



McMaster University

**Crisis Management Plan
2025**



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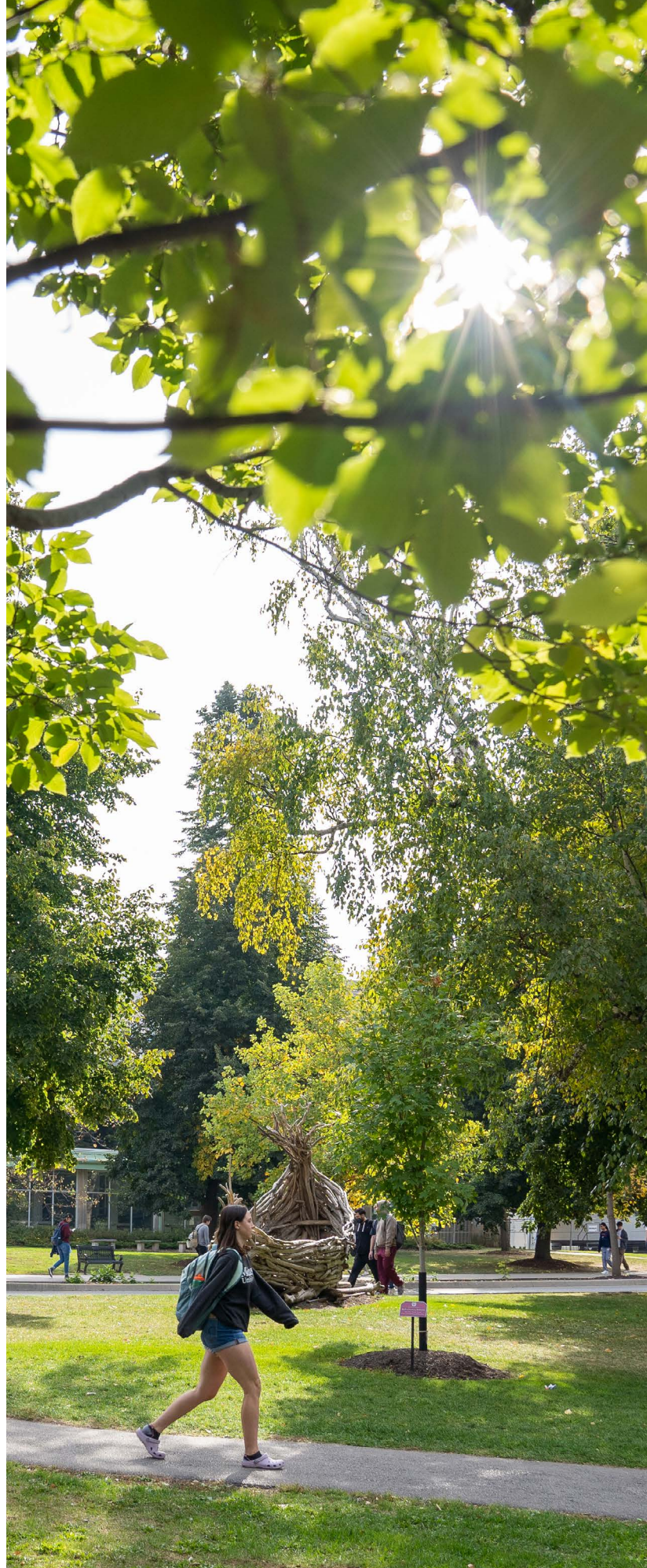
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Section 1: Plan overview

The McMaster University Crisis Management Plan (the Plan) provides a management framework to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises affecting the McMaster community. It is the responsibility of McMaster University to ensure that the health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff, faculty, volunteers, and visitors are safeguarded at all times while on university property (also referred to as 'campus'). The Plan consists of the plan framework and may include functional and hazard-specific appendices.

