



CONTINGENCY AND DISASTER PLANNING

October 2007

Quick Start
MANAGEMENT GUIDE





CONTINGENCY AND DISASTER PLANNING

The Quick Start Management Guide for Contingency and Disaster Planning is part of a series of brochures designed to highlight and summarize the information contained in the chapters of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) Election Management Guidelines (EMG). The goal of the EMG is to provide a collection of election management guidelines, consolidated into one document, to assist State and local election officials effectively manage and administer elections. These guidelines are solely designed to serve as a source of information for election officials and not as requirements by which they must abide. The EAC expects the EMG to be completed in 2008. However, due to the urgent need for election management resources, EMG chapters and Quick Starts are released as they are completed.

The content of the EMG and the Quick Start Management Guides has been developed in collaboration with State and local election officials and other election professionals who have first-hand experience managing elections. The EAC is grateful for their participation and ensuring the guidelines are practical and applicable for jurisdictions regardless of their size and resources. The EMG and the Quick Starts are available online at www.eac.gov.



INTRODUCTION

- Contingency planning in elections involves planning responses for situations as simple as maintaining a listing of poll workers to respond to a call for replacements on Election Day, or as complicated as relocating polling places on the morning of Election Day due to flooding or other natural disasters. This guide provides a quick overview of things to consider when developing policies/procedures for administering an election... from running out of ballots...to experiencing a major natural or manmade disaster.

DEVELOPING A CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLAN FOR ELECTIONS

- Contact your State and local Department of Emergency Preparedness to request copies of existing action plans and information on other available resources. Schedule a joint meeting to discuss how the election office can partner with these agencies to develop a comprehensive Continuity of Operations Plan for Elections.
- Review existing State law to determine if the Governor has the power to cancel an election or designate alternative methods for distribution of ballots in the event that an emergency/disaster occurs which impacts the conduct of an election.



- Develop a written line of succession for staffing within your office. Document this staffing authority and distribute it internally within your local and State jurisdictions.

RECOMMENDATION: ONCE YOU HAVE DEVELOPED A WRITTEN CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLAN, PLACE IT ON FILE WITH YOUR STATE'S CHIEF ELECTION OFFICE (I.E. GOVERNOR, SECRETARY OF STATE, ETC.) AND LOCAL BOARD OF COUNTY OFFICIALS.

- Coordinate the development of your plan by establishing a task force that includes all subdivisions of government within county government, including area law enforcement and fire district agencies, area school district representatives, and area power and light administrative staff. Utilize these connections to tap into their resources to provide assistance to your office in the event of an emergency.

RECOMMENDATION: DISTRIBUTE A COMPLETE LISTING OF ALL POLLING PLACE LOCATIONS, AND EXPECTED VOTER TURNOUT FOR EACH LOCATION TO AREA POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS PRIOR TO EVERY ELECTION.

- Publish and distribute the final approved Continuity of Operations Plan to all agencies responsible for providing assistance in the event of a disaster/emergency. The Plan should be reviewed and updated periodically.

RECOMMENDATION: CONSIDER REVIEWING THE PLAN WITH ALL INVOLVED AGENCIES AND INDIVIDUALS AT LEAST SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO EVERY FEDERAL ELECTION.

- Involve the media in your planning process. Distribute the final approved document to all area television, radio, and newspaper media.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR COUNTYWIDE EVENTS

- Conduct a brainstorming session with staff to develop a listing of various “Election Day” worst case scenarios. Examples include the various types of natural disasters (*snow/ice storm, flooding, hurricane, tornado, etc.*); and other election-related “disasters” (*poll worker shortage, last minute relocation of polling places, shortage of ballots and other mission critical supplies, etc.*). **NOTE:** It is important to list any possible issue that can occur that would impact the management of an election – even if it has never, ever happened before.



- Develop an action plan for each scenario. Include in the action plan: who is responsible for each task, what resources are required, what agency(s) will be called upon to assist, and where the designated area for media will be located and the name of the designated media coordinator, if required.

Examples of worst case scenarios and possible action plans, include:

- **SHORTAGE OF POLL WORKERS.** Assign a certain percentage of “stand by” poll workers to report to the Election Office on Election morning. This group of “stand-by” poll workers could also be recruited from the county or city employee base. These poll workers should be fully trained and arrive at the designated office location ready to be deployed where needed.
- **PHONE SYSTEM CRASHES.** Consider investing in a backup generator to support the phone system and other mission-critical computer systems. Provide instructions to poll workers on how to reach your office if the main phone line is not functioning. **NOTE:** *Partner with other county departments to identify front line staff who could answer overflow phone calls on Election Day. Provide answers to FAQ’s and enable the staff to look up polling place information. Give them the direct line to contact a permanent election staff person, if necessary.*

- **RELOCATION OR CONSOLIDATION OF POLLING PLACES.**

Use early voting locations as emergency polling places on Election Day. Usually computer network lines are already in place to provide the ability to process any voter in the county. Remember to post signs at the old location directing voters to the new location. Notify the media of the location changes and post this information on your office Web site. Use your automated phone message system to communicate last minute polling place location updates.

