



Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

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Business Continuity Plan Policy

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President and Vice-Presidents

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Introduction

1. A **Business Continuity Plan (BCP)** is a strategic tool designed to prepare for potential disruptions that could threaten McMaster University's essential operations. These disruptions may include internal events such as building fires, floods, labour disputes, security incidents, or system downtimes; regional incidents like network outages, severe weather, or critical infrastructure failures; and broader events such as public health crises.
2. The primary objective of business continuity planning is to ensure the uninterrupted operation of critical functions during significant disruptions to the institution's core activities. Effective planning can significantly mitigate the impact of operational disruptions.
3. Each department or Faculty is required to develop and maintain its own continuity plan, which collectively contributes to a comprehensive institutional BCP.

Definitions and Acronyms

4. For the purpose of interpreting this document, commonly used terms in this Policy are defined as follows:
 - a) **Business Continuity Plan:** A strategy and set of procedures designed to ensure an organization's ability to prevent or quickly recover from significant disruptions to its operations. The Plan itself is often a compilation of documents;
 - b) **Business Continuity Plan Owner:** The individual responsible for ensuring the continuity of business operations or technology within their department, and who acts as a liaison with other teams and service providers to ensure the Business Continuity Plan is effective and comprehensive. Typically, this role is held by the Dean or Associate Vice President (AVP) of a Faculty or Director of a Department. Note that tactical responsibilities of the BCP may be delegated by the BCP Owner to team members within their portfolio;

- c) **Critical Functions:** A collection of activities typically performed by a unit that must resume as soon as possible following a service disruption;

- [1] **Centrally Delivered Critical Functions:** Activities typically provided to the entire university by a central unit, such as, but not limited to: internet and network services, payroll, online learning technology and transition, snow clearing, and insurance services; and

- d) **Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA):** A process and document that identifies potential hazards and the risks they pose, aiming to ensure preparedness by implementing preventive measures.

Applicability

- 5. This Policy is applicable to all Faculties, departments, and operational units within McMaster University. It is designed to function in conjunction with the University Crisis Management Plan to ensure comprehensive preparedness and response to potential disruptions.
- 6. BCPs are adaptable to both small-scale functions, like monitoring a critical shared email inbox, and large-scale operations, such as university payroll. This BCP Policy and its templates are designed to support critical functions of any scope and size.

Accountabilities and Responsibilities

University Faculties, Departments, and Operational Units

- 7. Under the direction of the Dean or AVP, these entities are responsible for:
 - a) Identifying critical functions delivered by their units.
 - b) Developing individual Department Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) for local, department, or Faculty-level critical functions delivered by their units.

- c) Reviewing and updating their Department BCPs at least every 2 years, or following any significant changes to operations, critical functions, staffing or contact information.
- d) Storage of BCPs in electronic and hard copy versions in a location accessible by staff.
- e) Uploading updated BCPs to the Vice-President, Operations and Finance (VPOF) repository at least every 2 years, or following any significant changes to operations, critical functions, staffing or contact information.
- f) Responding to feedback and suggestions for revision to ensure alignment with related and dependent BCPs.
- g) Implementing testing and training exercises to familiarize staff members with their roles and responsibilities during an emergency, ensure that systems and equipment are maintained in a state of readiness, and validate the effectiveness of the BCP.
- h) Collaborating with central university teams where dependencies exist between Faculty / Department and centrally-delivered University critical functions.

Central University Teams

- 8. Under the direction of the President and Vice-Presidents, these teams are responsible for:
 - a) All of the items listed above;
 - b) Developing Business Continuity Plans for centrally-delivered University critical functions; and
 - c) Collaborating with Faculties and departments where dependencies exist between centrally-delivered University critical functions and Faculty / Departmental functions.

Vice-President (Operations & Finance) Office:

9. The VPOF Office is responsible for:
 - a) The central collection, review, and secure storage of all BCPs;
 - b) Reviewing submitted BCPs to ensure alignment and to identify dependencies;
 - c) Tracking and reporting on existing and outstanding BCPs, with a focus on the highest criticality functions;
 - d) Contacting Faculties and departments if any revisions are necessary;
 - e) Notifying Deans and AVPs ([BCP owners](#)) of the review and update schedule (every 2 years); and
 - f) Identifying gaps in Faculty / Department-level or University BCPs.

Crisis Management Group

10. The Crisis Management Group is responsible for:
 - a) Identifying common hazards through a Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment;
 - b) Developing a Crisis Management Plan; and
 - c) Leading the coordination of a University-wide response to a crisis.

