BOLD planning

THREE PILLARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PREPAREDNESS

How Administrators Can Leverage the Right Plans, Partners and Technology to Effectively Respond to Crisis
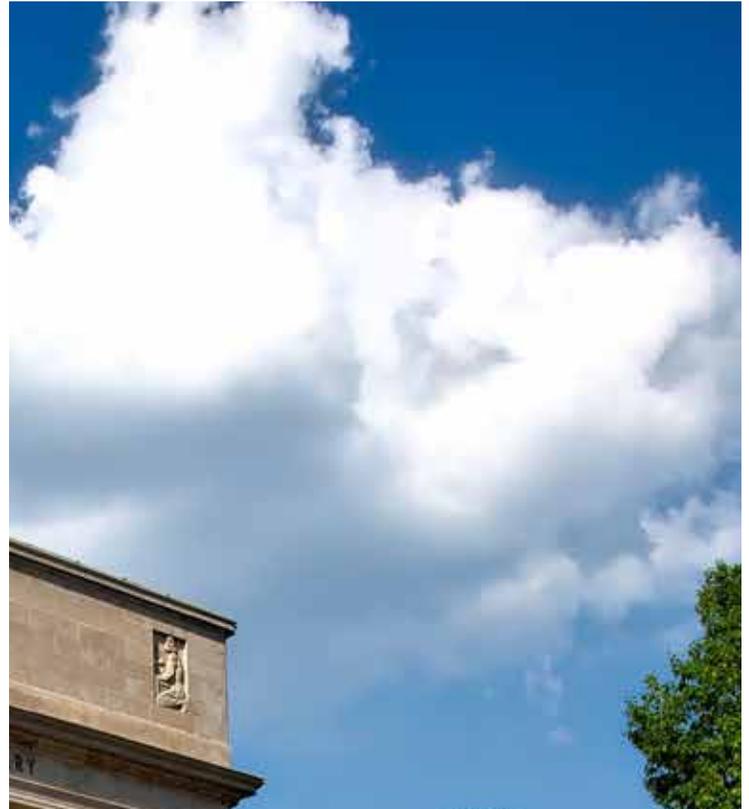
INTRODUCTION

The start of the 2020-2021 school year has been like no other in history.

All across America, higher education administrators have been weighing how to manage campuses so that they are safe for all students, professors, and employees. Should you teach in the classroom or online (or both)? Do you allow for extracurricular programs such as greek life or sports? How does your health system prepare for an influx in potential COVID cases? And most importantly, at what point do you pivot your strategy due to the changing conditions such as a new wave of cases?

But while it might seem like we live in a coronavirus bubble, that is not the only risk American universities are grappling with. At the same time they must plan for the impact of hurricanes, wildfires, cyber attacks, depressed and lonely students, and riots or protests.

The bottom line is that most higher education institutions lack the proper preparedness, continuity, and resiliency planning needed to respond to and recover from these events that interfere with normal business operations. Ultimately, this makes it impossible to continue to operate efficiently and effectively under the stresses of major disruptions, most notably, a pandemic like COVID-19.

THREE PILLARS OF PREPAREDNESS

Mike Tyson famously once said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." Do not use this piece of wisdom to belittle the value of proactive planning. Conversely, this emphasizes the importance of the right kind of active, agile planning.

The right plan can help ensure that universities can respond quickly and efficiently to unexpected events, preventing these disruptions from having monumental consequences on operations, and most importantly, human life.

In addition to the right plan, you need the right partners and technology actively supporting the development, maintenance and execution of your preparedness, continuity and resiliency programs.

This document is intended to guide administrators on how the right plan, partners and technology ensures that you can respond to and recover from urgent situations efficiently, without second-guessing or panicking.

"Crisis will test any leader. When disaster strikes, the best institutions respond rather than react. The difference is subtle but significant. A reaction is a reflex; a response is a procedure."

- Joel Peterson, Chairman, Jet Blue

PLANS

Some disruptions involve long-term trends that are widely discussed in the media or are prescheduled events, while others occur without any warning at all. Ultimately, disasters can strike at any time. Predicting the scale, magnitude and impact is impossible. But preparing for them is essential.

You must recognize that not all events can be prevented. Proper planning is essential to anticipate and detect the unexpected, while also maintaining or restoring balance when unavoidable events do interrupt normal operations.

Resiliency planning starts with the awareness of potential risks to your institution and is supported by a system of planning that ultimately enables rapid decision making amid uncertainty.

