Business Continuity Planning Guide

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# How to Use this Plan

This guide provides step-by-step instructions for creating a Business Continuity Plan for your organization.

The process has three main phases:

Phase 1: Identify Your Essential Processes (Section 1)

Use the Business Process Identification Guide to determine which processes your organization absolutely must maintain during a disruption.

Phase 2: Assess Impact and Priorities (Section 2)

Complete a Business Impact Analysis to understand how disruptions affect your processes and determine recovery priorities.

Phase 3: Create Your Plans (Section 3)

Develop your main Business Continuity Plan and individual Process Continuity Plans using the templates provided.

**Getting Started - Your First Steps**

Gather Your Team

Identify 2-4 key people who understand your organization's operations. Include department heads or staff who see the "big picture" of what you do.

Identify Essential Processes

Use the Business Process Identification Guide (Section 1) to determine which 8-15 processes absolutely must continue during a disruption. Focus on legal requirements and core mission delivery.

Assess Impact and Set Priorities

Complete the Business Impact Analysis (Section 2) for your essential processes. This will tell you which processes need the fastest recovery and help you focus your planning efforts.

Create Your Main Plan

Develop your Business Continuity Plan using the template provided. This establishes leadership, roles, and overall coordination.

Build Process-Specific Plans

Start with your highest priority processes (Priority 1) and create detailed continuity plans using the Process Continuity Plan template. Add lower priority processes over time.

**Remember:** Start simple and build over time. A basic plan that you actually use is better than a perfect plan that sits on a shelf.

# Business Process Identification Guide

**Understanding Business Processes**

A business process is a series of connected activities that work together to deliver a specific outcome or service. For business continuity planning, we focus on identifying the essential processes that must continue operating (even in a reduced capacity) for your organization to fulfill its core mission.

**Key Point:** We're identifying *what you do*, not *what you have*. Resources like buildings, computers, and staff are important, but they support the processes - they aren't the processes themselves.

**Process vs. Resource Examples**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Process (What you Do) | Resources (What You Use) |
| Student Enrollment | Student information system, registration forms, staff |
| Payroll Processing | Payroll software, bank accounts, HR records |
| Water Billing | Billing system, meters, customer database |
| Emergency Dispatch | Radio systems, computers, dispatch staff |

## Getting Started: Core Process Categories

Most organizations have processes that fall into these basic categories. Use these as starting points to identify your specific processes:

**For K-12 Schools**

* Student Services: Enrollment, attendance tracking, grades/transcripts, discipline records
* Educational Delivery: Classroom instruction, special education services, food service, transportation
* Administrative Functions: Payroll, purchasing, budgeting, facilities maintenance
* Communication: Parent/community communication, emergency notifications
* Compliance: State reporting, safety inspections, record retention

**For Cities and Counties**

* Citizen Services: Licensing/permits, tax collection, utility billing, public records
* Public Safety: Emergency dispatch, law enforcement response, fire services
* Infrastructure: Water/sewer operations, road maintenance, waste collection
* Administrative Functions: Payroll, purchasing, budgeting, asset management
* Governance: Council meetings, public notices, financial reporting

## Process Identification Workshop Method

Step 1: Assemble Your Team (2-4 people)

* Include department heads or key staff who understand operations
* Aim for people who see the "big picture" of what the organization does
* Plan for 2-3 hours initially

Step 2: Start with Your Mission

Ask: "What do we absolutely have to keep doing for our organization to fulfill its basic mission?"

* Schools: Educate students safely and meet legal requirements
* Cities/Counties: Provide essential services to citizens and meet legal obligations

Step 3: Identify Essential Processes

For each core category, ask:

* What specific activities do we perform in this area?
* What would happen if we stopped doing this for a week? A month?
* What are we legally required to continue?
* What do our citizens/students/families depend on most?