Activation of a Business Continuity Plan

11. The decision to activate a BCP will be made by the BCP owner (typically the Dean, VP, or AVP) and will be triggered when an event impacts the typical delivery of a critical function.

All Hazards Approach

12. The University has adopted an **all-hazards approach** to business continuity planning, which involves preparing for a broad spectrum of potential disruptions. This approach focuses on developing flexible and adaptable strategies that can be applied to various emergency situations, rather than concentrating on specific scenarios.
13. The University has identified a list of the most commonly anticipated hazards that could impact operations, as outlined below.

McMaster University: Most Commonly Anticipated Hazards

- a) **Cyber Attack**
- b) **Severe Weather**
 - Summer: High Heat, Flood, Windstorm/Tornado
 - Winter: Ice storm, Snowstorm, Flood, Cold Wave
- c) **Hazardous Material Incident**
 - Fixed Site
 - Transportation Incident
- d) **Civil Disturbances**
 - Demonstration, Labour Disruption, Special Event
- e) **Fire / Explosion**
- f) **Active Shooter / Violent Situation**
- g) **Critical Infrastructure Failure – Telecommunications, network outage, electric, HVAC**
- h) **Energy Supply Emergency – Gas, Oil, Electrical**
- i) **Terrorism or Criminal Act**
- j) **Public Health Event**

Critical Functions

14. Critical functions are essential activities that support the University’s primary services. These functions must continue without interruption or be promptly restored within specified time frames following a disruption to prevent harm to life, property, or assets. While all functions are necessary, only some are deemed critical.
15. While all critical functions are vital to the University's mission, some are more time-sensitive. During an emergency, less urgent functions may be deferred to prioritize more urgent ones. All functions will resume as full operations are restored.
16. The BCP Owner is responsible for identifying and developing a BCP for all critical functions. It is recommended that when developing a BCP, you begin with Level 1 criticality functions, followed by Level 2, and so on.
17. The following table provides a suggested categorization and prioritization of Faculty / Departmental and University functions, accompanied by illustrative examples for reference.

Critical Function Prioritizations

Level of Criticality	Description	Examples for Reference (non-exhaustive)
Critical 1	Must be continued at normal service load. Cannot pause. Necessary to life, health, and/or safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire suppression systems • Electricity, HVAC, and utilities • Cyber and network security monitoring • Animal care facilities • Payroll • Hazardous materials cleanup • Campus safety services

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical care activities as they pertain to McMaster faculty and learners • Research activities that include providing critical treatment to patients
Critical 2	<p>Must be continued if at all possible, though perhaps in reduced or alternative mode. Pausing completely would have grave consequences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residence and housing services • Food services • Functioning of data networks • Critical or at-risk research activities • Student instruction • Student support services • Procurement activities • Accounts payable
Critical 3	<p>May pause if forced to do so, but must resume in 7 days or sooner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions and graduation processes • Transcript issuance • Research activities • Financial aid activities • Student advising
Deferrable	<p>May pause; resume when conditions permit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examinations • Athletics and recreation • Student clubs and events • Routine building maintenance • Marketing activities • Certain administrative processes and projects

Developing a Department or Faculty BCP: Requirements

18. A BCP should incorporate the following essential elements. It is advisable to use these elements as headings (or individual stand-alone documents) within a department or Faculty's BCP.

Requirements for a Business Continuity Plan (BCP):

- a) **Identification of Critical Functions:** Clearly outline the essential activities, starting with Critical 1 and 2 functions, as outlined above.
- b) **Dependencies:** For each critical function, identify any dependencies on other departments or external resources or services.
- c) **Continuity Strategies:** For each critical function, describe how the function will be maintained under crisis or downtime conditions, for example, reduced resources, staff, space, equipment, or IT infrastructure. This should include:
 - [1] Roles and Responsibilities
 - [2] Contingency Plans
 - [3] Downtime Procedures
 - [4] Manual Workarounds
- d) **Emergency Contact Lists:** Maintain up-to-date contact information for key personnel within and outside the team.
- e) **Critical Materials, Supplies and Vendors:** List essential materials and supplies required for business continuity. Include vendors and service technicians that you may need to contract in the event of a crisis.
- f) **Activation Criteria and Authority:** Define the criteria and authority for activating the BCP.
- g) **Actions & Proactive Measures:** Identify actions that can be taken now to mitigate the impact of potential disaster events and facilitate recovery.

