Continuity of Operations / Continuity of Government (COOP/COG) Toolkit

GAPS & RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

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OVERVIEW

At the beginning of this project, a regional assessment was conducted with the 14 Bay Area UASI jurisdictions to determine current levels of planning for Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government (COOP/COG) with the 12 Bay Area counties and the core cities of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. The goal of the assessment was to identify application of state and federal essential elements, gaps, available planning resources and prepare recommendations for standardized planning benchmarks for the Bay Area Region. The assessment results reflected a great disparity of planning levels across jurisdictions. After the assessment, two workshops were conducted to introduce a sample COOP Plan Template and Handbook, provide educational information on the 10 essential elements, and gather stakeholder feedback on development of a list of standard benchmarks and recommendations for future COOP planning for the Bay Area Region.

A list of 10 standard planning benchmarks was developed a result of assessment feedback, identified best practices, stakeholder input from the workshops and individual interviews with Bay Area UASI jurisdictions. The purpose of establishing agreed upon benchmarks was to create a standard level of community resiliency across the Bay Area region.

The following report outlines key findings from this project, identifies gaps in planning, and provides recommendations for leveraging the momentum initiated with this project to increase the levels of COOP planning across the Bay Area Region with the goal of helping all jurisdictions achieve the standard benchmarks.

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I. KEY FINDINGS

Continuity of Operations (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) planning are efforts to assure that the capability exists to continue to provide essential agency functions across a wide range of potential emergencies.

Six of the Fourteen Bay Area UASI jurisdictions have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) covering the entire jurisdiction. The remaining eight jurisdictions have a COOP Plan that covers only certain departments. The primary departments covered are IT, Health and Human Services, CAO, Sheriff and Fire.

The majority of jurisdictions indicated that the 10 essential elements are integrated into their current COOP/COG planning, and they have adopted the federal and state terminology and standards. Eleven out of the 14 jurisdictions have incorporated six or more of the elements into their planning. Although most jurisdictions indicated that they had adopted the essential elements in their COOP/COG planning, a high number of jurisdictions reported low percentage of plan completion and that the plans have gaps and areas for improvement.

At the stakeholder workshops, participants were in unanimous agreement that the 10 essential elements utilized by FEMA and Cal OES (shown below) should be adopted but simplified as much as possible. Additionally, three of the elements embody what has traditionally been a COG plan for many jurisdictions, so the Toolkit has highlighted these elements and if used by local jurisdictions, the COOP plan will integrate the elements of COG planning.

Ten Essential Elements

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The ten essential elements identified above are defined and addressed by Cal OES and FEMA. By incorporating these ten essential elements into the COOP planning process, jurisdictions will address and meet the planning elements and requirements as described by the State and Federal governments.

An additional key finding that emerged in the course of the project was the importance of integrating COOP plans regularly into agency training and exercises and utilizing the COOP plan during any type of disruption of normal activities such as a power outage, a bomb threat that requires evacuation of key offices, winter storms, etc. This provides an opportunity for staff to become more familiar with the COOP plan and understand the process of implementing it. Of the counties/cities that have COOP plans in place, very few have regularly utilized them for small incidents or integrated them into ongoing training and exercises.

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II. GAPS

1. Of the 10 standard COOP elements, the following were most frequently reported as *not included* in current planning:

   - Tests, Training and Exercises
   - Continuity of Communications
   - Human Capital
   - Reconstitution of Operations

2. The majority of jurisdictions have no formal update scheduled for their COOP/COG plan. Opportunity exists for jurisdictions to use the Toolkit to promote regular updates and enhancements to existing plans.

3. The majority of the jurisdictions (8) indicated that they did not have the staff resources to create or complete a COOP/COG plan using the Toolkit. Many would have to contract out this task. The following jurisdictions do not currently have the staff resources to implement use of the Toolkit:

   - Sonoma County
   - Solano County
   - Santa Clara County
   - San Benito County
   - Contra Costa County
   - County of Napa
   - Marin County
   - County of Santa Cruz

4. Half of all respondents reported that they are engaging with the private sector in developing COOP/COG plans.

5. The majority of Operational Areas do not know the level of COOP planning that exists amongst their cities, special districts, and NGO communities.

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III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Because eight of the responding jurisdictions indicated they do not have the staffing resources to utilize and implement the COOP/COG Toolkit, and some of the jurisdictions with COOPs in place need updates to align with the standard benchmarks, a priority recommendation from stakeholders is that UASI provide support and/or funding to assist local jurisdictions on implementing the Toolkit to develop agency-wide and departmental plans. The following recommendations emerged on how to do this:

    a. Provide a full time planner/contractor from UASI to assist with COOP development for local jurisdictions

    b. Contract with a consultant team to provide technical assistance and tools to assist jurisdictions in their COOP development (see recommendation #3 for types of guidance and tools consultants could provide) One team would help ensure a regional standardized approach and consistency to achieving the benchmarks.

    c. Allocate funding for jurisdictions to hire a contractor, consultant or dedicate staff time to COOP/COG planning.

