Quick Start Guide: Pandemic Planning For Businesses

The goal of the *Quick Start Guide* is to provide businesses with seven easy steps they can take today to better prepare for the challenges faced in a pandemic event. This guide is not intended to be viewed as a tool with which to complete comprehensive business continuity planning. This guide is intended to address seven key areas that are the most helpful in quickly preparing a business to deal with the unique challenges a pandemic event presents. A basic introduction to business continuity planning is provided to give businesses a better sense of the context in which the pandemic planning activities fit. Upon completing the steps in this guide, businesses are encouraged to continue planning efforts.

This guide is intended to be used in addition to and in conjunction with existing workplace safety guidelines and is not intended to supplant other resources. It was purposefully developed for broad application so that businesses of different types and sizes could utilize it. Toward that end, this guide seeks to instill the key steps that each business should take without delineating the universe of possible activities within each step. Each business's planning efforts should be reflective of the issues most pertinent to that business and be cognizant of the business culture in which it will be operationalized.

The resource center at the end of this guide provides web page addresses for resources that will assist businesses in their education and planning efforts in relation to a pandemic event and general business continuity planning, as well as some sample templates.

If you have comments or questions about this guide feel free to contact either Grand Forks Public Health or the North Dakota State Emergency Management Program at the addresses below.

Del Streitz
Grand Forks Public Health Dept.
151 South 4th Street, Suite N301
Grand Forks, ND 58201-4735
(701) 787-8100
dstreitz@grandforksgov.com

Carol L. Cwiak
Emergency Management Program
North Dakota State University
Dept. 2350, P.O. Box 6050
Fargo, ND 58108-6050
(701) 231-5847
carol.cwiak@ndsu.edu

7 Steps to Readiness

+ Introduction to business continuity

Business continuity is the process by which businesses plan ahead to reduce their vulnerability to interruptions as well as increase their ability to resume operations in the event of an interruption. While it is not the intent of this guide to inform the entirety of businesses' planning efforts, it is important in the development of the pandemic planning piece to understand where it fits in the bigger picture.

Business continuity planning (BCP) typically follows these general planning steps:

- **Create a business continuity team**

  The business continuity team should be comprised of those members of the business whose expertise is necessary to plan comprehensively. Typically this means including representatives from different areas in your business that are key to maintaining operations. As an example, your team may include representatives from human resources, facilities, administration, operations, IT, safety and security.

- **Scope & assumptions**

  Prior to beginning the planning effort the scope and assumptions must be delineated. The scope addresses the extent of the planning (e.g., will all sites be included, will all operational levels be included, will all-hazards be included, etc.) and the assumptions address the premises the plan will be built upon (e.g., electricity will be available, facility will be available, employees will be able to make it in to work, etc.).

- **Assess current plans, policies & protocols**

  Most businesses have some basic plans, policies and protocols in place to deal with emergencies or events that may occur and disrupt business. Additionally, businesses also have a series of government safety standards that may also apply to their operations. These items need to be reviewed and evaluated by the planning team to determine the extent to which they are congruent (or conversely incongruent) with the other items under review; outdated; and, useful to the current planning effort.

  Some of the items businesses may include in this review include: employee training manuals; OSHA or other health/safety standards that your business must comply with; employment handbooks; policies relating to computer use and security; data backup procedures; evacuation procedures (e.g., written

procedures and marking of evacuation routes); basic safety documents; human resource procedures related to sick leave, training and employee disciplinary actions; specialized training materials and procedural instructions for large or dangerous equipment; and, local, state and federal ordinances pertinent to day-to-day operations and risk management planning items.

- ■ <u>Review insurance</u>

    Existing insurance polices should be reviewed to ensure that current coverage is adequate and not duplicative. Insurance companies should also be contacted to ascertain whether discounts are available for those businesses with continuity of operations plans. All insurance policy information (e.g., policy limits, renewal dates, and agent contact name and number) should be compiled and included in the plan and in an easily accessible off-site location.

