

# **BUSINESS CONTINUITY DURING COVID-19**

**A guide for the voluntary and  
community sector**

April 2020



**Community  
Southwark**



# Introduction

At its simplest, business continuity is about coping with disruption. Disruption can take various forms, such as a fire, flooding, or IT failure. But the biggest disruption currently facing every organisation is Covid-19, a new pandemic.

*“The reality is that we do not know what the reality will be” (Crowe)*

The Coronavirus pandemic has already had profound impact on the Voluntary and Community Sector, changing how we carry out our work and reach the most vulnerable. In the longer term, we are still uncertain what society will look like and how our sector will weather the storm and bounce back (see [Nesta’s take](#) on how there will be no ‘back to normal’).

Being as prepared as possible will help to mitigate the risks and negative impact, and manage response and recovery. This is where business continuity comes in.

## This guide

Community Southwark has put together this guide to help you think through the key components of your business continuity strategy in the current context. It covers:

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# What is business continuity and why is it important?

Business continuity is about identifying parts of your organisation that you can't afford to lose and planning how to maintain these if an incident occurs ([UK Government toolkit](#)). An incident may be a global event such as the current Coronavirus outbreak, but it is not only dramatic events that can disrupt charities' operations. A burst water main, fire or computer virus can also jeopardise a charity's work and potentially put vulnerable client groups at risk ([Third Sector](#)).

Business Continuity Management (BCM) provides the framework for building organisational resilience and capacity to respond. It is important because it can help you to:

1. Identify potential impacts that threaten your organisation
2. Handle emergencies
3. Continue to function
4. And recover effectively afterwards.

## How do I develop a Business Continuity Plan? A step by step guide

A Business Continuity Plan provides a reference point for actions you need to take during or immediately after a crisis or emergency. There is no uniform approach to developing a Business Continuity Plan, and it doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. It is simply planning what to do if something bad happens. You may have already done this sort of planning, but perhaps you didn't formally call it 'business continuity' or 'business recovery'.

We have put together the following strategy to help you think through your business continuity. These steps will help you to prioritise what needs to be done in the very short term (the next few days and weeks) in the face of the current crisis. But you can also come back to it to help you deal with the longer-term impacts of the Covid-19 crisis, or any future unforeseen disruptions.

**1**

## Decide who is responsible for leading on your Business Continuity Plan

Generally, the senior manager / CEO retains overall responsibility, but actions can be delegated to a small designated support team which may include the Health and Safety Officer, Office Manager, Senior Manager, CEO, Comms Officer, and/or Finance Officer

**2**

## Conduct a 'business impact analysis' by answering these questions:

- A. What are your organisation's key services?
- B. What do you need to do (activities) or have (resources) in order to deliver your services?  
*In the current context, concern over funding is likely to be at the forefront of your mind. Contact your key funders as they are likely to be sympathetic to your plight; this has generally been the case with the Covid-19 pandemic*
- C. What are the risks to these activities or resources? At what scale?
- D. What would happen if your activities and resources were disrupted and who would be affected?  
*Think about the time it would take for negative impacts to become unacceptable. This will help determine your priorities and the most suitable recovery arrangements*

### 3 Based on the above, you can plan your business continuity:

A. What activities will you prioritise to maintain?

*In the current context this might be a short list of 3-5 things you MUST KEEP DOING no matter what to survive and thrive despite the interruption. For many organisations, that list will include processing payroll, and providing vital services to vulnerable clients*

B. How will you go about maintaining these activities? At what timescales?

*In the current context, you may need fewer staff if some activities temporarily stop. The Government has announced support for workers to be furloughed, and other grants/relief may be available, and you may want to look into emergency funding available*

C. Identify the services you will temporarily discontinue, delay, scale back or change for the immediate future. Does this introduce new risks for the organisation?

