

A photograph of an airport tarmac seen through an airplane window. The view is split by vertical window frames. In the foreground, the wing and engine of the airplane are visible. In the background, there are other aircraft, including one with a red tail, and airport buildings under a hazy sky. Rows of empty airport seating are visible in the lower foreground.

Airport Continuity of Operations (COOP) Planning Seven Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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White Paper

Security. Staffing shortages. Rising costs.

These are just three of the many challenges faced by today's airports worldwide. Add to the mix the busy travel season, continued public health concerns, and the frequency of severe weather and natural disasters, and day-to-day operations become increasingly problematic.

Now, more than ever, it is imperative for airports, regardless of size, location, ownership, etc., to respond to critical or disruptive events and ensure essential functions are maintained. Enter the need for a current and actionable continuity of operations (COOP) plan.

COOP plans identify a facility's essential functions and outline the procedures to be followed when operations are interrupted and/or basic infrastructure is compromised. They provide instructions for delegations of authority, alternate facilities, interoperable communications, and reconstitution, among other things. And when developed, exercised, and updated properly, COOP plans do so in a highly efficient and effective manner.

Whether your airport is adept at continuity planning or grappling with the process, avoiding the seven common pitfalls ahead will help ensure its preparedness and, ultimately, its resilience in a crisis.



PITFALL 1

Overlooking Airport Essential Functions and Failing to Identify Their Associated Risks

To prepare for disruptive events, airport managers must first recognize the functions most essential to its business operations, then identify the hazards that can impact those functions. This is no small feat but a process that deserves significant time and attention. After all, these functions may directly (or indirectly) relate to airport security and the safety of travelers, airport tenants, staff, and others, or the incurrence of penalties or fines due to the failure to meet certain regulatory requirements.

A few key tips to consider for ensuring essential functions are properly identified include:

Get buy-in from the top

A thorough risk assessment is a serious exercise in continuity planning. It requires the involvement of resources representing multiple airport departments as well as airport tenants, e.g., airlines and retailers. Make sure airport management is fully supportive and willing to provide its stamp of approval on the process and the plan itself.

Apply feedback from different sources

As a best practice, do not rely solely on a handful of managers to develop your airport's list of essential functions or potential hazards. While their perspectives will be invaluable to the planning effort, they will invariably overlook lower-level risks that can cascade into larger problems. Glean information from others at every opportunity and incorporate their feedback into your airport's current COOP plan and future updates.

Associate details with the identified risks.

Each identified hazard poses a risk to an airport's operations and, therefore, the continuance of its essential functions in a crisis. Yet, for all the similarities, each hazard possesses unique characteristics and challenges. For each threat, outline the potential impact along with other vital elements, including:

- Probability the hazard will occur
- Magnitude/severity of the threat
- Warning time associated with the risk
- Typical duration of the hazard
- Recovery time objectives

Make the risk assessment actionable.

Identifying risks and all their associated characteristics is one thing. Outlining the proper measures to take when faced with a threat is another. For each hazard, airport managers should define and document the necessary actions to minimize disruptions and losses.

A common mistake is focusing solely on immediate actions, i.e., those taken in direct response to the event. While essential, it is also important to consider measures related to pre-event preparedness, post-event recovery, and mitigation. All actions should be well-documented and, just as important, easily accessible by authorized individuals/departments in an emergency.

PITFALL 2

Neglecting to Implement a Process for Ensuring Emergency Contact Information is Accurate and Complete

Proper preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation begins and ends with one common element — people. For that reason, airports must maintain an accurate record of all personnel, tenants, contractors, and others. This includes verifying titles and/or positions and current contact information, e.g., phone number(s) and email address(es), at a minimum.

Though this may sound simple, it is surprising how often organizations falsely assume such pertinent information is up to date. Employees come and go. Responsibilities change. Contact devices get cancelled or adopted by others. In a crisis, these differences can cause substantial problems.

Like other public and private sector organizations, airports need a consistent and repeatable process for maintaining emergency-related contact information. This may involve outreach campaigns to employees on a semiannual, if not quarterly, basis. The same holds true for external stakeholders, including airlines, security, and ground transportation, as they can play key roles in supporting resilience.





PITFALL 3

Failing to Clearly Define Key Teams and Communicate Assigned Roles/Duties

For effective response and recovery, it is wise to create teams centered on specific threats, responsibilities, or decision-making capabilities. With team development, airport and/or continuity managers should:

Clearly specify each team's mission

In an actual disruption, it is common for the lines to be blurred as to which team owns what responsibilities. A well-defined list of team mission roles can help bring clarity to the situation. Accordingly, each team should have a written “mini-charter” that outlines all known role parameters.

Make sure team rosters are up to date

Like your COOP plan's contact information, team data should also be reviewed and updated regularly. It can be frustrating or

potentially damaging to assemble a team only to discover that a portion of its members are no longer employees or that key members have changed positions and are not “plugged in” to the area in which they once offered expertise.

Ensure team members are fully prepared

As COOP team responsibilities are likely not something employees and other stakeholders think about daily, members must be reminded of their duties when possible. Teams should be encouraged to meet regularly throughout the year to confirm participation, review roles and responsibilities, discuss plan elements, etc. Regular tests and exercises should also be conducted to improve emergency preparedness.

PITFALL 4

Creating Insufficiently Deep Orders of Succession and Failing to Outline Clear Delegations of Authority

A familiar managerial structure can provide some degree of comfort during a stressful critical event. However, what happens if that decision-making hierarchy is impacted in some way? What do you do when a key senior manager is incapacitated or unreachable?