The Plan uses common terminology and a structure known as the Incident Management System (IMS), which is a standardized approach to incident management that results in enhanced communication and a more efficient response. During a crisis response, the organizational structure of IMS may not resemble the day-to-day organization and reporting structures of the University. Moreover, reporting relationships and assignments of employees may change within the IMS structure. McMaster University's Plan will operate in support of any municipal/provincial/federal emergency plan when any one of these plans is in effect.

Scope

This Plan describes a management process designed to respond to a range of incidents affecting the university which have escalated, or have the potential to escalate, to a crisis. These incidents include, but are not limited to emergencies, business interruptions, and emerging issues. This plan is not intended to cover day to day issues management, which is covered through other University teams.

The Plan scope applies to all McMaster owned and/or operated properties and campuses as well as McMaster activities.

Objectives

In any crisis, McMaster University's overriding objectives will be to:

- **Protect life and safety** of humans and animals
- **Stabilize and contain** incident to prevent it from escalating
- **Preserve property** and minimize environmental impact
- **Mission continuity and recovery of operations**
- **Safeguard and strengthen the organization's reputation**

Classifications of an incident or crisis

The following table outlines the four levels of incident and crisis classifications, providing examples and details on when the Crisis Management Group (CMG) should be notified or activated. These classifications are crucial for ensuring consistent and effective responses to incidents or crises. They help determine whether a situation qualifies as a crisis and guides leadership on when CMG involvement is necessary or not. Additionally, they offer a framework for analyzing incidents and continuously evaluating the framework when a crisis or incident occurs.

It is important to note that ongoing issues management efforts are in place throughout the university and are led by a diverse group of teams, including but not limited to: Communications Marketing and Public Affairs, Campus Safety Services, Student Case Management, Risk Management. The CMG will only be notified or activated if the incident meets the specified thresholds outlined below.

An **incident** is an event that can result in one or more of the following: physical/psychological harm or the potential to cause harm; damage to property, environment, reputation, disruption to operations of the University.

A **crisis** is a major incident with broad and significant impacts, where many if not all, departments are affected; university operations are interrupted; response and recovery activities continue for an extended period.

Due to the fluid nature of crises or incidents, their classification and severity may change unexpectedly. Continuous evaluation is essential to ensure an appropriate CMG response.

Incident /crisis classification	CMG (and senior leadership) activation and/or notification	Examples
<p>Level one incidents happen regularly, and their scope is well defined, their duration and impacts to people and property are understood. Typically, these incidents are managed through documented response procedures. Level One incidents do not require substantial additional resources from other University departments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No CMG activation • No notification to senior leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term power outage • Burst pipe • Controlled demonstration on campus • Individual student injury
<p>Level two incidents have a significant impact on one or more university departments and potentially require a coordinated response. Affected departments continue to be able to deliver operational services yet cannot effectively manage these incidents without a more intensive or longer response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No CMG activation • Notification to senior leadership for information only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous substance release • Localized flood, building is accessible during the repair efforts
<p>Level three incidents highly impact one or more person(s), university departments has potential reputational risk and requires a coordinated response led by senior leadership. Level Three incidents have the potential to become a crisis if not managed in a timely and effective manner, or without the appropriate University resources and partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No CMG activation • Notification to and involvement of senior leadership • Notification to CMG for information only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or more departments are unable to deliver operational services • Labour demonstration affecting access to campus and business interruptions • Severe weather incident
<p>Level four incidents are crises with broad and significant impacts, where many, if not all, departments are affected; university operations are interrupted; response and recovery activities continue for an extended period, and routine responses are insufficient. There is a high reputational risk to the university.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full CMG activation • Full CMG notification • (Note that this may involve activation of a subset of the CMG, for efficiency purposes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber-attack with broad network outages with operational disruptions • Active attacker / violent situation • Public health event where access to campus and operations is impacted

Hazard identification

McMaster University faces a variety of natural, human, and technological hazards, some of which have the potential to cause injury, damage or destroy property and other critical infrastructure, and negatively impact operations and the reputation of the campus.

