

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

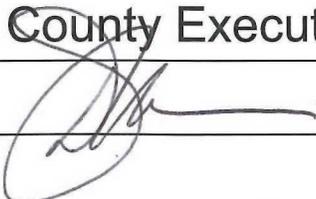
PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County
Program Title: Exercising for Resiliency & Continuity of County Services
Program Category: Organizational Development & Reg Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jim Chandler
Title: Continuity of Operations Program Manager
Department: Office of the County Executive
Complete Mailing Address: 12000 Government Center Pkwy, Suite 361
Telephone # 571-292-7219 Fax # 703-324-4017
E-mail: jim.chandler@fairfaxcounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: David J. Molchany
Title: Deputy County Executive
Signature:  5-29-15



Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

CHALLENGE

The 21st century challenge for local governments is continuing to sustain critically important services for its community. Whether the threat is budgetary constraints, cybersecurity, terrorist event, a Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, or Joplin tornado – county governments must maintain mission assurance. Continuity of operations and business continuity planning ensures resilient capabilities exist across the organization so essential services, critically important resources and competent staff are always available to provide for the community’s safety, well-being and economic vitality.

ACHIEVING MISSION ASSURANCE

The Fairfax County Continuity of Operations (COOP) Program provides the county executive, his leadership team, and the county’s senior managers with the ability to continuously direct, manage and sustain essential government services and business functions regardless of threats or disruptions. Using a highly-efficient matrixed staffing model, a single full-time coordinator position is funded by the General Funds within the Office of Emergency Management. This coordinator is permanently detailed to the Office of the County Executive, reporting directly to the deputy county executive for government operations. This staffing structure demonstrates the value and importance of the continuity program and it’s recognized as having the support of the organization’s chief administrative officer. This empowers the program with ability to work across all levels of the organization, coordinating with each of the other deputy county executives, the chief financial officer, chief information officer, and each department head.

The continuity program manager coordinates the efforts of more than 110 (part-time assignment) staff, representing all 45 departments and agencies. Using this matrix model provides

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Fairfax County with a fiscally-responsible, yet robust continuity framework to address the important challenges of assuring each agency has a viable COOP Plan. Further, that those plans adequately capture and reflect the structural interdependencies with other agencies, and identify the requisite collaboration necessary with critical State or Federal partners, community stakeholders, corporate partners and private sector vendors – upon which many county services depend for successful continuity of operations. This comprehensive framework reflects the commitment of government leaders to fulfill their responsibility to protect the safety, property and economic security of Fairfax County’s residential and corporate citizens during any type of emergency or if potentially catastrophic events threaten or occur within the county.

Since 2010, the county has been partnering with VDEM, DHS and FEMA and to develop and share continuity plan templates, host regional workshops and training events, and provide planning and staffing resources. Many of these resources have been shared with neighboring jurisdictions in the National Capital Region (NCR) and throughout the State and across the country. The county’s continuity program has been offered as an example of a best practice for State, Territorial, Tribal and local government continuity of operations planning by FEMA’s National Continuity Programs office.

As with any planning effort, the capabilities for implementing a viable continuity plan rely on the competency and experience of the staff responsible for activating, sustaining or re-establishing those services deemed most important. Each agency COOP Plan articulates how its prioritized mission capabilities are resourced and align with elected and appointed leadership expectations. A proven method for assuring agency preparedness is conducting training, drills, system tests, and exercises on their COOP Plans.

EXERCISING FOR RESILIENCY & CONTINUITY

Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

The Office of the County Executive initiated a Tabletop Exercise Series in 2014 to evaluate each county agency's level of mission assurance, as measured by its continuity capabilities. The tabletop exercise provides county agencies with a safe and inexpensive (staff time only) tool for evaluating its capabilities to sustain or re-establish core services. They help determine strengths and gaps/lessons learned – so readiness and business processes may be improved, continuity plans revised, and most importantly – efficiencies made to daily practices. Since early 2014, eleven continuity exercises have been conducted, involving fourteen primary agencies and an additional six supporting agencies, focusing on both individual plans and multi-agency collaboration and interdependencies. The overall goals include evaluating the agency's readiness and ability to adequately sustain or recover its prioritized mission essential functions, and specifically address each of these capabilities:

1. Affirm preparedness, alert notification and communication strategies.
2. Evaluate continuity operations, including: activation capabilities; consequence management; mission essential function capabilities; and critical infrastructure resilience.
3. Address reconstitution capabilities and logistics.

