

Municipal Affairs and Environment

Business Continuity Guidance Document for Municipalities

April 2019



Municipal Affairs and Environment

Introduction

Municipalities are facing unprecedented times as the novel Coronavirus and measures to slow its spread are implemented. In addition to your existing emergency management plan, enclosed is a guidance tool to assist communities with their business continuity planning (BCP) related to the current COVID-19 event.

Identifying municipal essential services is a key component to ensuring business continuity within your municipality. This document provides guidance to help identify services provided to your community and to determine what category those services fall into: **Essential**, **Vital** or **Necessary**. It is important that the services and their initial designation are reviewed on a regular base to ensure that they are in the appropriate category as situations and public health orders change.

Included is a table that your municipality may wish to use as you identify essential services and determine where they fit within the three categories. There are also other areas to focus on in order to maintain service delivery, such as, staff requirements, interdependencies and establishing communication and public notification procedures.

It is important to document decisions made and actions taken to provide a base for any post-event debriefings that may provide opportunities to understand what worked well, any areas for improvement and any other observations or recommendation. This activity can enhance your overall emergency management plan and associated procedures.

Above all, the safety of staff and residents is paramount and must be a guiding principle through the continuation of essential services delivery.

Business Continuity

A Business Continuity Plan guides the actions and decisions of staff of a municipality and facilitates efforts to ensure effective continuation of recovery of all essential services.

Municipalities with Emergency Plans have conducted similar exercises to protect your communities. Business continuity plans outline the governance structure and procedures to be used to allocate resources and to coordinate the continue of activities of your municipality during an emergency scenario. It may be implemented in whole or in part as the situation or emergency requires.

While the process to develop a full Business Continuity Plan can take considerable time, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment suggests that each municipality consider the core elements of a Business Continuity Plan as we proceed to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This includes a detailed review of municipal essential services. Included with this document is a template that municipalities can complete to outline their essential services and any relevant details for reference on a regular basis.

Identifying Essential Services and Related Considerations

Identifying essential services is key to ensuring service delivery continuity for your municipality.

As you review your services during this emergency period, services should be categorized as follows:

1. Critical Services: Services that normally require **continuity or restoration within 24 hours** of service interruption.
 2. Vital Services: Services that normally require **continuity or restoration within one week** of a service interruption.
 3. Necessary Services: Services that normally require **continuity or restoration within one month** of a service interruption.
- *If any service is shared with neighbouring communities, ensure that there is agreement on category of the service.*
 - *As this situation evolves, you may need to revisit your individual services to determine if they are still in the appropriate category.*
 - *When reviewing your services, consider activities that have legislative/regulatory timelines.*

Staff Requirements

Once services are categorized give consideration to the staff that are required to ensure these categories are maintained. Given the current pandemic, consideration must be given to ways that this work can be completed remotely and what technology must be obtained to facilitate remote work. Also consider if there is a need for staff to enter the office to complete the work and if any protection equipment is needed to complete the work.

Staff Contacts

During an emergency scenario, to ensure business continues, ensure that staff contact information is up to date and easily available to all members of the executive team. Make plans to keep staff informed as much as possible.

Travel or Contact with Others

Give consideration to public health orders before requiring staff to travel or have contact with others as it relates to essential services. Ensure staff have appropriate personal protective equipment to complete their tasks.

Interdependencies for Service Delivery

Identify any service that is internal to your municipality as well as those that depend on external service providers (e.g. government, contractor, supplier, etc.) Reach out to external entities to confirm their ability to continue providing/ supporting what you need for your own service continuity.

Communications/ Public Notifications

Determine if there is a requirement for public notifications as it relates to municipal service delivery during this time. Consider all municipal stakeholders.

Ensure you inform the public regularly as to which services are still being offered and how to access if different from normal operations. Advise which services may be temporarily suspended.

Consistency in messaging and diversity on where your messages are disseminated (e.g. council meetings, newsletters, social media) is critical to reach your staff and the public during this period. Messaging should be consistent with public health orders and communications from the Provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Considering a Future Exit Strategy

While there is currently no communicated end to the existing public health measures that continue to protect our community from the spread of COVID-19, it will at some point be important to consider a transition back to normal operations.

Once the issues that have caused the activation of your business continuity planning have been resolved or are under control, the top levels of your governance structure will direct the termination of response.

Termination of the response can be completed as followed:

- Conduct a reassessment of the impacts on your services.
- Assist where appropriate with the development of a communication plan to notify employees and the public
- Make steps to ramp up services in a measured way.
- Debrief employees following the event.

Appendix A: Essential Services Template Key

Attached to this document is a template spreadsheet (excel) that municipalities may use or manipulate to create the basis for business continuity planning and identification of key essential services.

Column A: Identify the services provided by your municipality.

Column B: Determine if the service is **Essential, Vital** or **Necessary**. It is important to review this classification on a regular basis.

Column C: Identify what staff are required to provide this service and if there is an alternate.

Column D: Can staff work remotely (e.g. at home) to provide the service.

Column E: Are other staff required to support the delivery of the service.

Column F: Can the support staff for this service work remotely?

Column G: What are the interdependencies that are required to provide this service – this interdependency may be within your own operations or may be from an external provider e.g. a supplier of water treatment supplies.

Column H: Does staff require new or additional PPE to provide a safe work environment to deliver this service.

Column I: Identify how this service will be delivered (i.e. in person at office, by appointment, remotely)

Column J: Identify changes required to deliver this services (e.g. alternative location, reduced hours etc.)

Column K: Ensure that the changes in service delivery is communicated to residents and any other entities (e.g. supplies, Canada Post)

Column L: Identify if this service is required to support another service provided by the community.

Column M: As the event continues to unfold, determine what service(s) need to be returned in the medium or long term (i.e. those services deemed **Vital** or **Necessary**).

Column N: Determine if this service can be quickly ramped up or scaled down (i.e. if there is a change in the situation, how quickly can delivery of this service be changed).

Appendix B: Business Continuity Resources

Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment Emergency Services Division

St. John's Office: 1-709-729-3703

Deer Lake Office: 1-709-635-4153

Grand Falls– Windsor Office: 1-709-292-4414

Clareville Office: 1-709-466-4109

Happy Valley– Goose Bay Office: 1-709-896-7957

Department of Health and Community Services COVID– 19 Website

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>

Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment COVID– 19 Municipal Circulars

https://mae.gov.nl.ca/for/covid-19_local_gov_ops.html