



Section 5- Communications

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Section 5 – Communications

Description of topic

The ability to continue essential functions depends on the ability to continue to communicate. Communications and IT systems must include multiple possibilities for connecting leadership, staff, key stakeholders and data. These systems should also have different vulnerabilities so that even if some become unusable, others still function.

Once a durable system of infrastructure has been identified and put in place a communications schedule and procedures should be defined that includes:

- Emergency alerts/notifications
- Initial communications timeline to ensure
 - Every staff member is located.
 - Their welfare, status of personal recovery, and availability for work is known.
 - Their next of kin have been notified.
- Ongoing communications timeline to ensure
 - The organization stays aware of the condition and availability of their personnel.
 - Assistance can be provided to help members of staff with personal recovery, thus freeing them to help with workplace recovery.
 - Personnel stay aware of workplace recovery and changing expectations for their assistance with continuity and return to full operations.

Communications with stakeholders, customers, the press and the public also need to be planned, including development of policies and procedures, and development of a directory to ensure contact information is readily available from the start of the event.

The duration and intensity of the disaster or disruption will have significant effect on where and how both continuity and reconstitution work can be most effectively handled. It is necessary to develop a plan for accessing reliable communications to monitor the incident from first awareness through its termination.



Component 1 – Resilient and Redundant Communications

Location

Essential Functions section

- Describe the need for maintaining multiple methods for communications so that it is always possible to maintain contact with personnel and key stakeholders.
- Include the methods and timelines for updating contacts.
- Provide a list of all communications systems that may be used during an event.
- Describe goals (if any) to expand communications, including adding mass notification systems, additional diversity, etc. Reference the Budgeting and Acquisition section for multi-year planning strategies.

Essential Functions appendix

- Provide the MOA and/or contact information for service providers for telephones, internet, radios, and other communications technologies.

Summary

Communications and IT systems must be operational within the recovery time objective (RTO) of the essential functions they support. When an event damages the primary facility or surrounding geographic area, some ways of connecting to one another may be knocked out. Having multiple options, with different infrastructure dependencies allows you to continue essential functions and speed recovery of full operations. During a pandemic event, when it becomes important to avoid spreading germs, infrastructure diversity can support social distancing efforts.

EX. 1: A hurricane leaves tens of thousands of people trying to access help or notify relatives of their location and condition. Cell tower traffic is significantly heavier than normal, and emergency services have appropriated public bandwidth to ensure they can coordinate an effective response. For several days it becomes almost impossible to place a cell call, so landlines, emails, radios, and even cell texts may become the primary means of communication.

EX. 2: An earthquake fractures the fiberoptic lines knocking out most landline phones and internet connections for the area. Cell phones, pagers and other wireless options become the primary means to communicate.

Your organization should identify multiple resilient communications systems, located at the primary and alternate facilities, remote work sites and staff members homes. These should make it possible to communicate between senior management, continuity and non-continuity personnel, partners, vendors, customers key stakeholders, and individuals with disabilities throughout the crisis, even if some forms of communications become inoperable.

You should document the systems and provide contacts for the various service providers so they are easy to reach them when a system needs repair.

Resources, tools and templates to guide planning

Internal

- IT Team.
- Facilities Manager.

External

- Host at alternate facility.
- Department of Information Resources.
- Internet service provider.
- Offsite data storage facility.

C-1-A: Communications Systems

System	EFs Supported	Provider	Contact Information	Alternate Provider	Contact Information	Notes
Mass notification system						
Land line phone						
Cell phone						
Satellite phone						
Secured line						
Fax line						
Pager						
Home email						
Work email						
2-way radios						
GETS or emergency phone access cards						
Internet access						
Data lines						
(Other)						



Component 2 – Alerts and Notifications

Location

Essential Functions section

- Overview of alert system and instructions for use.
- Immediate and interim actions personnel should take, or reference the evacuation, shelter-in-place and return home plans and designate as essential records [ER].
- Schedule for teams to arrive at alternate facility.
- Responsibilities for set-up and activation of alternate facility communications (including transfer of IPs and re-routing of internet).