- ■ <u>Collect basic information on employees, customers, creditors and vendors</u>

    Basic information on employees, customers, creditors and vendors must be gathered and centrally located in the planning document and at an easily accessible off-site location. The type of information collected about employees should contain at the least basic contact information (in-office and at home telephone and email) and an emergency contact person (with a telephone number and the relationship to the employee indicated).

    Customer, creditor and vendor information may be sensitive and closely-held information within your business and should be collected and handled with that in mind. In compiling this information relevant account numbers, sales representatives, and any other specific information that would be necessary to have during an event should be listed. In addition, alternate vendors should also be listed on the vendor list in the event that the primary vendor is unable to meet the business's needs during an event.

- ■ <u>Identify and detail critical functions (resources, equipment)</u>

    Critical functions are identified and detailed to allow the business to better prepare for an interruption of operations. In chronicling the detailed steps involved in performing each function as well as the resources and equipment necessary to the function's performance, the business can take necessary mitigatory steps to protect the function, invest in training additional personnel to perform the function, and make the necessary preparations to perform the function off-site if necessary. An information collection sheet for critical functions is included in the guide's resource center.

- <u>Risk assessment</u>

    The goal of a risk assessment is to better understand the risks that face the business. Risks are assessed based on probability, frequency, general impact (physical, financial, emotional, operational, etc.) and ability to recover. Risk assessment tools can vary from business to business based on the nature of the product or services provided. The risk assessment is foundational to later decisions regarding resource allocation, mitigation activities, training and exercising. A poorly done risk assessment leads to a poorly prepared business. All potential hazards/events should be assessed. A sample risk assessment tool is included in the guide's resource center.

- <u>Business impact analysis (BIA)</u>

    A BIA is the process by which you analyze your critical functions' vulnerabilities in light of your risks. The BIA is helpful in evaluating the depth of functions' vulnerability and in evaluating areas where mitigation will be valuable. It is also helpful in establishing function recovery strategies and timelines. While some functions may be vulnerable across multiple hazards or events, others may be uniquely vulnerable in only one type of hazard or event. Understanding the relative vulnerability of functions allows businesses to better allocate limited resources. A sample Business Impact Analysis (BIA) is included in the guide's resource center.

- <u>Function recovery strategy & timeline</u>

    Upon completion of the BIA the business is able to discuss recovery strategies and the timelines involved in standing back up operations. This may involve other sites, backup personnel, alternate approaches to a function, etc. Once the strategy is designed the necessary support for the recovery strategies can be put into place. This may include activities such as creating memorandums of understanding with backup sites, cross-training of employees, identification of alternate vendors, and the creation of policies and procedures.

- <u>Mitigation - assess, prioritize & implement</u>

    In the process of discovering critical functions' vulnerabilities, there is an opportunity to identify possible mitigation activities that will either reduce the hazard or event impact or completely remove people, property and the business's overall well-being from harm's way. Potential mitigation activities should be assessed, prioritized (by cost, criticality or both), and implemented. Many mitigation activities can be completed at no cost or at a relatively low cost. Examples of no cost and low cost activities include: moving computer

equipment to higher ground (or higher floors in the facility); off-site data storage; securing heavy objects; cross-training employees; elevating inventory; changing vendors or locating backup vendors; and, changing the resources or process in critical functions.

The ability to remove the potential for a negative outcome is a powerful proactive step; however, these type of expenditures can be difficult to support in a "what if" framework. This is where a strong risk assessment and BIA can be illustrative and supportive of the need. It is also helpful to remember that mitigatory steps are very effective in reducing the business's potential liability in an event.

■ <u>Plan compilation</u>

All the documents, lists and other items can now be compiled into "the plan". The plan should be stored in both a hard copy and electronic format, should be available both on and off-site, should be easily accessible and user friendly. It will be frequently modified (particularly over the first few years) and updated and as such should not be viewed as "completed". Ideally, planning is a process that is never "completed"; it is just more finely tuned as it progresses.