In consideration of regional, municipal and the higher education sector's most commonly cited hazards, as well as a review of past incidents and crises experienced at McMaster, the following table provides a list of hazards with the greatest potential to impact McMaster University.

Hazards with the greatest potential to impact McMaster University

- Cyber attack
- Fire / explosion
- Critical infrastructure failure
 - telecommunications
 - network outage
 - electric
 - HVAC
 - nuclear
- Hazardous material incident
 - Fixed site
 - Transportation incident
- Violent situation/criminal act
- Civil disturbances
 - Demonstrations
 - Labour disruption
- Severe weather
 - Summer: High heat, flood, windstorm/tornado, air quality
 - Winter: Ice storm, snowstorm, flood, cold wave
- Public health event /pandemic
- Energy supply emergency
 - Gas
 - Oil
 - Electrical

Section 2: Crisis Management Group (CMG)

The CMG is composed of members of the University leadership who have the responsibility for planning, preparing, and implementing all appropriate measures to respond to crises which may affect the University. The CMG is chaired by the Vice-President Operations and Finance (VPOF), and when convened in response to an actual or perceived crisis, has total decision-making powers regarding the University response. Terms of Reference (TOR) for the CMG are outlined in a separate document available on the CMG Teams site.

In addition to the overarching responsibilities outlined in the CMG TOR, there are additional detailed tactics overseen by the CMG when the group is activated in response to a crisis. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Make policy and strategic decisions with significant university-wide or campus-wide implications.
- Identify and manage key issues and consequences.
- Set response priorities.
- Oversee and coordinate the management response efforts in as calm and controlled an environment as possible.
- Approve the communications strategy and key internal and external messages.
- Inform, brief, and make recommendations as required to the Board of Governors, Senate, or other governance bodies as appropriate.
- Provide strategic guidance to the Incident Response Team managing the operational response to an incident.
- After a crisis: Establish a recovery team to ensure the recovery process is established and conduct a post-incident review.

Advisory and Support Team (AST)

The CMG has identified an 'Advisory and Support Team' (AST) which is composed of senior department-specific support personnel. The purpose of the AST is to provide specific advice and assistance to the CMG and to implement the action directed by the CMG. The AST will join the CMG on an "as required" basis. A listing of AST members can be found on the CMG Teams site.

CMG Alternates

Within the CMG (Crisis Management Group), each member designates an 'Alternate' who acts as a backup in case the primary CMG member cannot attend a meeting or participate in a crisis response situation. Additionally, CMG Alternates may be mobilized to assist with workload management during exceptionally large or prolonged crises. A listing of Alternate members can be found on the CMG Teams site.

CMG notification and communication

Any CMG member or Alternate can notify the CMG of a possible, pending, or actual incident for notification or to recommend activation of the group. Note that notification to the CMG does not necessarily equate to CMG 'activation'.

A secure CMG MS Teams site has been established to support information sharing, document storage and communication within the CMG.

CMG activation

In the event of a possible pending or actual Crisis / Level Four Response, any CMG member or alternate may request that the CMG be 'activated'. The goal of CMG activation is to formally convene the group in response to a crisis. Activation of the CMG occurs via Campus Safety Services (CSS) dispatch system. A process flow map for CMG activation can be found in the appendix to this plan.

CMG deactivation

The CMG will collectively decide when a crisis is over and no longer requires the group to be activated. There may be ongoing activities to resolve, recover from and close out the incident, but the university is no longer in a crisis situation.

CMG authority and liability

The University Crisis Management Plan has been issued under the authority of the University President & Vice-Presidents Group. When the CMG is activated, members are deemed to be acting as agents of the University and are not individually responsible for decisions of the CMG. The University accepts liability for the actions and decisions of the CMG provided that such actions or decisions are shown to be “prudent” and are made in “good faith.”