Essential Functions appendix

- Reference to the location of the Emergency Plan and desi
- Mass notification provider and instructions for sending alerts, or reference the location of the written procedure and designate as an essential record [ER].

Summary

The Emergency Plan should outline, and personnel should be trained to identify alerts for evacuation, shelter-in-place (for a storm), and shelter from a violent intruder. These may include alarms, public address announcements or mass notification system alerts.

Once emergency actions have concluded and senior leadership determines that full operations cannot be resumed for a period exceeding the RTO, an alert notification will be sent to activate the continuity plan. Personnel should respond as outlined within the Human Resources, Essential Functions and Reconstitution sections of this plan.

Outline who has the authority to declare continuity operations, as well as their successors in case they are unavailable at the time of need. Describe procedures for notification, including correct implementation of a communications tree. Include notification of personnel, alternate facility point of contact, emergency contacts/next of kin, as well as other key stakeholders.

Describe the actions to be taken by Continuity and Reconstitution Team members upon initial notification of continuity activation, including where they should go, when they should report for duty (to the alternate site or other remote work location).

For legal and planning purposes you should document important communications from the onset of the event. Include the name of the person authorizing or initiating the message, recipient(s), an overview of the content, time of receipt and a schedule reminder for repeat or follow-up messages.

Resources, tools and templates to guide planning

Internal

- Senior leadership.
- Managers.
- Human Resources.

External

- Mass notification contractor.
- Alternate facility host.



Component 3 – Ongoing Communications

Location

Essential Functions section

- Schedule for ongoing updates and notifications for staff and key stakeholders.
- Statement of who is responsible for check-in/update contacts.
EX. 1: Personnel are responsible for sending a daily update to inform their immediate supervisor of their condition and availability to return to work in a continuity role. To be considered a completed contact they must either speak directly with that supervisor, or if the contact is written (as with an email or text) must receive a reply to ensure their message was received.
EX. 2: Managers are responsible for making contact with each supervisee twice weekly and to report the condition of each individual, and their availability to step into a continuity role to Human Resources.
- Mass notification or other software that tracks messaging and responses (if used).

Essential Functions appendix

- Phone directory for all personnel, including as many methods of contact as possible.
- Phone directory for outside contacts, including vendors, postal and courier services, state mail office, partners, contractors, funders, customers, etc.
- Status tracking documentation for Human Resources.

Summary

Perhaps nothing is more important to continuity operations than the ability to connect with the people and data that allow you to complete essential functions.

- Senior leadership need to plan and organize their efforts.
- Human Resources needs to determine the condition and availability of the workforce and replace personnel as needed.
- Workers need to know where and when they are needed, and may need to access help speeding recovery at home.
- Customers, partners, contractors and other stakeholders need to know how to access what they need and how progress is being made toward returning to normal.
- Mail, courier services and vendors need to know when and where to deliver goods and messages.

Within the organization, messages should travel both ways. Information about facility and work recovery, and directions for action should be regularly relayed from senior leaders to staff regularly. Information about each person's personal recovery and availability to assist with workplace continuity or recovery should be regularly sent from personnel through the chain of command so senior leadership can effectively coordinate the available workforce and provide assistance as needed.

Resources, tools and templates to guide planning

Internal

- Human Resources.
- IT Team.
- Senior management.
- Managers.

External

C-3-A: Communications Log

Sender/Initiator	Recipient(s)	Time Sent	Method	Message	Receipt Notification Time	Notes

C-3-B: Internal Contacts Directory

First Name	Last Name	Work Email	Work Cell	Home Email	Home Phone	Cell Phone	Radio	Other

Each manager may want to work with HR to maintain an updated list for their supervisees.

C-3-C: External Contacts Directory

Organization	Contact First Name	Contact Last Name	Phone	Fax	Email	Product, Service or Purpose	Notes
Partners							
Vendors							
Stakeholders							
Mail and Couriers							



Component 4 – Contact With Media and the Public

Location

Essential Functions section

- Overview of the policy for external communications, including roles with permission to make statements and a summary of why other members of staff are not allowed to do so.