■ <u>Training & exercise schedule</u>

After the plan is compiled, a training and exercise schedule should be developed to map out the training necessary to implement the plan and the exercises required to test the effectiveness of the plan. Ideally, the training and exercise schedule will cover a 24 to 36 month period and include flexibility to address areas that emerge in exercises as being in need of additional training. Training and exercises should also include evaluative measures to ensure that they accomplish the goal they set out to and if not, to allow for changes in future trainings and exercises. Also, after action reports should be completed as a part of each exercise and any errors or omissions in the plan or training needs that become apparent during the exercise should be noted as requiring further attention.

■ <u>Communicate, train and exercise the plan</u>

A plan that is effective in implementation is a plan that has been thoroughly communicated, trained and exercised. The best plans only start on paper with a goal of integrating the actions and expectations into the business's

knowledge base and culture. This is accomplished by integrating the material across the business's operational policies and protocols, conducting regular training and practicing what the plan will look like in action (exercising the plan). In a crisis, employees will first revert to their training and existing knowledge base. For this reason businesses that prepare employees find that their employees are less panicked, more assured, and more capable in a crisis.

- **Plan maintenance/updating**

  Plans must be maintained and regularly updated. Planning is a process that continues to evolve and as such so must "the plan". A systematic review of the plan should occur every one or two years and updating (as it relates to changes in personnel, suppliers, etc.) should be ongoing (at least quarterly). All plan documents should have an update date in the footer and each update should be inserted into every existing copy of the plan. When multiple hard copies are circulated this updating may be more difficult. A schedule and procedure for maintenance and updates should be established upon the first compilation of the plan to ensure that the plan will remain viable and useful.

1 - Identify & detail critical functions

Not all the functions within a business are critical to its day-to-day operations. Prior to beginning any planning efforts, businesses must identify the critical functions that are necessary to continue operations during an emergency event. This entails the following process: 1) identify the function; 2) detail what is involved in the function (i.e., step-by-step if possible so that the function can be duplicated by someone who does not do it everyday - it is helpful to think the way one would when training a new trainee); 3) identify the resources necessary to perform that function (e.g., hardware, software, supplies, personnel, physical space, etc.); and 4) list all the personnel presently trained to perform the function.

In identifying and detailing critical functions businesses are typically shocked to learn how contained the knowledge base can be for any given function. Typically upon examining the depth of a critical function it is learned that only two or three individuals in the operation are versed in performing the function. If your administrative assistant is the only one who does payroll and the function has not been detailed, your business is one person away from not being able to perform that function. If the function has been detailed at least someone else can step into the role and work through the steps. If in addition to the detailing another employee (or two) is trained on how to perform the function, the business now has dramatically decreased its odds of losing the function based on absenteeism.

A sample information collection sheet is provided in the guide's resource center. This sheet provides a format for collecting the function information necessary to inform planning efforts. Ideally, this information should be collected electronically for ease of use and storage as well as printed and retained both on and off-site. An additional benefit of collecting this information is its value in reviewing positions and restructuring job duties. Too often businesses lose touch with the process and resources involved in critical functions. This planning step allows for a systems analysis overview of critical functions that can be helpful in streamlining operations, informing purchasing decisions and assessing mitigation options.

Once the functions have been identified and detailed, each department head can list the functions from most to least important and identify those functions that need greater employee depth. At this time functions can also be reviewed and grouped based on whether their performance is workplace specific or can be performed off-site. This grouping will be valuable in shaping solutions and preparing for events that interrupt critical functions and threaten the business's continued operations.

2 - Identify vulnerabilities & challenges

After the critical functions have been identified and detailed, the business can identify its vulnerabilities based on the hazards it faces. In this guide the focus is on a pandemic event, but the same method used in reviewing vulnerabilities in this type of event can be used for other hazard events as well. For the purpose of bringing businesses up to speed quickly, this step addresses underlying assumptions that apply to a pandemic event and the vulnerabilities and challenges that may emerge.

