

Seven Key Elements of Business Continuity Planning

Don't hope—plan.

A fire or burst water pipe can force you to shut down in an instant. Restoration can take weeks and months. *How prepared would you be?* Anticipating potential interruptions, planning your response, and establishing strategies for business continuity will greatly minimize the negative impact to your practice. Even a brief service interruption can mean lost business and chaos.

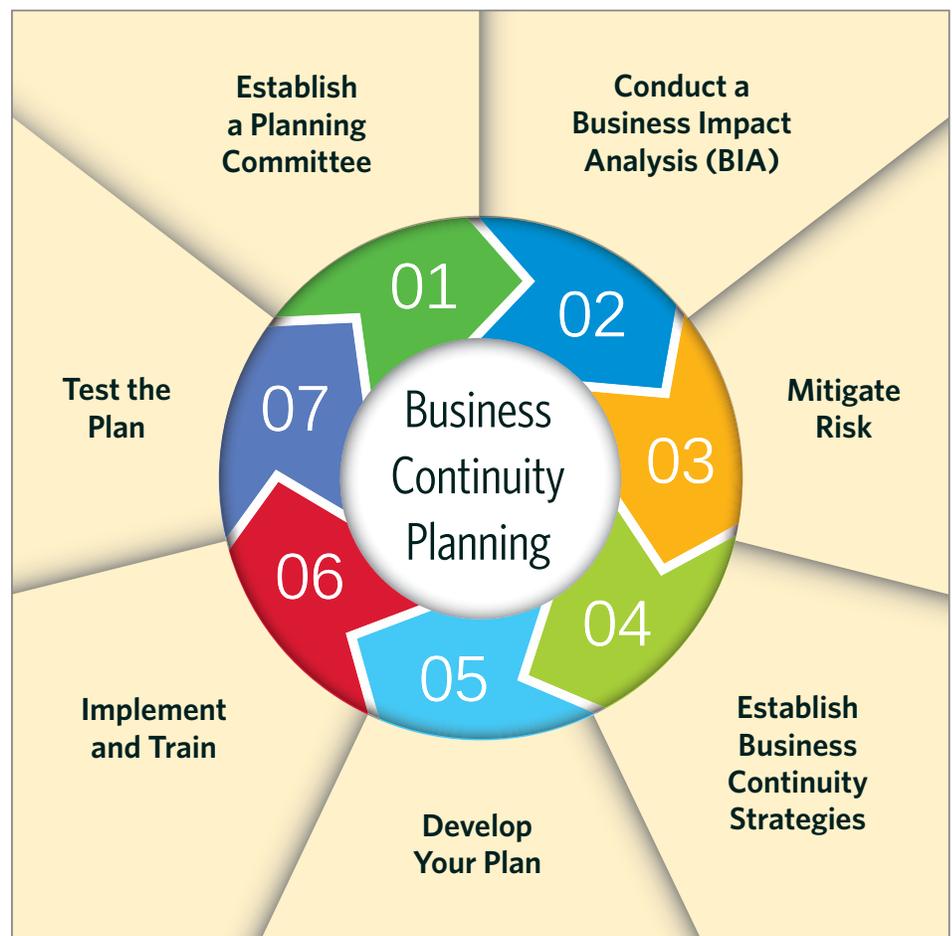
1. Establish a Planning Committee

Depending on the size of your practice, the emergency planning team may include veterinarians, practice managers, and supervisors. The committee at smaller practices may include all employees.

2. Conduct a Business Impact Analysis

A business impact analysis (BIA) supports the entire business continuity

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process. It is a process used to identify, quantify, and qualify the impact of a loss, interruption, or disruption. A BIA identifies mission-critical activities and the time frame within which they must be recovered. Explore all the risks that your practice is exposed to and the possible major disruptions that could occur.

And don't forget about your suppliers. Could you still operate if your top vendors closed due to a disaster? Consider the actions needed for your practice to remain operational. Plan alternatives for your critical supplier dependencies.

3. Mitigate Risk

After the BIA, the practice should mitigate risks that threaten the health and safety of people, operations, patients, company assets, or the environment by reducing the risk to an acceptable level.

Strategies may include:

- Building construction
- Security and fire protection systems
- Minimizing or eliminating single points of dependency
- Vendor readiness and qualification of secondary suppliers
- IT backup strategies and direct response sites
- Pre-purchasing of critical equipment or components for repair
- Splitting critical functions and resources between multiple sites
- Substitution of less hazardous components
- Preventative maintenance and testing programs
- Cross-training of personnel

4. Establish Business Continuity Strategies

Establish strategies for:

- Alternate practices to work at temporarily
- Mutual aid agreements with animal shelters or other veterinary practices to take patients
- Cross-training
- Outsourcing
- Use of secondary suppliers
- Prioritization of customers who need care for their pets
- Referring customers to a pre-identified alternate practice
- Work-at-home strategies
- Mobile offices
- Manual and alternate procedures if computer systems are down

5. Develop Your Plan

Record everything in the BIA process and develop a plan for disasters and emergencies. At a minimum, the plan should include:

- Policy, purpose, and scope
- Goals and objectives
- Assumptions
- Key roles and responsibilities
- Business impact analysis (BIA) results
- Risk mitigation plans
- Off-site data and storage requirements
- Business recovery and continuity strategies
- Alternate operating strategies
- Supplier vendor readiness
- Plan activation and universal response
- Communication and notification plan
- Training, drills, and exercises
- Plan maintenance

Add materials to the plan appendix including:

- Important contacts (internal and external)
- Initial notification form
- Action logs and issues tracking forms
- Damage assessment form
- Status forms (personnel, facility, operations)
- Site emergency procedures
- Site plans and asset lists
- Supplier and vendor response plan
- Client response plan
- Critical business functions
- Detailed alternate operating and recovery strategies
- Equipment recovery priority

6. Implement and Train

Conduct training for employees with key roles and assignments in the business continuity, disaster recovery, and incident response processes.

7. Test the Plan

Testing is the generic term used to describe the critical process of exercising strategies and plans, rehearsing with coworkers, and testing systems (technology infrastructure and administrative) to demonstrate business continuity.

Summary

In conclusion, use these basic elements of emergency planning to prioritize key business processes, identify significant threats to normal operations, and plan mitigation strategies. A business continuity plan is an essential element for every veterinary practice.

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