- **INCLEMENT WEATHER OCCURS AFTER THE POLLS ARE OPEN.** Coordinate an action plan involving county/city employees with four-wheel drive vehicles. Dispatch these employees to polling places to collect voting equipment and supplies after the polls close.





- **SHORTAGE OF SUPPLIES AND/OR BALLOTS.** In the event of a countywide shortage of mission-critical supplies, this plan should be developed to utilize enough manpower to reach all polling places within an approved time frame. Divide the jurisdiction into regions, prepare driving maps, and deploy county/city runners to distribute the necessary supplies. Poll workers should always be trained to know when to contact the election office when they anticipate running short of ballots or others supplies. Regional trouble shooters should be assigned and dedicated to support a certain number of polling places on Election Day. Each trouble shooter should have a kit of extra supplies to support individual requests within their region on Election Day. *Example: Develop a listing of 10-15 mission-critical polling place supply items. These items should be checked and double checked using the “two-person” rule prior to Election Day.*
- **BOMB THREAT** – Place a “Bomb Threat Protocol” laminated card in all polling place supply kits. Instruct the poll workers to follow the guidelines on the card and to call 911 immediately.
- **POWER FAILURE AT POLLING PLACES.** Provide instructions in all polling place supply kits on how to manage a power failure and continue the voting process. Poll workers should be trained to notify the Election Office as soon as possible. **NOTE:** *Be prepared to transport food, water, space heaters and fans to polling places, if needed.*

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR INTERNAL OPERATIONS

- Include within your Continuity of Operations Plan, procedures to follow when internal operations are affected due to unforeseen circumstances. Involve members of your county's information technology staff to assist with developing procedures for creating a computer and server action plan.
- Determine alternative office space in the event that your facility is unusable for any reason. This could also include the need to relocate certain staff due to computer access and/or phone failure.
NOTE: *Don't forget to incorporate security measures into any of your alternative facility action plans.*
- Send a written request to the area power and light company notifying them of Election Day activities and request that they limit any work in the area that could cause power outages at your office. Install tracking devices (*i.e.* UPS) on all mission-critical systems within your office. These devices usually provide up to 3 hours of back-up power. Consider coordinating the use of a back-up generator for use during an extended power outage.
- Develop an alternative communication plan to include use of individually owned cell phones, along with a reserve bank of spare cell phones to be available for use by poll workers.
Example: Consider the use of pagers for text messaging poll workers in areas where there is no cell phone access.



- Ensure that your vote tabulation computer system is backed up and stored onsite in a fire proof safe and in an off-site location. All other computer systems should be periodically backed up and stored in the same fashion. Procedures should be in place to coordinate the relocation of the computer system to an alternative location, if required, on Election Day.
- In the event that it becomes necessary to evacuate your office, establish written procedures for all staff to follow. These procedures should include a designated meeting place outside of the building. Designated staff team leaders should be responsible for accounting for all members of their team. Staff members should be requested to take their personal cell phone with them to the off-site location.
- Develop scripted messages for use by the designated office telephone staff. Separate messages should be developed for fire/bomb threats which require evacuation of the building; and for various weather-related emergencies. Telephone staff should be trained to broadcast these messages to notify staff to take action.
- Maintain a listing of all on-call personnel and telephone contact information for use while in election mode. This list would include emergency management and information technology support staff. Also include area police department, telephone support staff, and power and light phone numbers.

- Be proactive in determining how to prevent damage to voting equipment in the event that the fire alarm is activated. *Example: Routinely place tarps or plastic covers over voting equipment to prevent dust and water damage. Understand the difference between a fire-activated sprinkler system and a Halon system (which does not destroy the computer system).*

EVALUATING “LESSONS LEARNED”

- Conduct regular debriefing sessions following every election. Use this time to review your Continuity of Operations Plan for Elections and update/revise, if necessary. Coordinate the debriefing sessions with regular staff, regional trouble shooters, poll worker judges and others support staff involved in the countywide election operations.
- Share your Operations Plan with surrounding jurisdictions and your State Election Director. You are encouraged to also place a copy of your plan on file with the U.S. Election Assistance Commission office in Washington, D.C.



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