The two most common strengths identified thus far include: 1) competency of agency staff, and 2) validation of prioritized mission essential functions; while the two most common gaps were: 1) strengthening interagency collaboration and interdependencies; and 2) improving communication strategies. Initially the exercises focused on individual agencies, while the most recent exercise was a multi-agency tabletop for four primary and six supporting agencies. The commitment required of each agency to participate involves spending about 30 days preparing to conduct the exercise, identifying key staff to participate, developing exercise objectives and holding the exercise. The agency continuity coordinator then works with the program manager to complete updates and revisions to their respective COOP Plans. The entire process only requires a part-time commitment of agency staff for

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about 60-90 days. Details of the process and the specific roles and responsibilities are broken down in the following section describing the implementation process.

Implementation

Preparing for each Agency TTX is a joint effort between the county's Continuity of Operations Manager, the agency's Continuity Coordinator (and any staff that may be on the agency continuity support team) and the Agency leadership/management team. Pre-planning generally begins no later than the month before each Agency's selected exercise date; however, earlier discussions and planning meetings are encouraged and have been the rule as this series continues. Below is a list of planning responsibilities for each agency COOP Coordinator, to be completed with support from the county continuity manager. The Annual Exercise Planning Activities and Calendar includes completing (as a minimum) the following:

- Select an Agency Continuity Exercise Planning Team
 - Coordinating agency staff who will assist with exercise scenario planning, setup, observation, evaluation, note-taking, etc.
 - Determine the agency COOP Plan elements to be exercised
 - Coordinate the development of Agency-Specific Exercise Objectives
 - Submitting them for review by county continuity manager
 - Internal Agency coordination to determine number of exercise participants and their availability for Orientation and Exercise Dates
- Select an Exercise Date, Time & Location (Exercise is Three-Four hours)
 - Location should have PowerPoint & Video capabilities
 - Ideally Location is large enough for a "U-Shaped round-table" layout with video display at the front of the room
- Selecting an Orientation Date at least 1 week prior to the Exercise (45 minutes)
 - Orientation location needs PowerPoint & Video capabilities
- Two Planning Meetings beginning at least 1 month prior to the Exercise
 - Pre-Planning Meetings and Discussions are highly encouraged 60-90 days prior to the Exercise Date – if just to secure dates and facility reservations
- Coordinating After Action Reporting and meetings with county continuity manager

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- Applying Lessons Learned and any other applicable updates, revisions enhancements or changes to the Agency COOP Plan
- Submitting an updated COOP Plan with Agency-approved revisions

Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

Results

Each exercise is conducted and facilitated by the county continuity manager, and includes a minimum of two members of the county's Office of Internal Audit, which is conducting an independent review and analysis of the exercise process and state of readiness of each agency. Typically the exercise is conducted at the agency's office or facility; however, several have utilized alternate locations, and the Department of Public Works & Environmental Services – Wastewater Division exercise utilized teleconferencing and IT-resources to leverage technology so the exercise took place simultaneously at three different locations around the county. The results and observations from staff participating in the exercises have been overwhelmingly positive – with extensive knowledge transfer occurring among senior staff and agency mid-level managers to newer staff members. Each exercise scenario is customized to fit individual agency exercise objectives, location and a particular time of year, designed to challenge their staff with sustaining or recovering selected prioritized Mission Essential Functions – based upon which functions were evaluated. The exercises revealed specific strengths and gaps/lessons learned, reflecting the unique exercise objectives developed by the respective agency leadership.

The strengths and gaps are as varied as the agencies themselves; however, there are a number of recurring common themes that have been identified, aggregated and summarized below to illustrate common areas for concentrating countywide resources. These were compiled and presented in a summary 'annual' report recently prepared for the county executive. These are extracted for this Award Submission and provided below, and then listed by each individual agency participating in the series to date.