In a pandemic event the vulnerability analysis must be premised (at a minimum) on the following broad assumptions which translate into vulnerabilities for businesses:

1) There will be an absenteeism rate of 15-40% for an extended period of time;
2) Employees may have childcare and sick care responsibilities that increase the absenteeism rate;
3) Customers may need more or less of your product/service based on what it is;
4) Current sales and delivery methods may be interrupted or unavailable;
5) The spread of illness will be a primary concern for businesses;
6) Vendors will struggle with similar issues as those above;
7) Basic services (e.g., government services such as trash, street-cleaning, etc.) may be dramatically impacted or interrupted indefinitely; and,
8) Employees will be under extreme emotional distress based on fear of infection, illness and possible death of family and friends and economic distress.

Some of the vulnerabilities and challenges that businesses will face in this type of event are detailed below. Depending on the product or service a business supplies additional vulnerabilities may emerge. It is important to think about the impact the above assumptions will have on your business. The list provided below is to help begin the conversation in your business and is not intended to encompass all the vulnerabilities and challenges that may emerge during a pandemic event.

- ■ Workforce reduction challenges

    Absenteeism will create challenges in meeting customers' needs, performing critical functions and producing products and services. Many businesses are hard-pressed to endure for even a short period of time with an absenteeism rate of 10% or less. To address this vulnerability, businesses must examine what parts of their operations they can put on the back burner in order to maintain critical functions. Additionally, efforts to reduce infection and

disease spread, cross-training and allowing some functions to be performed off-site are helpful in dealing with this challenge.

- Critical function interruptions

    In addition to absenteeism, critical functions are vulnerable to interruptions based on a myriad of other challenges that may occur during a pandemic event; such challenges may include: shortages of necessary resources or supplies because of other businesses' vulnerability, government mandated rationing or closures; transportation restrictions; and, interruption of key utilities and government functions.

- Business product/service utilization

    Based on the product or service a business provides a pandemic event could result in either reduced or increased business; both possibilities have unique challenges. With reduced business, the focus will be more on sustaining the business through this slow period. The impact on the business's revenue may impact the business's ability to continue paying employees, particularly those that are home sick or providing care for someone else.

    With increased business, the challenge is being prepared enough to handle it and to think through the possible glitches that may affect your ability to produce and deliver your product or service. Most businesses can fairly assess whether the need for their products or services will decrease or increase during a pandemic event. Some businesses recognizing a potential decrease may be able to rethink their product lines and services to make them more viable in a pandemic event.

    It is important to remember that your business's ability to maintain operations and perform under the pressure of a pandemic event will have an impact on your business's reputation – for better or worse. Even if a business survives a pandemic event economically, a blow to a business's reputation can be just as deadly in the long run and this consideration should be factored into the planning effort.

- Travel and transportation

    Businesses that focus on direct sales and deliveries will need to assess the viability of that approach in a pandemic event and the best way to conduct business safely. Conversely, businesses that focus on storefront sales may need to look at delivery to door options. The ways in which businesses serve customers may be dramatically altered and each business should consider

viable alternatives to its current mode of operation. Preparing for these alternatives may require activities such as modification of current policies and procedures, additional employee training, additional health precautions and assurances to customers.

In a worst case scenario transportation corridors could be closed or travel greatly restricted. Current delivery transportation options that the vast majority of businesses rely on will be likewise challenged with absenteeism and other issues that arise out of the pandemic event which will impact the availability and viability of timely delivery options.

- Communication

It is expected that in a pandemic event communication methods such as the telephone and internet will experience a dramatic increase in usage. The availability of these communication methods is an assumption that most businesses build their continuity plans around. Advance planning regarding communication with employees, customers and vendors may be the difference between a business that survives the pandemic and one that does not. Communication protocols should be established in advance of an event and shared with employees, customers and vendors (see step 4 in this guide for more information on communication protocols).

