



Continuity of Operations Planning: Ministry & Services Post-Disaster

What would you do if your building was made unusable by a disaster, if your staff was unavailable, or if you had no way of reaching your congregants? By developing a continuity of operations plan (COOP) you can significantly strengthen your ability to serve your community during and after disasters. This tip sheet will help demystify the COOP planning process and help you get started.

Create a Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) Team

Your team should represent all aspects of your facilities and programs: religious leaders, administration, facilities managers, and program coordinators. Be sure to include those with expertise vital to daily functions. Find out if there are members of your religious community with risk management or business continuity experience. Note: the team you assemble to create this plan can be different from the team designated to lead during a disaster. See **“Decision Making and Leadership”** in the Checklist.

Do a Risk Assessment & All-Hazards Analysis

Consider the events that cause major disruption to your house of worship’s facilities and programs.

- **All-Hazards:** In New York City, we face hurricanes, flooding, fire, terrorism, utility disruptions, and hazardous materials.
- **Consider your vulnerabilities:** Are you next to a sensitive location? Are there chemicals stored nearby? Is your organization subject to bias crimes? Are you in a flood zone?
- **Plan for utility disruptions:** Loss of power, heat, water, and the loss of the use of your facility (this could be due to a number of hazards).

Perform an Operational Assessment

How Does Your House of Worship Function?

- **Assess how your house of worship functions,** both internally and externally, to determine which staff, materials, procedures, and equipment are absolutely necessary to maintain operations.
- **Identify all of your programs and outreach ministries:** Worship services, religious instruction, study groups, congregation-sponsored community programs (i.e., soup kitchens, social services), and guest programs (i.e., local organizations using facilities for programs and meetings).

What are Your Critical Operations?

- **Identify which operations are critical to survival and recovery:** Include emergency payroll, expedited financial decision-making, and accounting systems to track and document costs in the event of a disaster. Establish procedures for succession of management, including at least one person who is not at the house of worship, if possible.

What are Your Critical Programs?

- **Identify your critical programs:** Prioritize the programs you have identified and decide which are most critical and need to function quickly during the post-disaster period.
- **Identify actions & processes associated with these critical programs:** Inventory the separate processes that allow each critical program to function. For example, in order to run your soup kitchen, you must (among other things):
 - Pay employees or coordinate volunteers
 - Continue your access to food
 - Ensure you have a facility
 - Conduct outreach

Perform an Impact Analysis

Identify impacts of hazards on your critical programs and their associated processes.

Determine what is already in place to help protect your resources:

- **Records:** Files, computer back-up, contracts, agreements, etc.
- **Insurance:** Explore disaster-related insurance options
- **Physical resources:** Assess your facility’s hard security
- **Plans:** Fire safety, building evacuation, etc.
- **Support and resources** from your regional/national religious offices

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Develop a Continuity of Operations Plan

Make a plan for what you will do if your facility is not accessible. Define crisis management procedures and individual responsibilities in advance. Talk with your staff or co-workers and frequently review and practice what you intend to do during and after an emergency. Your document should address three types of activities:

- **Emergency Action Plan:** Immediate response
 - Include actions that should be taken just before (if there is warning), or immediately after a disaster to prevent loss of life and property and to promote fast recovery. Make a checklist.
 - Include a **Communications Plan** detailing who will be contacted, under what circumstances, how, and for what purpose.
 - Address circumstances that force you to evacuate or shelter-in-place (stay where you are).
- **Continuity of Ministry:** Continuation, growth, or suspension of existing daily programs
- **Integration of Disaster Response and Recovery Program Plans:** Include any services you offer during disasters that are not part of your regular programs. You must ensure that this plan does not conflict with your continuity of ministry plan.

Checklist: Areas of Consideration for Developing Plans and Taking Planning Actions

Facilities	Alternate sites, security, structural issues, liaising with building owner, landlord, or tenants.
Security	How will you protect your staff, congregants and volunteers as well as items of religious significance to your house of worship?
Insurance	Documentation needed for claims, scope of coverage, discounts for preparedness.
Regulations & Codes	Governmental & religious laws that apply to your emergency actions.
Equipment & Supplies	Such as computers, “Go-Bag” supplies, life safety, sprinklers, etc.
Records	How to store, update, and back-up important records. Include: payroll, lease, deeds.
Communication	How, when, what, and with whom are you communicating?
Timing	Consider how your actions need to change at different times of the day/week/year.
People	Think about who is in your neighborhood. Not just your congregants, but people with disabilities, elderly, non-English speaking individuals, etc. How will you execute your plans if many of your staff/congregants are affected?
Decision Making & Leadership	What kind of organizational structure will you use? Consider who is making decisions, communicating with your congregants and partners, and completing emergency actions.

Sharing and Practicing

Plans must be shared and practiced with all congregants. Perform various drills to ensure your plans address all situations.

RESOURCES

- NYC OEM Ready New York for small businesses: www.nyc.gov/oem. See “For Businesses.”
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) business recovery: www.fema.gov. See “Business.”
- Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS): www.ibhs.org/publications. See “Open for Business.”
- Church World Service (CWS):
Emergency Planning Guide
www.churchworldservice.org/Emergencies/docs/61CongregationalEmergencyPlanning.doc
Emergencies and Recovery Plan for the Religious Community
www.churchworldservice.org/pdf_files/emergencies/63emergencyrecoveryplan.pdf
- Non-profit Coordinating Committee of New York, Inc. (NPCC): www.npccny.org

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