FY2014-2015 Tabletop Exercise Series Results

Strengths

- Validation of individual Agency Mission Essential Functions, and the ability to maintain compliance with applicable codes and regulatory requirements

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- Affirmed various internal communication strategies, resources and capabilities for communicating with and among Agency leadership
- Identified, and in most cases, affirmed the strength and reliability of inter-agency partnerships
- Affirmed Agency leadership's knowledge of key roles, responsibilities and operational expectations and priorities
- Demonstrated confidence in existing practices and protocols for taking proactive measures to protect critical county assets and infrastructure ahead of anticipated potential threats

Gaps / Lessons Learned

- Need to formalize inter-agency partnerships for use of alternate locations, technology support and Mission Essential Function capabilities
- Internal and external communications strategies needed to be strengthened, particularly for communicating agency or facility status with essential and non-essential staff
- Coordination with OPA for public messaging of impacted county services to the public needed to be fine-tuned, and development of 'agency-specific' standardized pre-event messages would be beneficial to staff and the public
- Use of public address systems in county facilities needed better coordination with FMD and Security contractors; and processes/protocols needed practicing so staff are confident in their ability to use the equipment to share emergency information with staff and the visiting public during an incident

The first ten exercises focused on the individual agencies listed below, while the most recent tabletop consisted of a multi-agency exercise that challenged each of the counties courts: Circuit, General District, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts, and the Sheriff's Office to work collaboratively in addressing how each agency would work together to respond to and recover from a coordinated terrorist attack at the courthouse. This effort also benefited from the technical support of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Infrastructure Protection. The objectives are listed below,

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and the observations, strengths and gaps/lesson learned results will be discussed at the After Action Conference set for later this year.

It was by design that the agencies initially selected to participate were not traditional public safety, front-line agencies. Rather, the county executive directed that agencies not typically experienced with emergency response or activities be challenged to evaluate their preparedness and resiliency capabilities. These are the agencies selected for the first year of exercises, and their individual objectives and results/observations are included below.

Agencies in FY2014-2015 Tabletop Exercise Series

- Public Works & Environmental Services – Solid Waste Division
- Purchasing & Supply Management
- Finance
- Administration for Human Services
- Vehicle Services
- Tax Administration
- Public Works & Environmental Services – Land Development Services
- Cable & Consumer Services – Government Channel 16

Agency Exercise Objectives & Observations

Each agencies specific exercise objectives are listed, followed by their individual exercise observations regarding their individual agency strengths. Many of the gaps and lessons learned have been aggregated at the conclusion, to aid in maintaining the stated goal of non-attribution. This is important in assuring a high level of trust among the participants and to the integrity of the exercise process.

Department of Public Works & Environmental Services – Solid Waste

Objectives:

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1. Evaluate the emergency notification process to ensure that appropriate staff are informed of the incident and directed as to what action to take, in accordance with the procedures established in the SWMP Continuity of Operations Plan.
2. Evaluate the SWMP's ability to continue essential operations when an incident necessitates closure of a garage facility due to structure damage, requires relocation of operations to an alternate site, and requires action due to damage to approximately 50% of the refuse/recycling collection operations fleet.
3. Evaluate the ability to activate the debris contractor from the Debris Management Plan for support with storm damage assessment and debris removal.

Observations:

- Exercise confirmed the existing Mission Essential Functions were still valid, and internal Division resources are capable of sustaining them using county and contractor assets for solid waste collections
- Exercise revealed the benefits of reviewing and revising staff notification protocols and practices to eliminate reporting confusion following an event that closes a particular facility

Department of Purchasing & Supply Management

Objectives:

1. Notify staff of event and reporting location – alternate site and telework options.
2. Coordinate with bank to use Purchase-Card as an alternate means of procurement during transition and emergency response.
3. Notify users of operating status and use of emergency procurement procedures.