D. Who will do what? Do you have contact details for the key people?

### 4 Compile this information into a coherent document and inform staff and stakeholders

In the current context you will want to do this as quickly as possible. It can be reassuring for beneficiaries to know that you have a Business Continuity Plan

### 5 If you had more time, then you would test your approach

For example, by conducting regular fire drills, testing your emergency communications chains, or running a simulation and practising the response

### 6 Review your plan

New and different threats will keep emerging, some of them unexpected. Review your plans whenever new risks emerge or your charity undergoes significant changes

Strategy based on [Surrey County Council](#), [Charities Facilities Management Group](#) and [Non profit risk](#)

For more advice on how to deal with business continuity in the short term (in the current context of Covid-19 outbreak) check out these helpful resources:

- Some useful points to consider from [SCVO](#)
- 4 steps provided by '[Non profit risk](#)'
- [NCVO guidance](#) on contingency planning and financial implications
- Advice from [Crowe](#) (an audit and tax firm)
- Immediate response checklist from [Charity Excellence](#)
- Crisis communication plan [template](#)
- [OnStrategy](#) have just launched an online course run by their senior strategists to help organisations build a continuity plan and road-map to recovery in four virtual workshops - it's a 'pay what you can' programme

When you have more time, you may want to consider looking at the following tools which go into more detail:

- Business Continuity Exercise Sheet and Business Continuity 10-minute assessment from [Surrey County Council](#) – scroll to the bottom for downloadable worksheets
- [UK Government toolkit](#)
- [Zurich](#) have produced a checklist to help organisations consider business continuity in the context of a pandemic

## Road map to recovery

The information above should help you to think through what to do in the immediate term – which services or activities you need to keep operating and which you can afford to stop for now.

However, it is also important to try and think further ahead if you can. Although we cannot be certain what the future will hold, particularly during these uncertain times, planning for different possible scenarios will help you to be prepared for what may come next. You should start to think about when to move away from emergency response and transition back into your regular operations (where this is possible).

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Some other questions to consider:

- What steps need to happen to bring some of your programmes back into operation and at what timescales?
- Will you resume operations fully on a specific target date or restart one programme or service at a time?
- Will your programmes exactly resemble what they were before this crisis? Or have new needs emerged that you should be addressing?

Although these are difficult times, it is also an opportunity to try different approaches and be innovative. The adaptations we have all made in a short space of time have not always been easy, but some of them may have a positive long-lasting impact on how we work in the future.

## Examples of Business Continuity Plans

[Third Sector](#) case studies (scroll to the bottom of article)

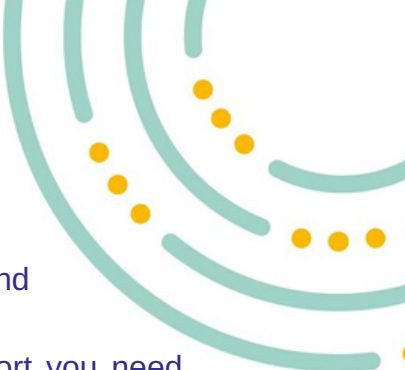
[UK Community Foundations](#)

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## Further support

Should you need further support and are a not-for-profit based in Southwark, please contact the **development team at Community Southwark** who will be happy to help ([development@communitysouthwark.org](mailto:development@communitysouthwark.org))



**Cranfield Trust** provide free tailored business support to charities and the social sector. During this challenging time, all services can be accessed remotely, so you can still get the expert business support you need, wherever you are. Here are some of the ways Cranfield Trust can help you – all these services are free for charities to access:

- 1:1 telephone support - from experts on topics including finance, communication, and business contingency planning
- HRNet - tailored HR and employment advice for charities in England and Wales
- Management Consultancy – longer term support, to help your charity thrive
- Mentoring - personal support for leaders in difficult times.

To find out more and get help for your charity, please email [admin@cranfieldtrust.org](mailto:admin@cranfieldtrust.org) or visit [www.cranfieldtrust.org](http://www.cranfieldtrust.org).



## **BUSINESS CONTINUITY DURING COVID-19**

Community Southwark is a registered charity (no. 1105835) and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (no. 5090324). Registered office address is: 1 Addington Square, London, SE5 0HF