Step 4: Define Each Process Clearly

For each process identified, create a simple description:

* Process Name: Clear, specific title
* Process Owner: The person responsible for ensuring this process works properly
* Purpose: What outcome does this process achieve?
* Frequency: How often does this happen? (daily, weekly, monthly, as-needed)
* Key Steps: 3-5 main activities that make up this process

**About Process Owners**

The process owner is typically the person who:

* Has overall responsibility for the process working correctly
* Would be contacted if the process fails or has problems
* Makes decisions about how the process should be performed
* Often supervises the people who perform the process daily

*Note: The process owner doesn't have to personally perform all the steps - they're responsible for ensuring the process happens and works properly.*

**Example Process Definitions**

Student Attendance Tracking

* *Process Owner:* Registrar or Attendance Secretary
* *Purpose:* Record and report student attendance for legal compliance and funding
* *Frequency:* Daily during school year
* *Key Steps:* Take attendance, enter data, generate reports, follow up on absences

Water Billing

* *Process Owner:* Utility Billing Supervisor
* *Purpose:* Bill customers for water usage and collect payments
* *Frequency:* Monthly billing cycle
* *Key Steps:* Read meters, calculate charges, generate bills, process payments, handle collections

## Defining "Essential" - Clear Criteria

**Important Note:** Essential doesn't mean "important" - it means "required for basic organizational survival." Many important and valuable processes may not be essential for business continuity purposes. This isn't a judgment about the value of the work or the people who do it.

### Avoiding "Mission Creep" in Definitions

Be Honest About Impacts: It's natural to want your work area to be considered essential, but stretching definitions hurts everyone's preparedness. Calling everything essential means nothing is truly prioritized for limited resources during a crisis.

Stick to Direct, Immediate Impacts: Avoid creative interpretations like:

* "Financial processes are safety-critical because financial stress affects mental health"
* "All customer service is essential because reputation damage could eventually hurt revenue"
* "Office maintenance is mission-critical because clean spaces improve productivity"

These may be true in the long term, but they're not direct, immediate impacts that business continuity planning addresses.

**A process is likely essential if stopping it would cause:**

* Legal/regulatory violations (required reporting, safety inspections, mandated services)
* Immediate safety risks (emergency response, student supervision, water quality)
* Financial crisis (payroll, revenue collection, financial controls)
* Mission failure (core services that define why your organization exists)
* Cascading failures (other essential processes can't function without it)

**A process may be important but not essential if:**

* It can be delayed weeks or months without serious consequences
* It improves quality or efficiency but isn't required for basic operations
* Other processes can temporarily compensate for its absence
* It's primarily about optimization, improvement, or enhancement
* The negative impacts are long-term or indirect

### When You're Not Sure - Use These Tests

**The "Two Week Test"**

If we stopped doing this process for two weeks starting tomorrow:

* Would we violate laws or regulations?
* Would people be at risk of harm?
* Would we lose significant money or be unable to pay bills?
* Would other essential processes fail?
* Would our core mission be compromised?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these, it's likely essential.

**The "Substitute Test"**

* Can someone else do this temporarily? (vendor, contractor, neighboring jurisdiction)
* Can we use a manual workaround for a few weeks?
* Can we delay it without accumulating serious problems?

If yes, it may be important but not essential for continuity planning.

**Remember:** You can always add processes to your continuity planning later. Start with the obvious essentials and expand over time.

### Common Process Identification Mistakes

**Avoid These Pitfalls:**

* Getting too detailed: "Process student enrollment" not "Print enrollment form, make copies, file in cabinet"
* Focusing on systems: "Run the student information system" is not a process
* Including everything: Focus on essential processes, not every activity (use the tests above when unsure)
* Mixing levels: Keep processes at similar levels of detail
* Confusing important with essential: Important work isn't always essential for survival

**Red Flags:**

* If you have more than 15-20 essential processes, you're probably too detailed or including non-essential processes
* If a "process" is just using a piece of technology, it's probably a resource
* If you can't clearly explain why stopping the process would harm the organization within weeks, question if it's truly essential