Observations:

- Exercise confirmed DPSM Mission Essential Functions were capable of being sustained at the Warehouse and remotely, should the Government Center offices be impacted
- Exercise confirmed the strength of the partnership with FCPS, and the County would benefit from documenting the assumed availability of the FCPS offices as an alternate location
- Identified the capability to quickly increase P-Card purchasing limits to support county agencies responding to a catastrophic event, within emergency purchasing authority granted by CEX and Department Heads

Department of Finance

Objectives:

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1. Identify, and communicate with staff available to form DOF Advance (core) team, responsible for reconstitution immediately following an event.
2. Evaluate the continuity phase of restored services, to ensure capability of performing key functions from alternate or remote sites.
3. Determine how we would utilize staff not tasked in their primary business areas, to support or replace those meeting DOF Mission Essential Functions.

Observations:

- Department of Finance Inter-division communication capabilities are a tested-resource
- DOF leadership and senior management team knowledge of key activities and operational needs to sustain or recover impacted Mission Essential Functions
- Off-site location needs confirmed, and knowledge of where other agencies will locate
- Lack of actual off-site testing of plan (e.g., can we print checks off-site)

Department of Administration of Human Services

Objectives:

1. Evaluate the emergency notification process to ensure appropriate staff are informed of the incident and directed as to what action to take, in accordance with the procedures established in the DAHS Continuity of Operations Plan.
2. Discuss the ability of DAHS (designated staff) to activate to an Alternate Worksite and maintain Mission Essential Functions.
3. Evaluate access to Essential Records by each division/business area.

Observations:

- Identified mechanism used to communicate emergencies to Essential and General department staff, (Agency Phone tree and EAN notification-messaging already created in the EAN). Agency phone tree is updated routinely and 99% of staff have signed up for the EAN
- Identified how staff would report to alternate locations or telework
- Identified management's commitment to COOP Planning
- Through the DIT "computer replacement program" and cycle, DAHS is moving toward replacing its desktop computers with mobile technology such as laptops and tablets, especially for our "essential staff", to increase the mobile capacity for our department's COOP readiness
- Some staff had a limited understanding of relationship between the COOP plan and other emergency plans (Emergency Operations Plan, Building Emergency Action Plans). DAHS needs

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to clarify the agency's functions/roles as they relate to the various plans. On-going education/training being provided

- Decision as to whether to activate the COOP plan needs to occur earlier in the process of the emergency. Additional training is being provided
- DAHS Senior Staff need to become more familiar with the detailed County-wide COOP structure and how our agency is integrated within that structure

Department of Vehicle Services

Objectives:

1. Evaluate ability to communicate with staff at the out-of-commission (OOC) facility regarding where and when to report for work, and with other facility superintendents regarding redeployment of staff.
2. Evaluate ability to execute the logistics of absorbing staff from one facility into other facilities, including assessment of tools, equipment, parts, and vehicles in work from the OOC facility; transport of staff and material resources to receiving facilities; integration of displaced staff into the receiving facilities.
3. Evaluate ability to communicate to customer agencies such information as: status of units located at the OOC facility; where and when to take vehicles needing new work.

Observations:

- The ability to relocate specialized vehicle repairs from one DVS garage location to another, should a particular DVS facility be off-line for a relatively short period
- The ability to work with other agencies located in Newington; including either or both the FRD Apparatus Garage and/or the Fairfax Connector Bus Garage for temporary relocation of mechanical repairs for large fleet vehicles

Department of Tax Administration

Objectives:

1. Evaluate DTA's ability to complete all real estate property assessments and data entry input during the month of December so the annual assessment file roll takes place as scheduled in January, 2015.
2. Evaluate DTA's ability to complete Book-3 assessment information and data entry to allow for the regularly scheduled late-December run.
3. Evaluate DTA's ability to maintain cashiering operations, posting and reconciliation of accounts during the month of December.

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Observations:

- DTA identified multiple internally-controlled office areas and alternative location resources for sustaining or quickly recovering revenue collection capabilities, should the 2nd floor counter be damaged
- DTA fine-tuned the most critical services to be performed and the functions required to remain in compliance with all codes and regulations with respect to taxation, billing and collections
- DTA better identified the personnel and equipment/resources necessary should the agency be required to operate outside the government center complex
- Need to establish coordinated understanding between DTA, DIT and Facilities Management regarding essential requirements/supplies/connectivity to set-up DTA's secured collection operations in an outside location

Department of Public Works & Environmental Services – Land Development Services

Objectives:

1. Evaluate staff's knowledge of the emergency notification process (EAN) to ensure appropriate personnel (including partner organizations) are informed of the incident and know where to report.
2. Evaluate staff's knowledge of, and ability to continue, Mission Essential Functions (MEF) following an incident impacting the Herrity Building. With specific focus on: staff's MEF responsibilities and the Division's Orders of Succession & Delegations of Authority.
3. Evaluate staff's knowledge of and access to Essential Equipment and Records/Format/ Location.

