following questions in surveys and interviews for agency employees:

- What would the consequences be if you were unable to report to work?
- What positions would, if vacant, cause the most difficulty for your organization to continue carrying out its essential functions?

Orders of Succession are closely related to [Identification of Essential Functions](#) and [Delegation of Authorities](#). Agencies should consider the following when determining orders of succession:

1. What personnel will be required for an essential function to be carried out? In other words, without whom would essential functions cease?
2. What positions have been delegated key emergency and administrative authorities?

- In an emergency, would your presence (or someone in your position) be required at the primary facility of the organization?

Organization Chart

Members of the COOP team should acquire or create organization charts for their branch, division, and/or agency. Developing an organization chart will help map out key personnel and their functions.

Common Key Positions

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the following are key positions for which orders of succession should be developed:

- Government Leaders (Mayor, etc.)
- Chief Executive Officer
- Director of Logistics and Administrative Support
- Communications Coordinator
- Public Information Officer
- Resource Manager
- All Personnel Involved in Essential Functions

COOP planners should record the key positions in a chart that associates them with each essential function, such as the following example adapted from the [Maryland COOP Planning Guide](#):

Essential Function	Key Positions
<i>Emergency Dispatch</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>911 Call Center Director</i> 2. <i>Dispatcher</i> 3. <i>Cell Center Technician</i> 4. <i>Database Administrator</i>

Identify Successors

Key positions should be designated by their title when possible, not by the name of the employee filling the post as key personnel may change jobs, go on vacation, or no longer be with the agency. In rare instances, there may be a situation where a person's unique skills and abilities require that name identification be used. But in most cases, avoiding the use of names will ensure that the order of succession plan is valid in the long-term, regardless of personnel change.

Elected Officials

Elected officials, such as sheriffs, county managers, and governors, must have orders of succession at least three persons deep, according to a panel of COOP planners. Agencies should consider naming even more successors for particularly important positions such as chief elected officials.

In one state, succession did not go further than the lieutenant governor and the president of the State Senate. COOP/COG planners reviewed statutes and found that no additional successors could be named without quorum in the Senate, which may not be achievable during a large emergency. COOP/COG planners sought to change state law to allow for additional successors to be named; legislation is currently pending to fix the problem.

Succession for elected officials, such as mayors, sheriffs, and county managers, is frequently restricted by local or state law. For example, laws may require that elected officials must have elected successors. COOP/continuity of government (COG) planners should identify legal restrictions to succession and seek legal recourse. Legal counsel will be very useful in accomplishing this goal.

Key Employees

A number of factors go into determining orders of succession for key employees. Prior to considering successor personnel for a key position, COOP planners should consider the position and function itself, specifically:

- The knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the position;
- The qualifications and background of the key position holder;
- The daily work requirements of the current office holder; and
- The positions branch or division and the location of the office.

Sample worksheets for use in developing orders of succession:

- [Maryland COOP Planning Guide Worksheets 12 and 13](#)
- [Federal Preparedness Circular 65 Table D1](#)
- [General Services Administration COOP Plan Template Table 9.1](#)
- [FEMA State and Local COOP Guidance Example Succession Plan](#)

COOP planners should apply these criteria to potential successors for each position. A single employee should not be designated successor for more than two positions.

While personnel in the same division as a key official are logical choices for successors, at least one person in the line of succession should not be co-located. A catastrophic event in one location could eliminate an entire order of succession if all successors are co-located. Designating successors in multiple locations will ensure continuity of command and control.

Training

Personnel that are designated successors should be trained to carry out their emergency duties. In addition to training, "position descriptions" that describe what a position does and how he/she does it can be useful. Alternatively, organizations can develop procedures for each key position that can be easily followed by successors.

Notification

All key personnel should be notified of a succession so that authority is established and clearly understood. Notification should come through a redundant communication system that allows messages to be sent through multiple channels.

Vital Record

The orders of succession are a vital record and should be protected as part of the agency's records management system and the overall COOP plan. Backup copies should be kept at the alternate facility if possible, or transported there during relocation. See the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing Best Practice: "State and Local COOP Planning: Vital Records, Documents, and Systems"* for more information.

REFERENCES

- Florida Department of Community Affairs, Division of Emergency Management. *Continuity of Operations: Elements of Viability*, 2003. ([LLIS.gov ID#11018](#))

- *Lesson Learned Information Sharing*. "State and Local Government COOP Planning: Delegations of Authority," 6 December 2004.
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- Maryland Emergency Management Agency. *Maryland State Agencies COOP Planning Manual*, 2004.
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- National Fire Protection Association. *National Fire Protection Association 1600: Standard on Business Continuity and Emergency Management*, 2004.
([LLIS.gov ID#9258](#))
- US Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency. *Federal Emergency Management Agency's Interim State/Local COOP Planning Guidance*, May 2004.
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- US Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Office of National Security Coordination. *Federal Preparedness Circular 65*, June 2004.
([LLIS.gov ID#10429](#))

Standards

National Fire Protection Association 1600: Standard on Business Continuity and Emergency Management

- **A.5.7.2.5.** "Specific areas to consider in continuity plans include: (1) Succession: To ensure that the leadership will continue to function effectively under disaster/emergency conditions. When practical, there is a designation of at least three successors for each position. Provisions have been made to deal with vacancies and other contingencies such as absence or inability to act."

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