## Prioritization During Identification

As you identify processes, do a quick initial sort:

* **Critical:** Must continue during any disruption (hours/days matter)
* **Important:** Should resume quickly after disruption (days/weeks matter)
* **Routine:** Can be delayed during disruption (weeks/months acceptable)

*Note: Detailed prioritization happens during the Business Impact Assessment - this is just initial sorting.*

## Documentation Format

For each essential process identified, capture:

* Process Name: [Clear, descriptive title]
* Process Owner: [Person responsible for this process]
* Category: [Student Services, Public Safety, etc.]
* Purpose: [What outcome this achieves]
* Frequency: [How often this occurs]
* Critical Timing: [Deadlines, seasonal peaks, or time-sensitive periods]
* Initial Priority: [Critical/Important/Routine]
* Key Steps: [3-5 main activities]
* Notes: [Any special considerations]

**Critical Timing Examples**

* Payroll Processing: "Must complete by 25th of each month for end-of-month distribution"
* Student Registration: "Peak period August 1-30, minimal activity rest of year"
* Tax Collection: "Critical December-April, routine processing rest of year"
* Budget Reporting: "Must complete by 15th following month-end"
* Emergency Dispatch: "24/7/365 - no timing variations"

## Workshop Output

Your identification workshop should produce:

* List of 8-15 essential business processes
* Basic information about each process
* Initial prioritization of processes
* Agreement on which processes need detailed continuity planning

Next Steps: Once you have identified your essential processes, you'll conduct a Business Impact Assessment to determine specific criticality and recovery time requirements for each process.

## Tips for Success

Keep It Simple

* Start with obvious essential processes
* Don't try to identify every process in your first session
* You can always add processes later

Think "Minimum Viable Organization"

* What's the smallest set of processes you'd need to keep operating?
* Focus on legal requirements and core mission delivery
* Remember: you're planning for temporary disruption, not permanent downsizing

Get Multiple Perspectives

* Different staff may identify different essential processes
* Cross-check your list with legal/regulatory requirements
* Consider seasonal variations (tax season, start of school year, etc.)

Test Your Thinking

* For each process: "If we couldn't do this for 2 weeks, what would happen?"
* Are there processes that are actually required for other processes to work?
* Do you have processes that only matter during certain times of year?

## Common Essential Processes by Organization Type

K-12 Schools (Examples)

1. Student safety and supervision
2. Food service operations
3. Transportation services
4. Payroll processing
5. Emergency communications
6. Student records management
7. Special education services
8. Financial management
9. Facilities security
10. State reporting compliance

Cities/Counties (Examples)

1. Emergency services dispatch
2. Water/sewer operations
3. Payroll processing
4. Tax/utility billing
5. Public safety response
6. Financial management
7. Public records access
8. Licensing and permits
9. Public communications
10. Waste collection services

*Note: Your specific list will vary based on your organization's size, services, and legal requirements.*

# Business Impact Analysis (BIA) Framework

## What is a Business Impact Assessment?

A Business Impact Assessment (BIA) helps you understand what happens when your essential processes stop working. It answers two key questions:

1. How bad would it be? (Impact)
2. How long can we wait? (Recovery Time)

The BIA takes your list of essential processes and helps you prioritize them based on real impacts, not just opinions.

## Why Do a BIA?

Objective Decision Making: Instead of everyone claiming their process is "critical," the BIA uses consistent criteria to determine what's actually most urgent.

Resource Planning: During an incident, you'll have limited people, time, and money. The BIA tells you where to focus first.

Realistic Planning: Understanding true impacts helps you develop practical recovery plans instead of trying to fix everything at once.