Section 3: Incident Management System (IMS)

IMS principles

In keeping with best practices and consistent with the Provincial and Federal incident management standards, McMaster University will strive to use an IMS-like framework as a guide in the management of crises. The Incident Management System offers numerous benefits that include, but are not limited to the following principles:

- Streamlined Management Functions
- Management by Objectives
- Common Terminology, Procedures and Templates, including:
 - Crisis Operations Cycle
 - Incident Action Plan (IAP)
 - Post Incident Review Process and After-Action Report
- Integrated Communications

Note that by adopting an IMS-like approach, the University is utilizing IMS principles and practices as appropriate and as required by the individual crisis situation but may not adhere to strict IMS protocols.

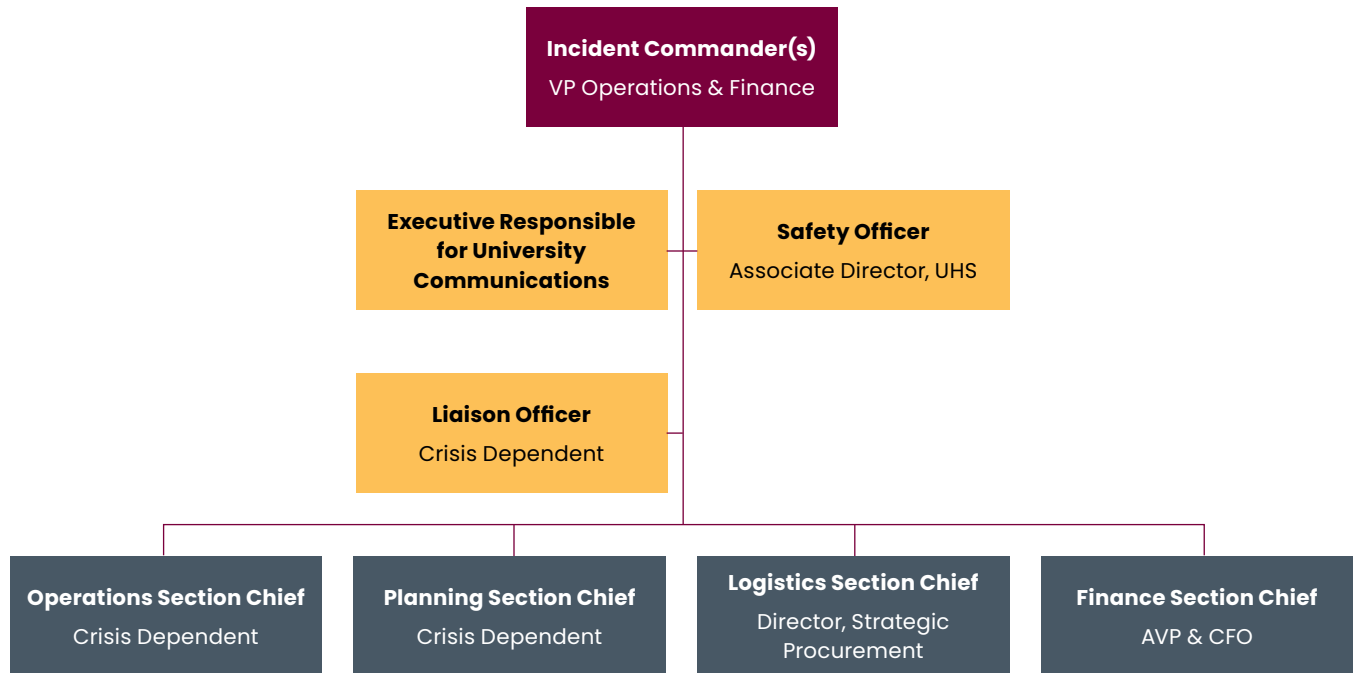
IMS management functions

There are several streamlined functions that form the foundation of the IMS structure. Examples of functions, purpose and the typical lead departments who would assume this function are outlined in the table below:

Function name	Purpose	Typical lead department(s) (or as delegated)
1. Command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates and directs response • Ensures safety of response actions during response • Liaises with the PVP and external agencies • Activates appropriate IMS functions sections 	VPOF Office
2. Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for public communications • Responsible for internal communications • Coordinates the communications team • Coordinates messaging with external organizations for complex multi-organization incidents 	Communications, Marketing, and Public Affairs (CMPA)
3. Liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for initiating and maintaining contact between CMG and internal stakeholders and external government agencies during an incident. 	Crisis-dependent for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPOF Office • CMPA • Chief Risk Office • Campus Safety Services • University Health and Safety

Function name	Purpose	Typical lead department(s) (or as delegated)
4. Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with site(s), response teams and departmental or Faculty response leads • Supports site operations • Implements plans and strategies • Deploys and tracks CMG-issued site resources • Coordinates multiagency department responses 	University Health & Safety
5. Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates with site(s), response teams and departmental or Faculty response leads • Supports site operations • Implements plans and strategies • Deploys and tracks CMG-issued site resources • Coordinates multiagency department responses 	Crisis-dependent, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Safety Services • UTS • Facility Services
6. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collects, evaluates, displays information • Develops Action Plans & Situation Reports • Conducts long-term/advanced planning • Recommends alternative actions • Maintains overall resource and event status • Coordinates continuity plan activation 	Crisis-dependent, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VPOF Office • Dean of Students • Provost Office
7. Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides technology and communications support • Arranges and manages facilities • Establishes transport resources • Arranges responder and personnel support • Orders and supplies requested resources 	Financial Affairs: Strategic Procurement
8. Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors response and recovery costs • Monitors expenditure process • Supports contracts & procurement • Tracks personnel time • Analyzes and estimates overall costs 	Financial Affairs
9. Administration & Scribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for incident record keeping • Take and collect notes throughout the duration of an incident • Take notes during meetings and teleconference calls as well as record key activities, events, agreements, and any matters of potential legal significance 	VPOF Office

The following image shows how the IMS management functions described above come together in an IMS framework, along with typical roles who would adopt these functions.



Crisis operation cycle

A Crisis Operations Cycle is a regular recurrence of meetings that recurs over the course of a crisis response situation. The CMG will adopt timing of operational cycles (ex: every 2 hours, or every 24 hours or every 48 hours, etc.) based upon the scope, evolution, and magnitude of the incident. This cycle, to the greatest extent possible, integrates operational requirements, documentation (using the Incident Action Plan) and sharing of information with stakeholders. The purpose of the Crisis Operations Cycle is to:

1. Assess the situation and provide incident status updates
2. Establish and re-confirm crisis management objectives
3. Develop an approach to implementing objectives (including specific tasks)
4. Evaluate the approach to managing the crisis

Incident Action Plan

The Incident Action Plan (IAP) document is a tool that is completed by the CMG during each crisis operation cycle and outlines the actions the CMG will take to support the crisis response. The purpose of the IAP is to serve as a standard action plan for the CMG and others who are supporting the response operations. A template Incident Action Plan can be found on the CMG Teams site.

The Incident Action Plan will identify the following:

1. Incident name
2. Operational period
3. Current incident status
 - Example: Severe winter storm, which has resulted in a power outage in student residence, affecting heating to the building.
4. Mission (overarching objectives)
 - Example: Ensure student health and safety during winter storm.
5. Objectives for current operational period
 - Example: Access evacuation plan and monitor need for resident evacuation.
 - Example: Communicate key safety messages to affected students and staff.
6. Strategies and tactics to achieve objectives (and who will be responsible for completion):
 - Example: Email to students and student support units on incident status and actions required to preserve health and safety.
7. Resources required to perform activities
 - Example: McMaster Safety App, McMaster social media channels, portable heaters, cots, hotel rooms.
8. Communications
 - Example: General campus messages.
 - Example: Key media messages.
9. Next meeting details (next operational period)
 - Example: Meeting every 2 hours. Next meeting to take place at 2:00 p.m.
 - Example: Virtual meeting. Attendees: CMG members and AST members.