So what makes up the right emergency operations plans (EOP) and business continuity plans (BCP)?

First of all, let's explain the difference between the two plans given an emergency such as a fire. An EOP would define the actions that must be taken to immediately put out the fire. Whereas a BCP defines the actions that must be taken to recover from and rebuild after the fire.

Both EOP and BCPs can include the following to ensure organizations can quickly and efficiently respond in the face of threats such as COVID-19, natural disasters, or violence:

⚠ **Action protocols**

📢 **Communications plans**

$ **Financial provisions**

👤 **Employee roles and succession plans**

🔒 **Facility lockdown & relocation options**

📱 **Tiered contingency and infrastructure guidelines**

These plans are complex, living documents that need to be maintained and updated to ensure that organizations can respond and recover from urgent situations efficiently without delay.

PARTNERS

Planning seems easy enough, right? But then why are so many of our colleges and universities unprepared? Why do so many of the plans fail when put to the test?

To cope with a crisis effectively, coordination is essential both within and outside of your organization. This coordination can become a source of solidarity and a potential source of relief during a crisis.

Let's take an EOP, which is intended to identify and respond to incidents by outlining the roles and responsibilities of staff, faculty, students, and other key stakeholders before, during, and after an incident.

Developing, maintaining, and exercising the plan empowers employees in an incident to act quickly and knowledgeably. Moreover, the EOP provides parents and other members of the community assurances that universities have established guidelines and procedures for responding to situations in a timely, proper, and effective way.

In crises characterized by uncertainty, leaders face problems that are unfamiliar and poorly understood. A small group of executives at an organization's highest level cannot collect information or make decisions quickly enough to respond effectively.

To create and continuously maintain the right plan, universities should look to rely on expert planners and actual responders.

These partners can manage the planning process through organizational and forensic analysis, integrated plan development, and EOP strategy development based on your individual needs and abilities.

They are experts in federal and state guidelines to ensure your plans are aligned with industry standards and consistent with accepted best practices.

For most institutions, the coronavirus epidemic is a crisis unlike any other in recent history. Now more than ever, leaders need more than just a predefined response plan. They need a team of expert partners that also share their mindset and values to help them navigate the coronavirus pandemic and future crises.

For example, you need experts that understand how to secure and disperse funds associated with the CARES Act's Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). As with any active crisis, requirements are changing and deadlines are shifting. But it is critical that you know what you can secure, how you can allocate grant money, and the time frame in which funds need to be dispersed.

※ TECHNOLOGY

It was not that long ago that disaster management professionals handled crises primarily through printed plans, landlines and press conferences. Thankfully, over the past 15 years, technology has redefined continuity planning, emergency management and disaster communications.

In today's digital world, the most prepared and resilient organizations are moving away from human managed plans and processes. A sound business continuity or emergency ops plan must be updated on a regular basis.

Online software is a mission critical planning tool that guides administrators through each step of the BCP and EOP process.

These systems guide users through identifying your organization's actions and responsibilities to efficiently continue essential business functions during and after a disruption.

Here's how technology can help manage this process:

It makes the process easy to understand and highly efficient to maintain.

It can track and monitor all version changes in your plan across internal and external stakeholders.

It ensures a single source of truth for your entire stakeholder network, response team and community.

CONCLUSION

There is no place that organizations can go to to be completely safe from disaster. In today's world it is not a question of "if", but more "when" interruptions will occur. The reality is that threats like coronavirus are inevitable, along with their negative impact on a university's operations and community.

If you didn't have well thought out and maintained preparedness, continuity and resiliency programs before COVID, you definitely wished you did. And you'll be held accountable for them in the future.

The right plan can help you respond quickly and efficiently to unexpected events. In addition, the right partners and technology systems can help actively support the development, maintenance and execution of your plans.

About BOLDplanning, Inc.

BOLDplanning Inc. is the market frontrunner for online software for Emergency Operations Planning (EOP), Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP), Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and Hazard Mitigation. Its comprehensive online system walks planners through each step of the continuity and emergency planning process, becoming the central resource for an organization's plan development, training and ongoing maintenance. Its consulting team is unrivaled in its knowledge, experience and planning certifications.

The BOLDplanning approach provides an unparalleled platform for both the public and private sector, making the critical process of contingency planning easy and efficient. Currently, BOLDplanning is the solution of choice for more than 10,000 organizational plans.