## BIA Timing and Process

Who Should Participate:

* Process owners (the people responsible for each process)
* Leadership who understands organizational impacts
* Someone who knows legal/regulatory requirements

Time Required:

* 2-4 hours for initial assessment
* Individual process owner interviews (30 minutes each)
* Follow-up review meeting (1 hour)

When to Update:

* Annually, or when significant changes occur
* After major incidents that provide new impact information
* When new processes are added or existing ones change significantly

## Simple Impact Categories

We use three basic types of impact. For each process, consider what happens if it stops working:

Financial Impact

* Lost revenue or income
* Fines or penalties
* Extra costs to work around the problem
* Costs to fix or replace things

Operational Impact

* Other processes that would fail
* Services you couldn't provide
* Legal or regulatory violations
* Safety risks

Reputation Impact

* Media attention or public criticism
* Loss of community trust
* Damage to relationships with partners
* Political or leadership consequences

## Time-Based Impact Assessment

For each process, we'll assess impacts at different time intervals:

**8 Hours:** What happens if this process is down for 8 hours?

**24 Hours:** What happens if it's still down after a full day?

**72 Hours:** What happens if it’s been down for 3 days?

**1 Week:** What if it's been down for a week?

**1 Month:** What if it's been down for a month?

### Impact Rating Scale

Use this simple scale for each time period

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Impact | Description | Example |
| 1 - Low | Minor inconvenience, easily manageable | Some paperwork gets delayed, easy workarounds available |
| 2 - Medium | Noticeable problems, requires management attention | Services reduced, staff working overtime, some complaints |
| 3 - High | Serious problems, major management attention required | Unable to provide key services, significant complaints, regulatory concerns |
| 4 - Critical | Organizational crisis, threatens mission or survival | Legal violations, safety risks, major financial loss, public crisis |

### Recovery Time Objectives (RTOs)

Based on your impact assessment, determine the *maximum time* you can afford for each process to be down before reaching unacceptable impact levels.

**Common RTO Categories:**

* 8 hours or less: Process must be restored within hours
* 24 hours or less: Process must be restored within a day
* 72 hours or less: Process must be restored within 3 days
* 1 week or less: Process must be restored within a week
* Best Effort: Process restored when resources are available after higher priorities.

**RTO Selection Guidance:**

* Your RTO is determined by finding the timeframe with the highest impact score for that process
* Focus your business continuity planning on processes with "Critical (4)" and "High (3)" criticality levels - these are your essential business functions
* Medium and Low criticality processes can be addressed later if you choose, but aren't essential for organizational survival
* Be realistic; very short RTOs require expensive recovery solutions

**RTO Examples:**

* Payroll processing shows "Critical" impact at 72 hours → RTO = 24 hours
* Student registration shows "High" impact at 1 week → RTO = 72 hours
* Emergency dispatch shows "Critical" impact at 8 hours → RTO = 8 hours or less

### Maximum Tolerable Downtime (MTD)

MTD is the *total time* from when a disaster is declared until you're back to normal operations. This includes:

* RTO: Time to get the process/system working again
* Work Recovery Time: Time to validate everything works, catch up on backlog, and return to normal

**Simple MTD Planning**

Think about what happens after you get a process "working" again:

* How long will it take to verify everything is functioning correctly?
* How much backlog will need to be processed?
* How long will it take to train staff in any new procedures?
* When will you truly be "back to normal"?

**MTD Examples**

* Payroll Process:

RTO 24 hours (system restored) + 8 hours (verify data, process missed transactions) = MTD 32 hours

* Student Registration:

RTO 72 hours (system restored) + 24 hours (process backlog of applications) = MTD 4 days

* Water Billing:

RTO 1 week (system restored) + 3 days (validate bills, handle customer calls) = MTD 10 days

### MTD vs. RTO Planning

* RTO: Focus on getting systems and processes working
* MTD: Focus on total organizational impact and resource planning
* Plan staffing and resources for the full MTD period, not just RTO

### Recovery Point Objectives (RPOs)

RPO answers: "How much data loss can we tolerate?" This is measured in time units (i.e., hours, days, etc.)

