

Lesson Overview

All COOP plans have certain elements in common. Together, these elements give the COOP plan a reasonable chance of succeeding—or viability.

This lesson will cover the elements that make a COOP plan viable, including:

- Essential functions.
 - Delegations of authority.
 - Succession planning.
 - Alternate facilities.
 - Interoperable communications.
 - Vital records and databases.
 - Human capital.
 - A test, training, and exercise program.
 - Plans for devolution and reconstitution.
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What is an Essential Function?

FPC-65 defines **essential functions** as those functions that enable an organization to:

- Provide vital services.
- Exercise civil authority.
- Maintain the safety of the general public.
- Sustain the industrial or economic base during an emergency.

In other words, essential functions are an agency's business functions that must continue with no or minimal disruption.

How Do You Identify Essential Functions?

To have a successful COOP plan, an agency must determine what its essential functions are by considering its customers and their needs. Assigning a priority to customer needs helps to distinguish between essential and nonessential needs—and thus, the agency's essential and nonessential functions.

When identifying essential functions, consider:

- Functions that **must** be continued in all circumstances.
- Those functions that cannot suffer an interruption for more than 12 hours.

Agencies must be able to continue essential functions within 12 hours and be capable of sustaining essential functions for up to 30 days.

Essential Functions May Be Established by Law or Presidential Directive

Some organizations are legally required to perform certain functions. Other functions may be mandated by Presidential Directive. Any function required by law or Presidential Directive should be considered an essential function.

The agency head may also identify functions as essential. Some essential functions may be defined by the agency's mission. Still other functions may be essential because they provide vital support to another agency.

Prioritizing Essential Functions

After identifying all functions that are essential to the agency, each function should be prioritized according to:

- Its relationship to and support for national-level essential functions, or the organization's essential functions, as appropriate.
- The criticality of the function.
- The likely COOP triggers and scenarios.

Sometimes, priorities may be situation-dependent. For example, the CDC's essential functions will be an extremely high priority in the event of a suspected biological attack or a pandemic than for widespread flooding.

Drivers of Essential Functions

The continuity of essential functions will be driven by the availability of:

- Trained personnel (human capital).
- Vital records and databases.
- Supplies.
- Equipment and systems.

Keep these "drivers" in mind when developing recovery timelines for essential functions.

Orders of Succession

Succession to office is critical in the event that the agency leadership is unavailable, debilitated, or incapable of performing their legally authorized duties, roles, and responsibilities.

Orders of succession provide for the orderly and predefined assumption of senior agency offices during an emergency in the event that any officials are unavailable to execute their legal duties. Like delegations of authority, orders of succession are not merely a COOP function. They should be developed to support day-to-day operations.



Order of succession flowing from the Director to the Assistant Director to the Associate Director. Orders of succession should be at least three deep.

Information Included in Orders of Succession

All orders of succession should include:

- The conditions under which succession will take place.
- The method of notification.
- Limitations on delegations of authority by successors.

The agency's General Counsel should review all orders of succession for legal sufficiency. All orders of succession should be maintained with the agency's vital records.

Delegations of Authority

Delegations of Authority are formal documents that specify the activities that those who are authorized to act on behalf of the agency head or other key officials may perform.

Delegations of authority document the legal authority for officials—including those below the agency head—to make key policy decisions during a COOP situation. Delegations of authority are required to ensure:

- Continued operations of agencies and their essential functions.
- Rapid response to any emergency situation requiring COOP plan implementation.

Information Included in Delegations of Authority

All delegations of authority state specifically:

- The authority that is being delegated, including any exceptions.
- The limits of that authority.
- To whom the authority is being delegated (by title, not name).
- The circumstances under which delegated authorities would become effective and when they would terminate.
- The successor's authority to redelegate those functions and activities.

Delegations of authority are not exclusive to COOP but are necessary for day-to-day operations. Delegations of authority for COOP should be determined **before** an emergency to ensure continued operations of critical functions.

