

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans for Local Governments

The purpose of this guidance document is to provide local governments with a recommended outline for developing a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan that will enable you to provide vital services effectively and in a timely manner during emergency conditions. The guidance is a step-based approach to COOP planning.

A strong COOP Plan will enable your town to continue performing essential functions and activities during emergencies, and to facilitate an orderly recovery from emergency situations. COOP planning applies to a wide range of potential emergencies or threats, including natural disasters, accidents, technological failures, workplace violence, and terrorism. Some of these hazards may produce emergencies that render a single facility unusable for a period of time, such as a local water main break or HazMat incident. Others may result in more severe and widespread emergencies such as a major national or regional disaster. Equally important, but largely overlooked, are disasters or emergencies with less severity, but greater frequency, such as floods.

Responsibility for COOP planning resides with the highest level of management in the community involved, typically the Selectboard. However, your COOP Plan will be strengthened and made easier to implement through coordination with other organizations. It is particularly important to coordinate COOP planning with the general emergency response planning for your community.

Below is an outline of a basic COOP Plan. For additional information, please contact the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission at (802) 457-3188. Sally Mansur or Kevin Geiger will assist you.

COOP Plan Outline

- I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** – Outline the organization and content of the COOP Plan and describe what it is, whom it affects, and the circumstances under which it should be executed. Discuss the key elements of the COOP Plan and explain the community’s implementation strategies.
- II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE** – Explain why the community is developing a COOP Plan. List the organizations to which the COOP Plan applies and the potential threats, crises and emergencies it is to address.
- III. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS**
 - A. Identify all functions that are required to be performed by statute or executive order or are otherwise necessary to provide vital services, exercise civil authority, and maintain the safety and well being of the general populace in an emergency.
 - B. Prioritize essential functions that must be continued under all circumstances

IV. KEY PERSONNEL AND RESOURCES

- A. Create a roster of personnel who can perform the essential functions in an emergency with relevant contact information (your adopted Rapid Response Plan is a good resource for this)
- B. Create orders of succession
 - 1. Establish an order of succession to the municipal head position and other key leadership positions
 - 2. Define conditions under which succession takes place and how successors are to be relieved
- C. Delegate authority
 - 1. Document the legal authority for officials to make policy decisions during an emergency
 - 2. Identify when emergency legal authorities begin and end

V. VITAL RECORDS AND DATABASES

- A. Identify records and databases necessary to support essential functions
- B. Plan to ensure that such records and databases are protected from the effects of emergencies and are available to key personnel during the emergency (e.g., regular back up in remote location; pre-positioning of records at alternate facility, etc.)
- C. Identify where and how municipal personnel are to access vital records
- D. Outline procedures for regularly updating identified vital records

VI. ALTERNATE FACILITY(IES)

- A. Identify one or more alternate facilities where the community's key personnel can perform essential functions within 12 hours and maintain capability for 30 days in an emergency
- B. Establish alternate communications capacity at the facility. Can you forward calls from your regular number? Do you have radio capabilities?
- C. List critical alternate facility information (e.g., address, telephone number, contact person to open the facility)
- D. Drive-Away Kits (specification of contents to be included for all key personnel if time to evacuate primary facility)

VII. PROCEDURES FOR PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A. Phase 1—Activation and Relocation

- 1. COOP implementation decision process (criteria for deciding when to implement COOP and who has the authority to activate the COOP Plan; may include partial activation or phased-activation)
- 2. Procedures for notifying key personnel
- 3. Procedures for contacting non-essential personnel
- 4. Procedures for COOP Team deployment to alternate facility(ies)

B. Phase 2—Alternate Facility Operations

- 1. Assignment of staff responsibilities
- 2. Procedures for executing essential functions
- 3. Communications procedures
- 4. Procedures for public information and media releases

C. Phase 3—Termination and Return to Normal Operations

1. Procedures for terminating COOP and deactivating the alternate facility(ies)
2. Include procedures for returning to the primary facility, if available, or procedures for acquiring a new facility
3. Assign responsibility for after-action review and development of remedial action plan

VIII. MAINTAINING COOP READINESS

- A. Training Plan (outlines COOP training requirements for key personnel)
- B. Exercise Plan
 1. Scope of exercises
 2. Exercise schedule
- C. COOP Plan Maintenance (outlines how the community plans to ensure COOP Plan is up to date)

POTENTIAL APPENDICES

Appendix A: Operational Checklists

Emergency Calling Directory

Key Personnel Roster and Essential Functions Checklist

Emergency Equipment Checklists

Appendix B: Alternate Location/Facility Information – address, points of contact, and available resources at the alternate location.

Appendix C: Maps and Evacuation Routes

Appendix D: Definitions and Acronyms