Post-incident review process and after-action report

After a crisis, an operational debrief will take place as an opportunity for continuous learning and improvement and will result in an After-Action Report (AAR). The AAR will provide lessons learned from the incident and inform the revision and updating of related plans and university procedures.

The post incident review will be completed within 3 months of the deactivation of the crisis and will include all management functions included in the crisis management and response.

Delegation and transfer of responsibility

If a crisis is extended in duration, members of the CMG may transfer or delegate their responsibility and function to an Alternate as required. It is the responsibility of the CMG member to ensure their Alternate is fully briefed and prepared to receive transfer of responsibilities. All transfers are to be shared with the CMG for information. For example, VPOF as Incident Commander may transfer command to Deputy Provost as Incident Commander after a period of time.

Section 4: Crisis communications

Information sharing

CMPA will lead all communications activities, including the communication strategy, approval of all communications, development of messaging and content, and authority to speak on behalf of the university.

During crisis situations, information changes rapidly as events develop. It is critical that information be shared regularly with the CMG members to facilitate timely and accurate decision-making and actions.

CMG meetings and the crisis operations cycle are structured to support information sharing and situation status updates. The meetings begin with an operational briefing or update of known information.

The CMG will use the secure MS Teams Crisis Management Group site for sharing of information, communication and document repository throughout the course of a crisis event.

Crisis communications plan

For major incidents, including crises, communications will be guided by the university Crisis Communications Plan. The CPM department is responsible for maintaining and administering this plan.

Warnings and mass notifications

McMaster has several, overlapping tools to issue warning and mass notifications in the event of a crisis that requires action on the part of McMaster community members.

The **University emergency notification systems** include, but are not limited to:

- McMaster Safety App (smartphone app-based alert)
- 'Alertus' Software (displays alerts on university desktop computer)
- Video information screens in most campus buildings
- McMaster Daily News webpage
- Social media channels
- Campus telephone operator greeting message
- CFMU radio station

Emergency siren alert system

- Includes the external siren and speaker, which are used to alert people to imminent or possible dangers and provide direction on how to keep safe. These systems are tested on a regular basis. Testing is widely broadcast to the campus community.

Government emergency alerts and national public alerting system

- All carriers of a mobile device will receive emergency alerts from federal or provincial agencies to warn the public about imminent or possible dangers such as floods, tornados, hazardous materials, fires, and other disasters.

Section 5: Business continuity and recovery

An essential element of emergency response and coordination is determining areas that require continuity of operations in the event of an incident or emergency.

Department and Faculty-specific business continuity plans (BCPs) are required to be established throughout the organization, and generally outline:

- Critical services that need to be maintained during an emergency incident or event.
- Services that will be maintained at a reduced level.
- Services that would be discontinued.
- Plans and tactics to ensure the continuous delivery of critical services.

The plan outlines the expectations for department and faculty-specific BCPs, however the CMG does not track and retain copies of BCPs.