Selecting Alternate Facilities

FPC-65 assumes that, if COOP activation is required, an agency's primary operating facility is unavailable and that essential functions will require relocating. The Circular requires all agencies to identify a location, other than the normal facility, that can be used to carry out essential functions in a COOP situation. Agencies should also identify business continuity-or devolution sites-in case the alternate facility is made inoperable.

Alternate facility selection should be based on an analysis of a combination of factors. Prioritizing the factors based on the organization's requirements is the first step in locating a suitable alternate facility.

Ensuring Interoperable Communications

Alternate communications provide the capability to perform essential functions, in conjunction with other agencies, until normal operations can be resumed. Interoperable communications must:

- Support the execution of the agency's essential functions.
- Ensure the capability to communicate internally and externally.
- Permit access to data, systems, and services.

Interoperable communications must also be:

- Redundant.
- Available within 12 hours of activation, or less, depending on the mission and requirements of the organization.
- Sustainable for up to 30 days.

Identifying and Safeguarding Vital Records

Every agency has documents, files, and other materials that are "vital" to the agency and its operations. These records may include:

- **Emergency operating records**, such as plans and directives, delegations of authority, or staffing assignments, and orders of succession.
- **Legal and financial records**, such as personnel records, payroll records, insurance records, and contact records.

COOP personnel may also require other materials and resources. If so, these materials and resources should also be considered "vital."

Components of an Effective Vital Records Program

Vital records programs have several components in common. These components range from establishing and assigning responsibility for the program to development of a records maintenance program and testing the program to ensure that it works as planned.

Human Capital

During COOP activation, agencies will have to perform their essential functions with reduced staffing. Human capital, then, is critical to ensuring the flexibilities required of ERG personnel. Agencies should ensure that all ERG personnel are adequately trained and cross-trained to enable the performance of all essential functions.

Tests, Training, and Exercises (TT&E)

TT&E includes measures to ensure that an agency's COOP program is capable of supporting the continued execution of its essential functions throughout the duration of a COOP situation. Tests, training, and exercises (TT&E) are an extremely important component of the overall COOP program.

TT&E programs should be a blend of test, training, and exercise events to ensure that it:

- Is comprehensive in that it includes all three components.
 - Reflect lessons learned from previous TT&E events.
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Tests

A **test** is an evaluation of a capability against an established and measurable standard. The key word in this definition is **capability**. Tests are conducted to evaluate capabilities, not personnel. From a COOP perspective, tests are an excellent way to evaluate functions such as:

- Communications connectivities.
 - Alert and notification procedures.
 - Deployment procedures.
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Training

Training:

- Is instruction in core competencies and skills and is the principal means by which individuals achieve a level of proficiency.
- Provides the tools needed to accomplish a goal, meet program requirements, or acquire a specified capability.

Training encompasses a range of activities, each intended to provide information and refine skills.

Exercises

Exercises are events that allow participants to apply their skills and knowledge to improve operational readiness. Exercises also allow planners to evaluate the effectiveness of previously conducted tests and training activities.

The primary purpose of an exercise is to identify areas that require additional training, planning, or other resources. The goal of exercises is improving an agency's mission capability.

There are several types of exercises. Exercise type should be selected based on the program goal.

Devolution

Devolution is the capability to transfer statutory authority and responsibility for essential functions from an agency's primary operating staff and facilities to other employees and facilities. Devolution is sometimes also called "fail over."

Devolution planning supports overall COOP planning and addresses catastrophic or other disasters that render an agency's leadership and staff unavailable or incapable of performing its essential functions from either its primary or alternate facilities.

Reconstitution

Reconstitution is the process by which surviving and/or replacement agency personnel resume normal agency operations from the original or replacement primary operating facility.

Agencies must identify and outline a plan to return to normal operations after agency leaders or their successors determine that reconstitution operations can begin.

Because reconstitution can be complex, reconstitution operations should be overseen by a Reconstitution Manager.