Define and document clear orders of succession

If one or more key decision-makers find themselves unable to fulfill their duties in a crisis, particularly long term, it is crucial for everyone to know where to turn for leadership. As such, a COOP plan must include clear orders of succession. The succession plan should go at least three levels deep, though defining additional levels is advisable, if possible. It is also recommended that the successor's title be the defining element in the plan instead of only referring to a specific individual's name.

Document delegations of authority

A disruptive event can quickly bog down operational processes for payroll, purchasing, human resources, etc. This is especially true when immediate decisions (or even routine approvals) are needed during the short-term absence of a key decision-maker. In cases where there is a temporary lapse in leadership, clearly documented and preferred delegations of authority are invaluable.

A well-developed and fully vetted COOP plan outlines both the position holder(s) who have the typical day-to-day authority to make decisions and the position holder(s) who have delegated authority in a continuity situation.





PITFALL 5

Overlooking the Need to Maintain Accurate and Detailed Facility Information

Though important to COOP planning, facility details are commonly overlooked or inadequately addressed. While most employees have sufficient knowledge about their organization's main facilities, they may know very little about alternate locations to be activated in a disruption. Such knowledge gaps can hinder the continuance of essential functions and thereby create significant resilience problems. Consider the following questions when outlining or updating the details/characteristics of your airport's alternate facilities.

- Do new employees know about a backup location and where it is?
- What about remote workers? Are they appropriately identified, aware, and informed?
- Will relocated staff arrive at the alternate facility with the proper entry credentials?
- Are relocated personnel aware of any emergency procedures for the secondary location?

If the answers surprise you, there is even more reason to maintain an accurate and accessible list of primary and alternate facilities. Include physical addresses, ingress/egress locations, access control measures, communications infrastructure, etc. It is also wise to detail evacuation procedures and any rally points for evacuees.



PITFALL 6

Failing to Document Essential Records and Critical Systems

Every airport relies on myriad systems, databases, documents, spreadsheets, forms, etc., to conduct business. However, some are more important than others for continuity planning. Take HR records and accounting systems, for example.

Though the information may reside in different systems and/or locations, two key things can be done to ensure accessibility and use in a disruption.

Determine what is truly “essential”

For every essential data source, there may be dozens of useful but non-essential sources. The challenge is determining which ones are truly crucial to your airport's resilience. Once identified, all essential data sources should be documented within the COOP plan.

Capture relevant details about the essential data source

It is not enough to document all essential data sources. You also need to include relevant source details. While not an exhaustive list, these details may include:

- Physical location of hardcopy documents
- Shared drive locations
- Local software applications
- Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solutions and administrator(s)
- Network resources, e.g., printers, fax machines, etc.

PITFALL 7

Continuing to Rely on Outdated Methods to Create and Maintain Your COOP Plan

COOP plans, in general, can be difficult to develop, and when only printed on paper and stored on office shelves, even harder to maintain. Regardless, many organizations, including airports, still reach for these binders and thumb through the many pages when the need arises. This may be in response to a continuity event, as part of a routine plan review/update, or when the need to reference certain elements arises.

In today's world of technological advancements, hardcopy approaches leave much to be desired and complicate matters even more. Consider using an online planning solution instead; your airport will reap a multitude of benefits. Among them are:

Better collaboration - COOP planning requires deep collaboration between multiple people, departments, and external stakeholders. An online platform eases this burden, allowing all to participate collectively and in a more efficient manner. The result is a plan that represents your airport as a whole and its commitment to resilience.

Easier plan editing and maintenance - Traditional, paper-based COOP plans are inherently difficult to manage and create opportunities for errors. A change made here may need to be made there, and vice versa. With an online planning solution, users simply log in, make edits, and save. Contacts, roles, records, etc. will be updated automatically throughout the entire plan.

Enhanced security - COOP plans typically contain information sensitive to an organization and, therefore, should be protected. Binder shelves have virtually no access limitations and safeguards, and there is no audit trail of who has accessed the plan, much less when. Online planning software provides permission-based access to plan details and contact information through assigned usernames and passwords.

Superior mobility - Accessing a shelf full of COOP binders may not be feasible during a business disruption or even practical on a regular business day. Many employees work remotely or constantly move about, performing their duties using only mobile devices, e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc. Recognizing this trend, providers of online planning solutions typically offer mobile capabilities that extend the practical application of continuity planning to the hands of everyone (wherever they may be).

Faster response - A comprehensive COOP plan is a conglomeration of several mini-plans. This is why most hardcopy plans require several binders and occupy so much space on office shelves. As such, precious time can be wasted while manually scouring printed tables of contents and indexes in search of the right information. With well-designed online planning software, you can search electronically, uncovering crucial details in seconds.

Moving Forward with Your Airport's COOP Plan

The seven common pitfalls identified here are based on the knowledge and experience of BOLDplanning, a division of Agility, in helping organizations plan for, respond to, and recover from critical events.

We offer a unique combination of expertise, facilitation, training, and project management, combined with industry-leading online planning software, to improve resilience. The BOLDplanning platform is the solution of choice for over 10,000 plans across a variety of industries as well as the public sector.

If your airport is looking to develop a comprehensive COOP plan or build upon its existing one, look no further. We stand ready to assist in every possible way.

Contact us now to find out more.

Be Prepared. Be **BOLD**



About BOLDplanning Inc.

BOLDplanning, a division of Agility, is the leading developer of online software for Emergency Operations Planning (EOP), Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP), Business Continuity Planning (BCP) and Hazard Mitigation.

It's comprehensive online system walks planners through each step of the continuity and emergency planning process, becoming the central resource for your organization's training, plan development and ongoing maintenance. Its support 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 this important process easy and efficient. Currently, BOLDplanning is the solution of choice for more than 10,000 organizational plans.

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