

Keeping Your Organization Viable for the Future

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For generations to come, September 11, 2001, will be remembered as a day in which innocent lives were lost and businesses were destroyed. Yet, it doesn't take a cataclysmic event to threaten the viability of a business or your nonprofit organization. Torrential rainstorms, computer hackers, embezzlement, or accusations of sexual improprieties can bring your services to a standstill or destroy them forever.

All of the businesses in the World Trade Center lost office space, records, all their business equipment and furnishings and many lost a high percentage of staff, but the terrorist attack did not spell ruin. How did they do it? These businesses, including at least one charitable foundation, had business continuity plans in place that would help them to restart operations and take the necessary actions to continue their financial viability and competitive position in the marketplace. These plans were truly the lifelines for these businesses and could be for your nonprofit, as well.

What is Business Continuity Planning?

Business continuity planning helps a company, an institution, an agency or a nonprofit organization to develop and document the policies, procedures, activities and protocols necessary to resume essential business operations immediately following a business interruption, no matter the cause.

What are the benefits of business continuity planning?

Having an effective plan allows a nonprofit organization to:

- Remain a viable entity, ready to take action in support of its mission regardless of the incident that causes business to be interrupted.
- Maintain the confidence and trust of donors, staff, clients, and other stakeholders.
- In the event of a natural disaster that affects the broader community, such as earthquake or fire, business continuity planning helps the organization to:
 - Play an effective role in disaster response and relief.
 - Provide support to clients and staff who may be experiencing the impact of the incident that caused the interruption of normal operations

What are some examples of events that could disrupt operations?

Some categories of events that could disrupt operations are:

- *Natural causes, which include:*
 - Earthquake
 - Flood
- *Civil disruption, which includes:*
 - Riot
 - Police action
- *Causes related to criminal activity, which include:*
 - Computer virus or worm infestation
 - Workplace violence

- *Other types of incidents that can interrupt operations, which include:*
 - Fire Loss of electrical power Corruption of financial or donor databases Loss of critical funding stream Bomb threat
 - Loss of essential members of staff or executive team

Despite the frightening variety of scenarios that could disrupt a nonprofit's operations, there are still many misconceptions about business continuity planning that keep a nonprofit from making such plans.

Five Myths About Business Continuity Planning

Myth #1: We have a small nonprofit organization. It won't matter if our office is closed for a few weeks.

In the few weeks that your office is closed, your staff, clients, *and donors*, may have no idea how to contact you, and may wonder if your nonprofit still exists. Staff will understandably be anxious to hear if they still have jobs and can expect to receive a paycheck. Clients will wonder how they might continue to access services. Donors will wonder how they might send contributions — but to where? A business continuity plan will provide direction in completing those initial tasks that are crucial in communicating to your stakeholders and the community at large.

Myth #2: We aren't a large enough organization to require business continuity planning.

Organizations of all sizes need to establish a business continuity plan and keep it up to date. Your organization exists to fulfill its mission and serve the community. Neglecting to develop an effective business continuity plan for your nonprofit has the potential for permanently damaging your organization.

Myth #3: Nothing ever happens here — we don't even have floods.

The sad reality is that your nonprofit's operations can be disrupted by many types of events — many which may seem like remote possibilities. But should they occur, each of these events upset operations, as well as distress staff and other stakeholders.

Myth #4: We can just back up some files and store them in the safe deposit box at our local bank.

Business continuity planning is more than just collecting and storing data. It is a method to establish protocols and procedures within your organization to deal with the tasks that will be necessary to restart your organization's operations, and to provide essential information to your stakeholders and the community at large.

Myth #5: This is a project for the clerical staff.

Business continuity planning must start at the highest levels of the organization. The board and senior management need to endorse business continuity planning and to model the behaviors necessary to begin the planning process. Business continuity planning will — only be effective — if the entire organization is involved — and everyone — from the executive director to the maintenance staff — is held accountable for his or her part of the plan.

Ready to Begin? Let's Go!

If you're ready to start business continuity planning, that's great!