

Business Continuity Planning Help Desk

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following Frequently Asked Questions cover some of the general concepts behind the current COVID-19 outbreak and National Society Business Continuity. They will be further expanded as more questions are submitted.

Questions related to the Help Desk services:

1. Why a Help Desk?

The Business Continuity Help Desk is a service to National Societies provided by the IFRC through the Global Disaster Preparedness Center. With the world-wide onset of COVID 19 the IFRC is seeking to directly assist National Societies in their efforts to continue as important and effective auxiliaries of their governments in providing needed services and programs to those in need. The Help Desk seeks to provide a direct and simple access point by which National Societies can obtain the wealth of information and technical guidance residing within IFRC Departments and Regional Offices. Given the wide diversity of National Societies, the Help Desk seeks to provide service and assistance that is most relevant to each National Society. As inquiries grow, a knowledge base for the topic will be established and shared with NS for their ease of reference.

2. Is this just for COVID-19 planning?

The Help Desk offers information and referral services to National Societies related to business continuity and pandemic preparedness. While the primary focus of many National Societies is currently on the COVID-19 response, business continuity planning applies to all large-scale disruptions that affect the normal functions of a National Society. The Help Desk therefore provides information and referral services for all types of emergencies that significantly impact the ability of National Societies to deliver their humanitarian services.

3. Who can I contact for more information or assistance?

If you are unable to locate the answer in the Frequently Asked Questions section, go to the “Direct technical support” section below and submit your query. Upon receipt of an information or guidance request Help Desk staff and volunteers will review the issue.

- If the issue can be addressed by existing IFRC documents and guidance, the most helpful resources will be forwarded back to the requester.

- If the issue requires further discussion or the development of additional guidance, the matter will be promptly relayed to the appropriate IFRC Department or Regional Office for resolution. In such cases, the National Society will be informed of this action.
- If the issue requires more personalized support, the Help Desk is in close contact with the IFRC staff and will help identify the corresponding support team to provide additional support to the National Society.

4. How long will it take to receive a response to an inquiry or request for guidance?

In most cases National Society information and guidance requests will be addressed within the day they are received. Issues involving complex or multifaceted issues may take longer when they prompt expert collaboration, coordination or consultation within the IFRC. In these situations, an interim report can be returned to the National Society. In such cases, every effort will be made to address all inquiries and assistance requests in a most expeditious manner.

5. How long will the Business Continuity Help Desk operate?

The Business Continuity Help desk will function on a 7 day a week basis. It will be operational as long as there is a demonstrable need and use by National Societies.

COVID-19 questions:

6. What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so it's important that you also practice respiratory etiquette (for example, by coughing into a flexed elbow). At this time, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19. However, there are many ongoing clinical trials evaluating potential treatments.

[source: [WHO](#)]

7. What is the difference between quarantine, isolation and social distancing?

Social distancing, isolation and quarantine each have different goals, but all of these protocols are designed to limit the spread of COVID-19, the disease that results from the novel coronavirus, and other communicable diseases.

Here's what each term means, according to US Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC.

- **Social distancing:** Social distancing is used to limit close interactions among people. You can see this happening as conferences are canceled, gatherings are limited, and schools shut down. Individuals may also choose to distance themselves by avoiding public transportation or choosing to work remotely. Other social distancing practices include avoiding handshakes and remaining more than three feet from other people.
- **Quarantine:** To be quarantined (or self-quarantined) is when a person who is well -- not sick or exhibiting symptoms -- separates themselves or drastically restricts their movement. It's used when a person has come in contact (or is suspected to have done so) with an infected person and needs to monitor their symptoms. Quarantine is also used with individuals who are at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and need to limit their exposure to potentially ill people.
- **Isolation:** Isolation is used when a person that's ill or displaying presumptive coronavirus symptoms is separated from those who are healthy to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. In some cases, people might be isolated in a hospital, while those with manageable symptoms are isolated at home.