Observations:

- Identified internal and external communications between Director and Division leaders and use of EAN messaging for essential staff
- Leadership and COOP Advance Team members aware of roles and responsibilities, particularly related to Mission Essential Functions and countywide role in Disaster Damage Assessment
- Records, Laptops, county cell phones and MC3000 in place for inspectors to call-in as redundancy to land-line and cell phones

Department of Cable & Consumer Services – Government Channel 16

Objectives:

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1. Evaluate staff's knowledge of emergency notification methods and staffing of mission essential functions.
2. Evaluate engineering staff's knowledge of Emergency Messaging System (EMS) system, including discussions of both current out-going EMS system and upcoming EMS system.
3. Evaluate staff's knowledge of the process for covering meetings and producing emergency programming.

Observations:

- Identified capabilities and redundancies for transmitting an emergency message with our production assets (primary) and the cable provider's assets (secondary)
- Identified operations for staging equipment at remote locations in the event of advanced notice of an emergency
- Identified capabilities and redundancies for transmitting the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and Board of Zoning Appeals meetings using both our production assets and the assets of agencies partners
- Acknowledged the success of prior internal exercises and testing to ensure staff was well aware of their roles in the event of an emergency

Aggregated Lessons Learned/Gaps from Agency Exercise Observations:

- Internal and external communications strategies needed to be strengthened, particularly for communicating with essential and non-essential staff
- Coordination with OPA for public messaging of impacted county services to the public needed to be fine-tuned, and development of pre-event standardized messages would be helpful
- Use of public address systems in county facilities needed better coordination with FMD and Security firm; and processes/protocols needed practicing so staff are comfortable using the equipment during an event requiring emergency information sharing with staff and the visiting public
- Exercise revealed the benefits of developing a "Supervisor" level Go-Kit to support work activities at an alternate location
- Identify an alternate work facility for staff in the event of a long-term displacement
- Identified the need for the Senior Engineer to be on the FMD Assessment Team (post-event damage assessment)

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- Strengthening of communication strategies (Pretty much like everyone I'm sure but nonetheless, important.)
- For emergency management purposes, not only COOP, the current Pennino Building Fire Annunciator Panel (building paging system) is limited for communications purposes during some emergencies (e. g., power outages-system on generator cannot not use intercom function, severe weather- may not be able to access system, due to its location on the 1st floor)

FY2015 Tabletop Exercise Series – In Process

The following agencies conducted their exercises in the third and fourth quarters of FY2015, and while their respective objectives are listed below, the observations, strengths and gaps/lesson learned results are still being evaluated as part of the After Action Reporting process and will be released later this year.

Department of Public Works & Environmental Services – Wastewater

Objectives:

1. Evaluate staff's knowledge of the emergency notification process (EAN) to ensure WWM staff are informed of an incident in Lorton and know where to report.
2. Evaluate the resiliency of designated alternate locations to ensure Technology capabilities for establishing reliable information and communication transfer (SCADA, phone lines, databases).

Innovative Technology

An important note for the Wastewater Management Tabletop Exercise is the use of technology. The exercise was hosted in the training lab at the Treatment Facility in Lorton; however, two remote locations participated in the exercise from the Government Center in Fairfax and the Monitoring & Collections Division in Burke, Va. via 'Go-To Meeting' tele-conferencing technologies and the use of email to distribute real-time Exercise Scenario Events and Injects.

Department of Human Resources

Objectives:

1. Discuss preparedness, alert notification and communication strategies.

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2. Discuss continuity operations, including: activation capabilities; consequence management; mission essential function capabilities; and critical infrastructure resilience.
3. Discuss reconstitution capabilities and logistics.