**Simple RPO Guidelines:**

* No data loss acceptable: Real-time backups required
* Minimal data loss acceptable: Daily backups may be sufficient
* Some data loss acceptable: Weekly backups may be sufficient
* Significant data loss acceptable: Monthly backups may work
* Data loss not relevant: Process doesn't depend on recent data

## Process Criticality Determination

**Simple Criticality Method:**

1. For each process, assess impacts at each time interval: 8 hours, 24 hours, 72 hours, 1 week, 1 month.
2. Find the highest impact score across all time intervals and impact categories
3. That highest score determines the process criticality level

**Criticality Levels:**

* Critical (4): Highest impact score of 4 anywhere in the assessment
* High (3): Highest impact score of 3, no 4s
* Medium (2)**:** Highest impact score of 2, no 3s or 4s
* Low (1): Highest impact score of 1

**Priority Categories Based on RTO:**

* Priority 1 (Immediate): RTO 8 hours or less
* Priority 2 (Urgent)**:** RTO 24 hours or less
* Priority 3 (Important): RTO 72 hours or less
* Priority 4 (Significant): RTO 1 week or less
* Priority 5 (Best Effort)**:** RTO Best Effort

## BIA Interview Process

For each essential process, conduct a brief interview with the process owner.

### Standard BIA Questions

Process Understanding

1. Walk me through what happens when this process works normally
2. What would prevent this process from working?
3. What other processes depend on this one working?

Impact Assessment

1. What happens if this process is down for 8 hours? 24 hours? 72 hours? 1 week? 1 month?
2. Are there times when this process is more critical? (refer to Critical Timing from process identification)
3. What's the longest this process has actually been down? What happened?

Recovery Requirements

1. How quickly do you need this process working again to avoid serious problems? (RTO)
2. How long after the process is "working" until you're truly back to normal operations? (Work Recovery Time)
3. How much recent data/work can you afford to lose and still function? (RPO) 10. Are there manual workarounds that could keep things going temporarily?

Dependencies

1. What systems, people, or facilities does this process absolutely require?
2. What information or materials do you need to have access to?

### Interview Tips

Keep It Conversational: This isn't an interrogation. You're trying to understand their world

Use Real Examples: "Remember when the server was down last year? How long before that became a real problem?"

Challenge Gently: If everything is "critical," ask "If you had to choose, which would you fix first?"

Think Worst-Case Scenarios: "What if this happened during your busiest time of year?"

### Completing the BIA Assessment

**Step 1: Gather Information**

* Interview process owners using the standard questions
* Document impacts at each time interval
* Note any special timing considerations
* Identify dependencies and requirements

**Step 2: Assign Ratings**

For each process and time period, assign impact ratings (1-4) for:

* Financial impact
* Operational impact
* Reputation impact

**Step 3: Determine Criticality and Priority**

* Find the highest impact score across all time intervals and categories
* Assign criticality level based on highest score
* Determine RTO based on when impacts first reach "High" or "Critical"
* Assign priority category based on RTO

**Step 4: Document Recovery Requirements**

* Recovery Time Objective (RTO)
* Work Recovery Time
* Maximum Tolerable Downtime (MTD = RTO + Work Recovery Time)
* Recovery Point Objective (RPO)

## BIA Results and Next Steps

### Using BIA Results

Your completed BIA provides:

* Objective priority rankings for continuity planning focus
* Recovery time targets for developing solutions
* Impact information for cost-benefit analysis of recovery options
* Dependencies that need to be addressed in planning

### Focus Areas for Business Continuity Planning

Priority 1 & 2 Processes

Require detailed continuity procedures and robust recovery solutions

Priority 3 Processes

Need solid continuity plans with moderate recovery solutions

Priority 4 & 5 Processes

Basic recovery approaches, addressed when resources are available after higher priorities

### Next Steps

1. Focus detailed continuity planning on Priority 1 and 2 processes first
2. Develop recovery strategies that meet your RTOs and RPOs
3. Document detailed continuity procedures for each priority process
4. Test your plans regularly, starting with highest priority processes

### Common BIA Mistakes to Avoid

Everything is Critical: If every process is critical, none of them are. Use the rating scale consistently.

