

What You Need to Know For COOP

BY NICHOLAS CERRONE



Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), is not just backing up your data to tape and shipping it offsite.

COOP is more advanced looking at the grand scale picture posing the question, **“How do I get my users back up and running after a data center disaster?”** “How do I minimize impact to operations and keep the organization’s activity flowing in the event of a data center failure?”

Organizations increasingly rely on data centers to provide the mechanism for daily operations. Data and the availability of instant, continuous access to that data, has become vital to an organization’s existence. Because continuous functionality of operations are linked to continuous functionality of the data center, designing an effective and efficient Continuity of Operation Plan is necessary in today’s environment.

In the event of disaster, we need to preserve the ability to react, respond and combat the disaster. COOP provides continued availability of the data center enabling key operational functions. The ability to battle disaster successfully can be achieved much faster and more effectively with ongoing support of the data center.

Below are five steps to help start the planning of a Continuity of Operations Plan for your organization.

Step 1 – Assessment

Determine the vulnerabilities of the data center and the organization overall by conducting a Business Impact Analysis (BIA). A BIA study for the data center will uncover where vulnerability lies within the infrastructure and defines the underlying consequences in the event of failure. This analysis will determine the organization’s risks associated with particular components of the data center and provide guidance on how to allocate funds and resources to minimize those risks.



Yokota AFB 2009 – Operations Building

Step 2 – Define

Define realistic Recovery Time Objectives and Recovery Point Objectives for the organization.

As per Wikipedia in May 2009:

“Recovery Time Objective (RTO) is the duration of time which a business process must be restored after a disaster (or disruption) in order to avoid unacceptable consequences associated with a break in operations.”

“Recovery Point Objective (RPO) describes an organization’s acceptable amount of data loss measured in time. The amount of data which can be lost without significant impact to business or operations.”

It is important to determine the tolerance of the organization for unplanned downtime and data loss. It should be determined what length of time the organization can function without data center support before permanent damage results or organization survivability comes into question.

Tiering of critical processes on a scale of one to five will help prioritize importance. Mission critical systems and applications typically fall into a tier one category as back-office operations are deemed tier 4 or less critical. This will prioritize the most crucial functions and help to allocation resources for COOP planning most effectively.



Kessler AFB 2005

Step 3 – Ensure Upper Management Support

Putting a budget together can be difficult as upper management may

not agree to the necessity of funding. Typical comments rejecting funding for COOP tend to be “It seems to be working fine now”, “We haven’t had a problem yet”, however it is important to consider the consequence in the event of failure when the proper measures are not taken.

Pose the question “What is the cost of damage in dollars if the data center was to be down for 3 hours, 1 day, 2 days or a week”? “What are the costs of data losses”? When totaling these costs and comparing them to the cost of COOP the price for proper planning is dwarfed many fold.

Step 4 – Thinking Ahead

Keep future data center requirements in mind during the planning phase. Ask the question, “Can this plan adapt to changing environments”? “Will the RTO’s and RPO’s remain somewhat constant”?

Data center requirements reflect the changing demands of end users. COOP planning should accommodate growing and changing need of end

users and the overall environment having the ability to adapt in the future.

Step 5 – Testing

Testing is an important element to providing COOP. If a plan cannot be tested, the value and confidence of that plan becomes diminished. Every plan of action sought for COOP must incorporate a capability for testing.

Testing provides key functionality for operational improvement and training. Mechanisms to simplify testing procedures should be incorporated into a COOP plan to consistently check for operational capability.

As data centers take on a larger role in providing the tools for daily operations, their continued functionality has become top priority for CIO’s and data center managers around the world. COOP Planning has quickly become a priority within organizations as consequences from service outages grow increasingly costly.

It is important to start your planning of COOP with basic principles in mind to keep your project on the right track. However, in the end experience will deliver the right results to achieve the required outcome that will have your CIO and data center manager sleeping at night with confidence.

Nicholas Cerrone is a storage consultant with Zibiz Data Management (www.zibiz.com). The author can be contacted at ncerrone@zibiz.com.

Zibiz Data Management is a leading provider of Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) and end to end turn key data center solutions.