Essential Functions appendix

- Press release template.

Summary

Effective communication with outside entities can always be tricky. During a disaster there are many additional things that must be tested for accuracy and carefully managed, or the reputation of the business may become damaged beyond recovery.

- Personnel may be injured, unaccounted for or dead.
- Individuals may have witnessed different glimpses of the event and have widely divergent or interpreted ideas of what has happened (and it is possible that none may be correct)
- Staff, families, the press and the public all have significant interest in what has occurred and the seriousness of the damage.

More than ever in an age where social media has created an urge to be first rather than most accurate with news releases, and where people feed off of sensational media, it is important to find a balance of releasing information soon and often, but using known facts rather than speculation.

An individual should be appointed to lead the processing of data and information as it comes in, attempting to verify its accuracy, and releasing solid and timely information. While they may have additional staff helping them get through the research process they (or their successors) should be the only individuals on the staff roster to issue information for release to family members, press or other outsiders.

All other personnel should be advised that they are not to speak with the media or others without first discussing the situation with the communications lead. It is easy to get excited about the chance to be on television or earn your 15 seconds of fame, but inaccurate information could affect your ability to resume your position as the disaster ends.

Resources, tools and templates to guide planning

Internal

- Communications or External Affairs Manager or Public Information Officer.
- Senior Management.
- Legal staff.

External

- Volunteer organizations who help reunite family members.

Contact with media and the public – who is responsible, how will you try to keep the rest of the staff from the 15 seconds of fame, ensuring timely accurate passage of info, sample press release templates2



Component 5 – Monitoring Developments

Location

Essential Functions section

- Provide an overview of sources and resources your staff will monitor to determine the likeliness of a disruption occurring, the length of time it might be causing an effect, and when it is safe to attempt recovery of more than continuity activities.

Essential Functions appendix

- Information on accessing all monitoring services.

Summary

The disaster itself may be over in minutes as with a tornado, days as with a ransomware attack, or weeks as with a pandemic. Sometimes a storm that has passed circles back, regenerates or is closely followed by another dangerous system.

EX. 1: A small town suffered a direct hit from a small F-1 tornado at 10:00 p.m. Warnings were issued in time and everyone made it to a safe shelter. Twenty minutes later the warning ended and they emerged from their shelters. The powerlines had been knocked down so television and most radio news was unavailable. Soon they began to go to bed. A second, more powerful F-4 tornado approached the town at midnight and many were unable to receive the warning. This time there was a significant number of injuries and several deaths.

It is important to stay abreast of the developing incident from the time of first warning, till the time when no further damage or illness is expected so that you know when it is safe to begin reconstitution efforts or to begin resumption of more than the barest essential functions.

Use the information from experts to ensure the health and safety of personnel, continue essential functions from a safe location, assess the effects of the event on communications, IT, facilities, and equipment and connectivity and to direct recovery.

Resources, tools and templates to guide planning

Internal

- Senior management.
- IT Team.
- Communications or External Affairs Manager or Public Information Officer.

External

- Weather services.
- Homeland Security alerts.
- Centers for Disease Control reports of epidemics and pandemics.

C-5-A: Sources to use to track a disaster or disruption event.

Use the business impact analysis (BIA) to choose the disruptions that might affect your workplace.

Disruption or Disaster Events	Source	Format
Weather		
Tornado/thunderstorm		
Hurricane		
Wild fire		
Heat		
Flood		
Ice storm		
Criminal/Human		
Violent intruder		
Civil/terrorist action		
Mail threat		
Hazardous materials		
Fraud		
Theft		
Resources		
Pandemic illness		
Supply chain interruption		
Leaks		
Fire, explosion		
Structural integrity		
Technological		
Utilities outages		
Hacking/malware		
Data or internet line break		
Electromagnetic pulse		
Communications systems outages		
Ancillary		
Neighborhood buildings		
Partner organizations		