[Source: [CNET](#); [CDC](#)]

8. Where can I go for COVID-19 updates?

- The World Health Organization has [daily situation updates](#) on the pandemic.
- Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center offers [realtime updates of the COVID19 situation](#) in your country
- The United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) provides updates on [airport status](#)
- The United National World Food Program provides updates on [travel restrictions](#)

Business Continuity questions:

9. What does Business Continuity mean for the Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies?

Business Continuity Planning establishes the basis for the organization to continue functioning during the crises, and recover and resume business processes when programs have been disrupted unexpectedly. Because RC/RC societies play a crucial role in the overall emergency disaster response, disruptions in service should be minimized in order to maintain public trust and confidence in the RC/RC emergency response capabilities. As such, RC/RC management should incorporate business continuity considerations into the overall design of their emergency response model to proactively mitigate the risk of program disruptions.

The organization, staff and volunteers of the 192 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across the globe are not immune from the threat and risks of COVID-19. Therefore, National Societies must take planning, precautionary, mitigation and other direct measures to ensure their ability to continue executing their mission. To do this National Societies should be able to promptly access relevant and available Business Continuity information and technical guidance they need.

[source: [IFRC Business Continuity Planning Guidelines](#)]

10. We have already developed our Contingency plans. How is Business Continuity different from Contingency Planning?

Contingency plans relate to the response to a possible event, while the business continuity plans relate to sustaining programs and assets that are already operational.

- Contingency planning prepares an organization to respond well to a future emergency and its potential humanitarian impact. Developing a contingency plan involves making decisions in advance about the management of human and financial resources, coordination and communications procedures, and being aware of a range of technical and logistical responses.
- Business continuity planning looks at the systems of prevention and recovery to ensure the National Society continues to provide relevant country-wide services to vulnerable people during the crisis. It ensures the critical functions are in place and protected from disruption.

11. What are the National Society's Organizational Critical Functions?

Critical functions are activities that need to be constantly maintained or must be recovered within a very short time in order to ensure the provision of services. These activities or processes cannot be interrupted or unavailable for several working days without having a significant negative

impact on the organization While these critical functions need to be defined for each National Society as part of the business continuity planning, they can include:

- Health support and coordination (such as relief health support; medication stocks management; etc.)
- Relief Operations/Disaster coordination & support.
- HR/staffing management (contracts and payroll management; staff health monitoring and referral; counselling and psychological support; staff movement monitoring and emergency contact list updates; flexible /remote working system; etc.)
- Security management.
- Finance and Accounting (cash availability; payroll continuity; contingency for banking services shut down; etc.)
- Logistics, procurement and stock management
- Information technology, systems and telecommunications (setting up telecommuting for essential staff to work from home; periodic back-up of all electronic files with safe off-site storage; maintaining help line support; etc.)
- Information and Communication (press and media relations; general communications, press releases and publishing; etc.).
- Etc.

12. What components should a Business Continuity Plan include?

The National Society's Business Continuity Plan should cover the following:

1. Accountability
 - Organizational Policy
 - Business Continuity Planning Team
 - Delegation of Responsibilities
 - Communicate BCP
2. Risk Assessment
 - Risk Management Process
 - Threats
 - Vulnerabilities
 - Risk Assessment
 - Security Standards
3. Business Impact Analysis (reviewing types of risks and the possible impact on the organization)
4. Strategic Plans
 - Critical Processes
 - Assessing Impact
 - Determining Maximum Allowable Down-time and Recovery Time Objectives

- Contingency Plans; Relocation and Hibernation
 - Alternative Sites of Operation
 - Identify Resources Required for Resumption and Recovery
5. Crises Management Development
- Crises management
 - Crises management team composition
 - Contact Information

[source: [IFRC Business Continuity Planning Guidelines](#)]

13. Who is responsible for business continuity planning?

It is the responsibility of the Senior management to support not only the planning process but also the development of the infrastructure to install, maintain, and implement the business contingency plan (BCP). This will ensure that management and staff at all levels within the organization understand that the BCP is a critical top management priority.

The senior management should establish policies that define how the organization will manage and control the risks that were identified. In the event of a crisis, an organization wide BCP Policy should be committed to undertaking all reasonable and appropriate steps to protect people, property, and program interests are essential.

[source: [IFRC Business Continuity Planning Guidelines](#)]

14. Who should be part of the planning process?

A Business Continuity Planning Team should be appointed to ensure wide-spread acceptance of the BCP. It should include senior managers from all major departments and volunteer groups.

[source: [IFRC Business Continuity Planning Guidelines](#)]

For specific technical support, contact: **bcp.helpdesk@redcross.org**