Policy Administration

19. This Policy is administered by the VPOF Office. As per the [McMaster University Policy Framework](#), the Vice-President (Operations & Finance), as the executive responsible for this Policy, will typically review it every five years. Smaller and more frequent reviews may occur to ensure this Policy remains current and compliant with legislative requirements, professional standards, operational requirements, and leading practices. For questions or further information, please contact the VPOF Office at vpof@mcmaster.ca.

Appendix 1: Checklists – Developing a Business Continuity Plan

This checklist has been developed to support teams in developing and identifying the key components of a BCP. Teams are encouraged to choose a format and layout that supports their unique needs, operations and team functioning.

- Have you identified your **Critical Functions** and prioritized them by Criticality Level?
 - What functions must continue without interruption or be promptly restored within specified time frames following a disruption in order to prevent harm to life, property, or assets?
 - Could we experience operational disruptions, loss of revenue, or damage to our reputation if certain functions aren't maintained?
 - What functions are most frequently impacted? Have you experienced recent events?
 - Have you collaborated with key stakeholders to identify what your critical functions are?
- Have you identified any **dependencies** related to your critical functions?
 - Have you considered both internal (e.g., centrally delivered functions) and external (e.g., third party contractors and suppliers) dependencies.
 - For any dependencies, have you proactively connected with central university departments to understand how dependencies will be handled in the event of a crisis or major downtime?
- Have you developed one **Continuity Strategy** document for each of your Critical 1 and Critical 2 functions?
 - Does your Operational Continuity Strategy include:
 - Roles and Responsibilities
 - Contingency Plans

- Downtime Procedures
- Manual Workarounds
- Lists of Critical Material, Supplies and Vendors
- Actions & Preventative Measures
- How you will deliver critical functions in various scenarios, for example, in an alternate location, with a reduced workforce, or without IT/network access
- **Special Considerations:**
 - Do you store pharmaceuticals, materials or other items that require refrigeration and/or storage within a controlled climate?
 - Does your research activity support the provision of critical treatment to patients?
 - Do you have animals that require special attention?
 - In the event of a power outage, alternate storage of these items must be thought through and incorporated into your plan.
- **Continuing Instruction and Research:**
 - Specify how instruction and research will continue, including alternative class locations, accessing student information, and contacting students without the data network.
 - Have you included notification methods for class relocations and the process for manual grade submission?
 - Do you conduct research that requires specific conditions or continuity of intervention?
- **Communications:**
 - Do all staff know to notify Communications (local or central communications) in the event of a crisis or downtime?

- All media inquiries should be directed to the Office of Communications, Marketing and Public Affairs.
 - How will information be disseminated during a crisis? Multiple communication channels should be used to ensure all stakeholders are informed.
- Is your team's **Emergency Contact List** updated and available in hard copy and electronically?
 - Does your list include contacts both within your department, as well as key contacts within the university and external to the university?
 - Is this list available in both electronic and hard copy formats, that are accessible to the team in the event of a disruption?
 - Does the list include alternative contact information (e.g., non-McMaster email address and phone number)?
 - Is this list updated on a regular basis (e.g., quarterly) to reflect changes in staffing and contact information?
 - Are you receiving building notification updates and do you know what to do when these are received? Do you need to be added to any other key distribution lists?
 - Are any of your staff located at non-McMaster sites or distributed campuses, and how will they be incorporated into your plans? Should there be a plan for continuity at those sites?
 - **Critical Materials, Supplies and Vendors:**
 - Have you developed a list of critical materials, supplies and vendors for each of your Critical 1 and Critical 2 functions?
 - Do you keep inventory records of critical supplies that may be needed during a crisis or downtime?

- Have you defined the criteria for **Activation and Authority** for activating the BCP?
 - What criteria will activate the BCP?
 - Who can make on-the-spot decisions for your department?
 - Who is the backup authority to activate the BCP and make immediate decisions?
 - What policy exceptions might you need to continue operating, and who can grant them?
- Have you identified **Actions & Preventative Measures** that can be taken now to prevent a crisis or downtime, mitigate the impact of potential disaster events, and facilitate recovery?
- Have you **reviewed and provided training** on your BCP with leadership, management and relevant staff within your unit / department / faculty, on an annual basis?
- **Post-Incident Review:** Following an incident, does your team have a process for debriefs or post-incident reviews? This can help evaluate the response, identify strengths and weaknesses, and determine updates needed for Business Continuity Plans (BCPs).
- Have you **submitted your BCP to the VPOF site** [Business Continuity Plan Repository](#)?

Appendix 2: Resources and Related Documents

Please see Office of the Vice-President Operations and Finance – SharePoint Portal for additional resources.