

# Communications planning for Mission Continuity

## **Background:**

When an outage or disruption occurs, you will probably need to communicate about it with your key constituencies. It's a good idea to plan for these communications in advance; when an outage or disruption occurs, you and other members of your department will undoubtedly be busy dealing with the event. It's good practice to create a communications plan and load it into Shadow-Planner so it will be easily available in the event of an emergency.

## **Goals of communications:**

- To communicate and create a sense of awareness about the outage, informing the various stakeholders (users, administrative groups, support personnel) of plans and progress on resolution
- To inform the user community that the outage may be impacting their business activities, events, or processes
- To identify applications and services that are not available during the outage
- To identify applications and services that are still available during the outage
- To inform the user community of any actions or workarounds that they can take to continue operations during the outage
- To establish and maintain open communication lines with stakeholders throughout the outage, including contact information for someone who can answer questions

## **Before creating the plan:**

1. ***Determine who your key stakeholders are.*** Examples include: staff members in your unit or other units of the University, students, faculty, alumni, patients, patrons, customers.
2. ***Determine how you can best communicate with them in the event of an outage or disruption (vehicles).*** Examples include: e-mail listservs, your web page, phone calls, texting to cell phones, social media. For your own staff, you may wish to maintain a list of cell phone numbers and non-Penn e-mail addresses (such as g-mail or Yahoo addresses).
3. ***Determine what they would need to know in the event that you could not continue operations as usual.*** For example, would they need to know that you are closed for business, or that certain deliverables will be delayed, or that your office is closed but you are still reachable by e-mail, or that certain systems you own are down?

***Some suggested content:*** It's best to keep these communications as simple and straightforward as possible, but include the key information, such as:

- a. The X office or organization is currently unavailable for business due to an outage; depending on the relevance, you may or may not wish to specify the type of outage (power loss, etc.).
- b. We are taking the following steps to resolve the issue: XXX.
- c. You can reach us at: XXX.
- d. We will keep you informed about when we will return to business as usual.

# Communications planning for Mission Continuity

## **Creating the communications plan:**

1. **Start a new plan in Shadow-Planner called “Communications Plan.”** Here is a possible framework for the plan:

<b>Trigger</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Procedure</b>
Short-term building loss	Notify staff		Staff Communications Procedure: building loss*
	Notify students		Student Communications Procedure: building loss*
	Notify faculty		Faculty Communications Procedure: building loss*
Long-term building loss	Notify staff		Staff Communications Procedure: building loss*
	Notify students		Student Communications Procedure: building loss*
	Notify faculty		Faculty Communications Procedure: building loss*
Short-term technology loss	Notify staff		Staff Communications Procedure: technology loss*
	Notify students		Student Communications Procedure: technology loss*
	Notify faculty		Faculty Communications Procedure: technology loss*
Long-term technology loss	Notify staff		Staff Communications Procedure: technology loss*
	Notify students		Student Communications Procedure: technology loss*
	Notify faculty		Faculty Communications Procedure: technology loss*

If you know that there are specific organizations you will need to communicate with (for example, ISC in the event of a technology outage, or Unique Advantage in the event of a large-scale loss of human resources), include a specific action for each one.

To keep all communications information in the same place, you can enter communications plans for each element of the BETH3 model (Buildings, Equipment, Technology, Human Resources, 3<sup>rd</sup>-party vendors or partners) in the same plan. The actual plan and content of the communications can go into a Procedure.

2. **Using the information you have decided on in #3 above, draft the text/content of some *brief* communications you know you will need.** Examples include: the content of a splash page for your website saying you are not available; a basic e-mail to stakeholders stating that your facility is closed; the content of a voicemail message callers would receive stating that you are partially or wholly non-operational.

\*Create a procedure for a specific stakeholder group (e.g., students, staff, faculty) that includes the following information:

- a. Communication method (e-mail, webpage, etc.)
- b. Basic content of communication

## Communications planning for Mission Continuity

- c. Timeline of communications (for example, “After one hour send message X, after 8 hours send message Y.”)
- d. Owner of the communication, i.e., who is responsible for sending it.
- e. Process for responding to queries about the outage from your stakeholders (e.g., who is in charge of monitoring the e-mails)
- f. If the people being contacted are not part of Penn (for example, third-party vendors or partners), you may wish to include contact information for the key people or organizations.

It could be organized like this:

ID #	Distribution Date	Audience	Vehicle	Summary of content	Owners of audience list(s)	Responsible	Status

### Some pointers:

1. **Dealing with the media:** If you are contacted by the media about the outage or disruption (including the *Daily Pennsylvanian*), please refer them to University Communications. You may wish, as a part of your communications plan, to draft a message to University Communications, with content something like this: “The XXX office/department/School is experiencing an outage of XXX type. The following services are not available: XXX. All inquiries for information can be directed to our web page/Facebook site/other.”
2. **Staff who are not in the office at the time of the outage:** Often, staff members may be elsewhere on campus when an outage occurs. Determine how they should be contacted (by cell phone or text, for example). Encourage all staff members to keep their online schedules up to date, so people in the office will know where they are at any given time, as well as keeping their entries in the University Directory up to date.
3. **Frequency of communications:** You should plan to continue to communicate with your stakeholders on a regular basis throughout the outage or disruption. People feel better about an outage if they know more about what’s going on.
4. **Following up afterwards:** It’s good to plan for post-event communications as well, letting people know what happened and confirming that you are back in business.