Courthouse Multi-Agency – Courts & Sheriff’s Office

Exercise objectives are created to focus the players’ discussion on Agency-specific Mission Essential Functions (MEFs) capabilities and reconstitution practices. The Court & Sheriff’s Office leadership developed these Overall Objectives for this tabletop exercise. Individual Agencies also have ‘agency-specific’ objectives guiding their participation and follow-up.

1. Discuss capabilities for the individual courts and Sheriff’s Office staff to assess situation, validate and share information, and communicate adequate and accurate situational awareness details to decision-makers.
2. Evaluate Circuit Court’s ability to assess and respond with a timely & clear Order of Judicial Emergency, observing formalities established in the Code of Virginia; and how an Order of Judicial Emergency is communicated to all stakeholders.
3. Discuss capabilities for the individual courts and Sheriff’s Office to activate their respective Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plans – as may be appropriate.

Individual Agency-Specific Objectives

Circuit Court

1. Evaluate the Circuit Court’s ability to assess & respond with a timely & clear Order of Judicial Emergency, observing formalities established in Virginia Code (activation of COOP).
2. Evaluate the Circuit Court’s methods of communicating this Order and its immediate, event-response to the other courts, county agencies and the public.
3. Discuss the Circuit Court’s ability to reconstitute its essential functions, communicating this timeline to the other courts, county agencies and the public.

General District Court

1. Evaluate the General District Court’s methods of receiving and disseminating communications about emergency or COOP activities with staff, public, and collaborating agencies.
2. Evaluate the General District Court’s ability to perform essential functions as required during Continuity Activation/Operations.

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Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court

1. Assessing issue/crisis and responding to our ability to perform essential functions both as a court and a court service unit to include Information Technology capabilities (short term and longer term).
2. Assess two-way communication with other courts, other county and state agencies, staff, other professionals and the public.
3. Discuss managing response for court operations, CSU intake services, possible redeployment of staff from service areas if necessary, information technology needs.

Sheriff's Office

1. Discuss the coordination, support and security roles played by the Sheriff's Office in assessing & responding to incidents adversely impacting the ability for the courts to safely operate within the courthouse.
2. Discuss the Sheriff's Office methods of communicating with outside responders, court judges other county agencies and the public during – and following an incident occurring on the courthouse/ADC complex.

ONGOING PROGRAM FOR RESILIENCY & CONTINUITY

The continuity program's exercise series consistently identifies for department-heads and executive leadership the value of prioritizing the core services and assuring their continued availability to support the community. Its value is being revealed not only in tangible improvements and greater efficiencies being made in daily operations – but it continues to provide substantive justifications for each agencies budgeting and prioritization of resources. One of the truest measures of success in any endeavor is the credibility and value-added recognition of agencies requesting to be included in future years. That's the case with a number of county agencies – as well as interest from the neighboring jurisdictions, schools, utility companies, the Water Authority, and regional entities – all of which have expressed an interest in participating in future exercises.

Planning for the next multi-agency exercise currently includes agencies responsible for financial business processes, when these departments will develop specific objectives for an exercise that will

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evaluate their business continuity capabilities, specifically those dependent upon information technology assets like a secure network, internet and other related critical infrastructure to ensure the county and public schools are resilient with their business process. They include:

- Department of Management & Budget
- Fairfax County Public Schools
- Department of Finance
- Department of Purchasing & Supply Management
- Department of Human Resources
- Department of Information Technology

The program continues with both individual and multi-agency exercises scheduled into 2016 and beyond. As the exercise series continues grow, these partnerships are being leveraged so collaboration with other NCR jurisdictions on tabletop exercises addressing cyber threats, and regional catastrophic events are being pursued, in coordination with VDEM, DHS, FEMA and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The following departments are scheduled for individual exercises in FY2016:

- Department of Transportation – Connector Transit Service
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Department of Family Services

Examples of agencies that have requested inclusion in the upcoming exercise calendar include:

- Department of Public Works & Environmental Services – Stormwater Division
- Office of Elections – General Registrar
- Department of Planning & Zoning
- Library

As reflected in numerous examples above, the tabletop exercise series identifies many strengths and lessons learned; however, the greatest benefit has – and continues to be – the recognized value and importance of effective and efficient communications and strengthening of interdependent relationships with partnering agencies across the organization and community-based stakeholders. The

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Continuity Tabletop Exercise Series has utilized an aggressive, but lean and efficient model for staffing and implementation. One that can be easily replicated using existing resources within a jurisdiction, or freely available from Federal, State and other jurisdictions. Fairfax County has shared these resources with other counties, and continues to make itself available as a resource to provide technical support and training/instruction to the region and the State. For information on how to access any or all of these resources – just email the program manager or deputy county executive for government operations.



Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

Program Overview

The 21st century challenge for local governments is continuing to sustain critically important services for its community. Whether the threat is budgetary constraints, cybersecurity, a Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, or Joplin tornado – county governments must maintain mission assurance. Continuity of operations and business continuity planning ensures resilient capabilities exist across the organization so essential services, critically important resources and competent staff are always available to provide for the community's safety, well-being and economic vitality.

The Fairfax County Continuity of Operations (COOP) Program provides the county executive, his leadership team, and the county's senior managers with the ability to continuously direct, manage and sustain essential government services and business functions regardless of threats or disruptions. A highly-efficient matrixed staffing model of one coordinator supporting more than 110 (part-time assignment) staff, representing all 45 departments and agencies, provides Fairfax County with a fiscally-responsible, yet robust continuity framework to address this important challenge. Each agency COOP Plan articulates how its prioritized capabilities are resourced and align with leadership expectations.

A proven method for assuring agency preparedness and resiliency is conducting training, drills, system tests, and exercises on their COOP Plans. The Office of the County Executive initiated a Tabletop Exercise Series in 2014 to evaluate each county agency's level of mission assurance, as measured by its continuity capabilities. The tabletop exercise provides county agencies with a safe and inexpensive (staff time only) tool for evaluating its capabilities to sustain or re-establish core services. They help determine strengths and gaps/lessons learned – so readiness and business processes may be improved, continuity plans revised, and most importantly – efficiencies made to daily practices. Eleven continuity exercises have been conducted, involving fourteen primary agencies and an additional six supporting agencies, focusing on both individual plans and multi-agency collaboration and interdependencies. The program continues with both individual and multi-agency exercises scheduled into 2016 and beyond.



Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

Program Summary

The 21st century challenge for local governments is continuing to sustain critically important services for its community. Whether the threat is budgetary constraints, cybersecurity, terrorist event, a Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, or Joplin tornado – county governments must maintain mission assurance. Continuity of operations and business continuity planning ensures resilient capabilities exist across the organization so essential services, critically important resources and competent staff are always available to provide for the community’s safety, well-being and economic vitality.

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exercises have been conducted, involving fourteen primary agencies and an additional six supporting agencies, focusing on both individual plans and multi-agency collaboration and interdependencies. The overall goals include evaluating the agency's readiness and ability to adequately sustain or recover its prioritized mission essential functions, and specifically address each of these capabilities:

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2. Evaluate continuity operations, including: activation capabilities; consequence management; mission essential function capabilities; and critical infrastructure resilience.
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The two most common strengths identified thus far include: 1) competency of agency staff, and 2) validation of prioritized mission essential functions; while the two most common gaps were: 1) strengthening interagency collaboration and interdependencies; and 2) communication strategies. The first ten exercises focused on individual agencies, with each agency spending about 30 days preparing to hold the exercise, identifying key staff to participate, developing exercise objectives and holding the exercise. The agency continuity coordinator then works with the program manager to complete updates and revisions to their respective COOP Plans. The entire process only requires a part-time commitment of agency staff for about 60-90 days.

The most recent tabletop consisted of a multi-agency exercise that challenged each of the counties courts: Circuit, General District, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts, and the Sheriff's Office to work collaboratively in addressing how each agency would work together to respond to and recover from a coordinated terrorist attack at the courthouse. This effort also benefited from the technical support of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Infrastructure Protection. The continuity program's exercise series consistently identifies for department-heads and executive leadership the value of prioritizing the core services and assuring their continued availability to support the community.

Exercising for Resiliency and Continuity of County Services

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