Perfectionism: Don't spend weeks debating whether something is a "2" or "3" - close enough is good enough for planning purposes.

Ignoring Timing: Remember that criticality can change based on when incidents occur (reference Critical Timing from process identification).

Unrealistic RTOs: Very short RTOs require expensive solutions. Be realistic about what you can actually achieve.

Forgetting Dependencies: A process might not seem critical until you realize 5 other processes depend on it.

# Business Continuity Planning Glossary

**Alternate Facilities**: Locations, other than the primary facility, used to carry out essential functions during a continuity event. This includes other buildings, working from home (teleworking), and mobile office concepts.

**Alternate Procedures**: Modified methods for performing essential processes when normal resources or systems are unavailable. aka Alternate Operating Procedures (AOP)

**Business Continuity (BC)**: The capability of an organization to continue delivery of services at acceptable predefined levels following a disruptive event.

**Business Impact Analysis (BIA)**: The process of analyzing activities and the effect that a business disruption might have upon them. Used to determine recovery priorities and time requirements.

**Crisis:** A situation with a high level of uncertainty that disrupts the core activities and/or credibility of an organization and requires urgent action.

**Crisis Management Team (CMT)**: The group responsible for overall incident command, safety decisions, and coordination with emergency responders during a crisis.

**Critical Timings/Peak Critical Periods**: Times when a process is most critical or experiences highest demand (seasonal peaks, deadlines, etc.).

**Disaster Recovery (DR):** The plans an organization puts in place for responding to a catastrophic event. It involves the measures an organization takes to respond to an event and return to safe, normal operations as soon as possible.

**Essential Functions**: The critical activities performed by organizations that must continue or be quickly resumed after a disruption of normal activities.

**Essential Outcome**: The core result a process must achieve even during disruption - what absolutely cannot be compromised.

**Essential Records:** Records that are necessary for emergency response; protect the health, safety, property, and rights of residents; are necessary to resume or continue operations; would require massive resources to reconstruct; or document the history of communities and families. (Vital records refers to records like birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, and wills.)

**External Dependencies**: Vendors, contractors, or outside organizations that provide essential services for the process.

**Incident**: An unplanned interruption to a service or reduction in the quality of a service that might lead to a disruption, loss, emergency, or crisis.

**Internal Dependencies**: Other departments or processes within your organization that a process relies on to function.

**Maximum Tolerable Downtime (MTD)**: The total amount of time from when a disaster occurs until normal operations are fully restored (RTO + WRT).

**Mission Essential Functions (MEFs)**: Functions that must be continuous or resumed within 12 hours after an event and maintained for up to 30 days or until normal operations can be resumed.

**Normal Operations**: The broad functions undertaken by an organization during routine, day-to-day operations without disruption.

**Process**: A set of interrelated activities that transforms inputs into outputs to achieve a specific organizational outcome.

**Process Owner**: The person responsible for ensuring a process works properly and makes decisions about how it should be performed.

**Recovery**: The implementation of prioritized actions required to return an organization's processes and support functions to operational stability following an interruption.

**Recovery Point Objective (RPO)**: The point in time to which data can be recovered when a disaster occurs (i.e., the time between the event and the last successful data replication or backup). It focuses on data and is independent of the time it takes to get non-functional system components back on-line.

**Recovery Time Objective (RTO)**: The period of time following a disruption within which a service/product or activity must be resumed, or resources must be recovered to avoid an unacceptable level of impact.

**Resources:** All assets, people, skills, information, technology, premises, and supplies and information that an organization has to have available to use when needed, in order to operate and meet its objective.

**Work Recovery Time (WRT)**: The time needed after a process is restored to validate functionality, catch up on backlog, and return to normal operations.