

Posts

No Business Continuity Plan? Take These 4 Steps

If you're regretting the fact that you never got around to finishing your nonprofit's Business Continuity Plan, you're not alone! Many nonprofits in the U.S. are in the same, unprepared boat. The purpose of this special edition of the RISK eNews is offer a highly simplified, quick-start framework to activate when your nonprofit is currently facing an interruption to operations.

Follow these four steps to bolster resilience and minimize the long-term, costly impacts of ANY interruption to 'normal operations.'

Step 1. Reach Out

Determine how best to quickly and efficiently communicate with ALL key stakeholder groups in your nonprofit. Your method could be a series of lists (think email addresses and phone numbers), a communications app with options, or a phone tree. Don't waste time trying to find a slick or fancy communication tool. For now, choose one that will enable you to quickly communicate key messages about your operating status, cancellations, staff availability, etc. Assign clear responsibility for crafting those messages and make sure everyone knows who has authority—and who doesn't—to click "send" on those critical messages.

Step 2. Make a Short MUST Do List and Do It

Identify a short list of 3-5 things your nonprofit MUST KEEP DOING no matter what to survive and thrive despite the interruption. For many organizations, that list will include processing payroll, providing vital services to vulnerable clients, and letting partners, contractors, and others know about your temporary change in status. Gather your best and brightest around a virtual table to determine the practical, plausible strategies to keep doing those MUST DO things.

Step 3. Shutter and Scale Back

Identify the services, programs, and activities that you will temporarily discontinue, delay, scale back or change for the immediate future: think 45-60 days. Determine the steps you will take to make those changes in operations immediately.

Step 4. Plan to Resume Operations

Brainstorm with your core leadership team some of the critical steps necessary to bring shuttered programs back online. Also, determine whether you'll resume operations fully on a specific target date or restart one program or service at a time. As part of this step, identify any short-term projects or activities that build resilience for your agency. For example, could someone who typically answers the phones assist with an important information-gathering project, making telework a possibility? Assume that your staff and volunteer team want to support your work and are available to pitch in and pivot as needed!

We know it's hard NOT to do these things, but we urge you to try:

- Don't beat yourself up (or cast dispersions on others in your agency!) for failing to finish that BCP before now.
- Don't obsess about creating BCP strategies narrowly suited to the cause of your current interruption; take steps and make plans that will be useful when the NEXT interruption occurs.
- Don't add unnecessary complications or contrivances to your immediate action plan: BCP is all about focusing on mission-critical activities and scaling back everything else.

In the short-term, the focus should be on communication and critical operations. Once normal operations resume, your organization can use lessons learned during this interruption to assist in crafting a more comprehensive, but still flexible business continuity plan. Reach out to our team— info@nonprofitrisk.org (<mailto:info@nonprofitrisk.org>) or 703.777.3504— if you need help evaluating your response to a recent interruption or creating a durable plan for 'next time'.

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