2. Provide presentations and tools to help build buy-in from the highest levels of leadership within and outside the organization. The jurisdictions with the most advanced COOP planning have had strong support from executive leadership, which has been tremendously successful for allocating internal or external resources (or both). Emphasizing the agreed upon newly developed standard benchmarks, UASI could develop and provide the following presentations:

    a. Template executive level presentation for use within the organization for Executive Leaders, Department Directors, Elected Officials etc. Key objectives of the presentation would include emphasis on "Why" COOP plans are critical; cite state and federal policies and directives regarding COOP plans and highlight strategies for effective implementation. *

    b. Customized presentations for Bay Area leadership groups such a City/County Manager's Association, League of Cities, Police Chiefs' Association, Fire Chiefs' Association, Finance, City Attorney's Association, Public Works, American Planning Association, etc.*

    * UASI could provide these presentation templates with or without staff to assist in delivering them to key audiences.

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3. Provide additional training and tools for implementation of the COOP Toolkit to each jurisdiction such as:
   a. Provide PowerPoint templates for the series of intra-departmental planning workshops for internal staff.

   b. Planning Workshops:

      i. Provide training to internal staff from contractor/consultant on conducting the workshops or;
      ii. Provide contractor/consultant to conduct the workshops and internal staff are responsible for completing the worksheets and the template plan.

   c. Template Tabletop Exercise / Plan Validation Workshop:

      i. Provide template and training to internal staff from contractor/consultant on conducting a COOP TTX or;
      ii. Provide contractor/consultant to conduct TTE Exercise/Plan Validation Workshops.

   d. Template After Action Review (AAR) based on Workshop or Exercise:

      i. Provide template and training to internal staff from contractor/consultant on completing an AAR following a TTX or plan validation workshop or;
      ii. Provide a UASI contractor/consultant to conduct the evaluation and complete an AAR.

   e. Provide consultation and Technical Assistance to cities conducting their own internal COOP Planning. Assistance could be provided in a Not to Exceed (NTE) amount of hours for each jurisdiction.

4. Develop and help standardize the 10 essential elements for specific key priority disciplines within jurisdictions, such as Public Health, Social Services and Public Works. Standardization for essential elements for these key agencies could be accomplished by:
   a. Providing an assessment survey (such as Survey Monkey) for each specific discipline to determine level of preparedness, planning efforts, common language, etc.
   b. Conduct multi-jurisdictional discipline specific group training or table-top exercises to help them understand why COOP is important and how to implement. (Law and Fire are already standardized more clearly due to

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> Mutual Aid.) This will help peers in the different disciplines to develop standard benchmarks for the region for these specific critical functions.

5. Very few Operational Areas have knowledge of the level of COOP/COG planning amongst their local jurisdictions, NGOs and the private sector.
    a. Recommend a survey template be provided for Operational Areas to assess planning levels in local jurisdictions in conjunction with distribution of the COOP/COG Toolkits. The survey template could be broadened beyond local jurisdictions to include NGOs and the private sector to be inclusive of a whole community approach.
    b. Once Operational Areas have completed a COOP plan or during the process of implementing it, develop and share tools and best practices with local jurisdictions, NGOs and the private sector.

6. UASI could provide a guidance document on strategies to integrate COOP planning into existing activations, training and exercises and regularly test the ability to re-establish essential functions such alternate facilities, communications, IT, etc.

7. Develop educational materials, posters, webpage ads and campaign materials to explain COOP planning to staff throughout the jurisdictions to extend beyond the scope of those who attend COOP specific training. Materials could be provided in new employee orientations, employee break/lunch rooms and distributed at staff meetings.

8. Conduct research and provide a report of key learnings from other organizations who regularly conduct business resumption and contingency planning such as the private sector, BRMA, etc. Identify best practices that could be applied to local government COOP planning.

9. Develop a training video to accompany the COOP/COG Toolkit teaching users COOP concepts and how to use the tools provided.

10. Develop a Just-In-Time Training Video to be used if a jurisdiction does not have a COOP Plan and needs to establish alternate facilities, delegations of authorities, etc. in the wake of a disaster or emergency.

11. Develop metrics to measure effectiveness of COOP plans once in place. Re-assess best practices and shared learnings after more jurisdictions have had the chance to implement the COOP Toolkit.

12. Further develop the Bay Area benchmarks to include guidance of how they can be achieved by local governments.