Section 6: Crisis Management Plan administration

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Plan maintenance and review

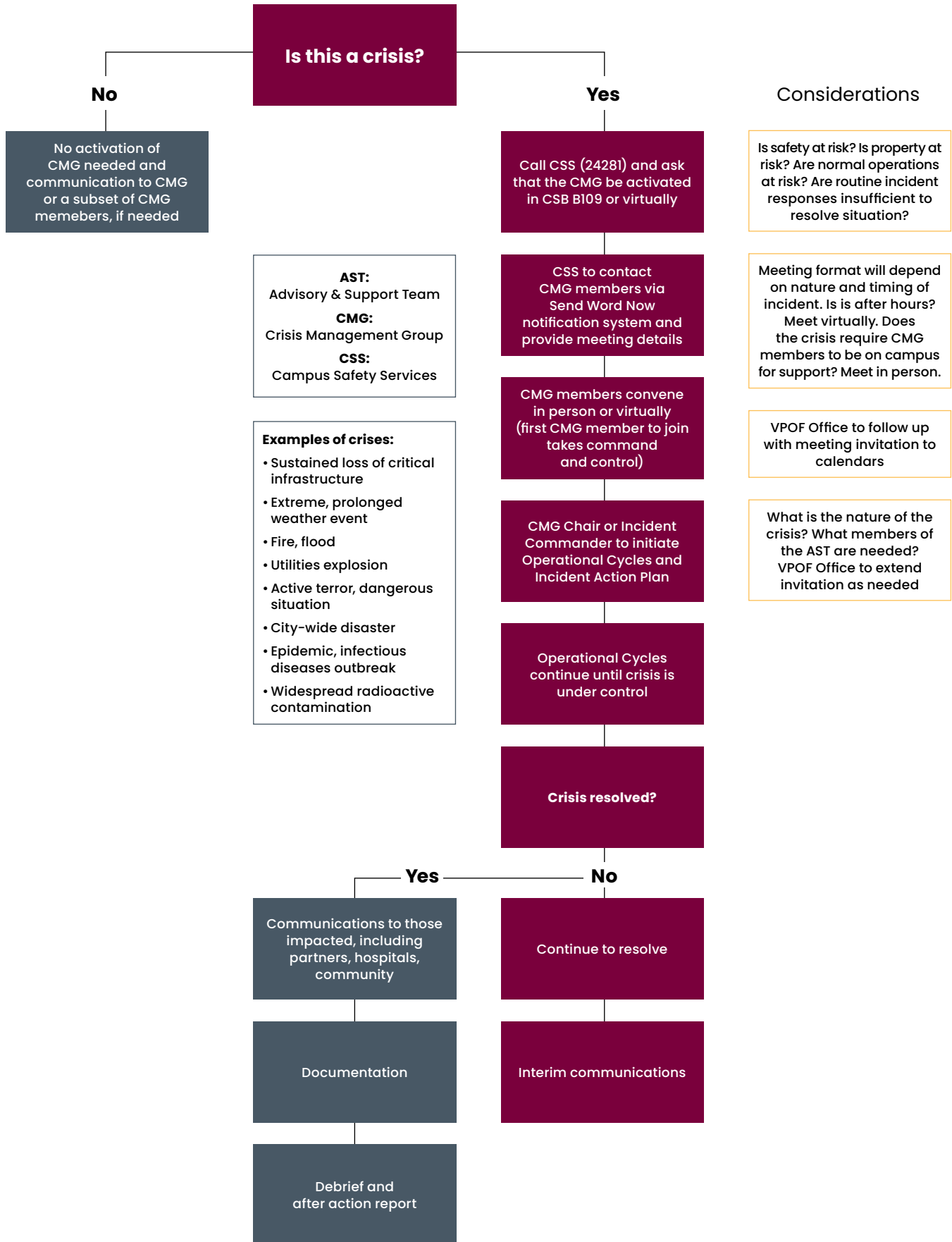
The Office of the Vice President Operations and Finance is responsible for the tracking, storage, and management of the Plan. The Plan shall be reviewed and updated every three (3) years. The Plan may be updated as a result of recommendations stemming from an After-Action Report or Tabletop Exercise.

The Plan shall be posted publicly on the McMaster website for information. Supporting documents, which are not available to the public, shall be accessible to CMG Members and Alternates on the secure CMG Teams site.

Training and testing

CMG Members and Alternates are expected to complete IMS 100 training, which is offered by Emergency Management Ontario. IMS 200 training is recommended for those likely to take on an IMS Command function.

The CMG will strive to participate in an annual Tabletop Exercise with the purpose of reinforcing our objectives and familiarity with the Plan and to drive continuous improvement.





Crisis Management Plan 2025

