
Guiding Note # 2 COVID-19: Continuity of Planning

1. Introduction:

This guidance note is an update on the Continuity Planning Note shared on March 4th, 2020.

The previous guidance note dealt with issues concerning preparedness for COVID-19. This document is an update as it provides continuity planning recommendations for widespread sustained person to person in-country transmission of COVID-19. At present we are now at the phase where several Participating States have confirmed in-country cases of the virus and it is imperative that planning be done for widespread sustained human to human transmission.

In light of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in 17 CDEMA Participating states this document seeks to guide stakeholders and Participating States in continuity planning for widespread sustained human to human transmission of COVID-19. The guide comprises the following operational risks (Singapore, 2020):

- I. Human Resource Management
- II. Processes and operational functions
- III. Supplier and customer management
- IV. Internal and external communications
- V. Fiscal measures for social protection

It is imperative that critical business functions continue without interruption or substantial change. As such, this guide helps national agencies with the following:

- I. Make certain that plans are available should employees become affected or require quarantine
- II. Minimize the risk of the locations becoming a hub for transmission
- III. Ensure alternative arrangements with stakeholders and the public are in place so that agency operations can continue

2. What is COVID-19

“COVID-19 is a new strain of novel coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning that they are transmitted between animals and people. Common signs of infection in humans include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath, and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, kidney failure and even death among persons with underlying health issues” (WHO, 2020).

3. Continuity Planning

Agencies within the Caribbean are advised to employ continuity plans to limit interruptions to daily operations and ensure that productivity remains sustainable during the instance of an outbreak of COVID-19. Entities can take the following measures to ensure adequate preparedness for continuity planning and management (Singapore, 2020).

4. Human Resource Management

- a. Utilize work-transfer strategy for functions and processes that can be transferred to other office locations or entities outside the geographic region. In the eventuality that a specific geographic region becomes a COVID-19 hotspot, agencies can develop a work-transfer strategy where agency functions can be transferred to a surviving site such as an alternative division/branch.
- b. Guarantee online mechanisms are available for processing payments and accessing salaries.
- c. Ensure employees are aware of the obligatory health/medical protocols if they become infected whilst on the job or at home. Clear country-specific guidelines on where/how illness can be reported and the requisite quarantine and isolation measures need to be communicated to staff.
- d. If monetarily feasible, provide support packages for employees that are traditionally paid at a daily or hourly rate.
- e. Agencies should ensure that in-house continuity procedures are aligned to governmental mandates.
- f. Agencies should seek guidance from their legal counsel when making pertaining to decisions concerning human resource management (DRI International, 2019)

5. Processes and Operational Functions

- a. Develop continuity strategies such as; establishing teams of workers who can be utilized at varying work schedules, cross train workers and establish covering arrangements to minimize disruptions and remote working from home (Singapore, 2020).
- b. Operate virtual mechanism for regular reporting to management and executive teams. Within this mechanism agencies can assign agreed upon times for specific meeting sessions, this should be done on a secure and easy to operate platform. Also, a cost benefit analysis should be conducted to determine if a paid online meeting service can be used. If funds for such a tool are unavailable then alternative open source online platforms can be utilized.
- c. Suspend operations that are not time sensitive and transfer people/work to a surviving site. This is recommended if the existing workplace is unsafe or remote working is not a possibility.
- d. Adhere to emergency response procedures such as, the crisis communication plan, incident management system and standard operating procedures.
- e. Utilize cloud management options to ensure vital records are available outside the physical realm of the office.
- f. If monetarily feasible, utilize active/active technology environments and data centers whereby files, data and operational functions can be continuously available.

6. Supplier and Customer Management:

- a. Devise mutually agreeable mechanisms and systems with stakeholders and service providers for recovery continuation post COVID-19 impact.
- b. Maintain virtual contact with existing customers and offer assistance where possible. If the situation allows, agencies should engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) ventures to boost overall community morale.
- c. Establish agreed upon recovery points and times with suppliers to synchronize re-commencement of operations such manufacturing and deliveries.
- d. Establish triggers and activate agreements whereby replacement suppliers can be used for the provision of the requisite materials necessary for continuation of operations.

7. Internal and External Communications:

- a. Ensure that the communications coordinator relay timely and accurate updates and information concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the agency. Proper communication of health updates from local health authorities need to be delivered to staff on a timely basis.
- b. Make sure that crisis communication policies, plans and procedures are adhered to.
- c. Maintain and utilize virtual communication channels whereby employees can communicate and report their work and health status as well as make enquiries.
- d. Utilize pre-set communication messages and statements to inform stakeholders and customer groups in the event of a widespread human to human transmission. Messages would be structured and aligned to specific phases of the pandemic timeline and country-specific phases.

8. Fiscal Measures for Social Protection

- a. Establish emergency support and care packages for persons who are hourly/daily paid. Monetary packages can provide support to workers who are unable to receive a steady income from their usual workplace.
- b. Mechanisms that facilitate the deferral of insurance, mortgages and tax payments.
- c. Broaden the eligibility of persons that are entitled to social protection measures. Expansion of this cohort would provide social protection to newly vulnerable persons.

Bibliography

DRI International. (2019). Business Continuity Management Training Participant Guide Version 4.2. New York, New York, United States of America: Disaster Recovery Institute.

Singapore, E. (2020). *Guide on Business Continuity Planning for 2019 novel coronavirus*. Singapore: Enterprise Singapore.

WHO. (2020). *Coronavirus*. Retrieved from World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>