- Parts and supplies

Many businesses have moved to a just-in-time inventory approach which results in a smaller inventory stockpile. Getting additional inventory timely in a pandemic event may be problematic. At the least, businesses should plan on doubling their wait time between order and delivery and as much as is practicable should build in a back supply that would cover 30 days of operations. This does not just apply to product or service specific supplies but also general supplies the business uses such as office, printer, restroom, cleaning and first aid supplies. Making a quick trip to the store may not be an option and even if it is, store supplies may be dramatically impacted by reduced product production and delivery delays. Businesses that rely on machinery as part of a critical function should be prepared for the most common repairs by having on hand the necessary parts and supplies. Also important is to have a backup supply of things such as light bulbs, batteries and other day-to-day items that have an indefinite operating life.
Additionally, note that given reduced production and supply there may be rationing of some items by both private sector businesses and the government. Businesses should check with vendors now and seek memorandums of understanding that memorialize that the vendor will be able to supply the

business's needs in a pandemic event. Businesses should also identify and build relationships with alternate vendors who may be able to supply them if the primary vendor is unable to meet the agreement.

The location of vendors may matter in such an event. Businesses should have access to both in-state and out-of-state vendors if possible. For each item a business must have for a critical function there should be a vendor depth of at least three. If that depth cannot be accomplished a greater back supply is recommended. When a business relies solely on one vendor for a key item, the business is vulnerable to the vendor's failure. That level of dependency on another business is risky and planning discussions should address how to best deal with the level of vulnerability it creates for the business.

- Outside services

Many businesses utilize outside services for janitorial, catering, dry cleaning, plant care, etc. Businesses must decide if these services will continue during a pandemic event; and if so, under what framework. Some services, such as janitorial services may find a higher demand for their services based on the need for more frequent cleaning of repeatedly touched surfaces. Businesses that anticipate a need for additional services from an outside service provider in a pandemic event should develop a memorandum of understanding now to ensure that the business's needs are met.

- Policy issues: absence, health care and insurance, compensation

All businesses should review their policies that address absence, extended absence, health care and insurance, and compensation. Buffers within the business' system for leave should be examined to allow for employee absence to be paid without unduly burdening the business. This may mean allowing employees to utilize paid leave such as personal or vacation days when they are out sick and have already used all their sick leave. It also may mean allowing for unpaid absence when all the other paid leave options are extended (the Family Medical Leave Act may provide some support for this). The business must decide if it will subsidize or pay entirely for flu shots; whether such shots will be mandatory to continue working at the site; whether employees who have infected family members will be allowed to come to the workplace; and, whether mandatory healthy behavior protocols will be put in place.
Questions about the continuation of health insurance during a pandemic should be discussed. Businesses must decide whether health insurance will continue to be paid for an employee who has an extended absence or dies. Even if a business is committed to continuing the coverage for the family,

insurance providers should be consulted to confirm that family coverage can continue in the event of the death of the primary insured party.

The most difficult issue for businesses lies in compensation. Whether employees will be paid when absent and at what rate has been an issue that has been discussed for years. Businesses must think pragmatically about what is feasible in a pandemic event where revenues may be down and the business may need to close for extended periods of time.

- <u>Workforce re-entry</u>

  Businesses should create a policy and clear procedures on how workforce re-entry will be handled after an absence. Businesses should address when employees will be allowed to return to work and the parameters that will be set on "wellness" (i.e., no current temperature, 24 hours without a temperature after a flu episode, limited coughing, limited interaction with infected individuals, etc.).

  Other considerations such as dealing with employees' re-adjustment to the workplace after the possible loss of close family members, friends and colleagues must be addressed. Businesses should discuss whether employees' mental health status will be measured and attended to, as well as whether there will be mandatory leave for those employees who have lost family members. Businesses must decide whether an employee with a compromised mental health status will be allowed to return to work at all; and, if so, has the business then opened itself up to potential liability if the employee acts out against other employees, customers or vendors? If businesses have an existing relationship with a mental health provider, conversations should be had with the provider to ascertain what type of assistance will be provided to employees and what type of mechanisms can be used to evaluate an employee's mental health fitness to return to work.

3 - Classify employees

To shortcut the time and energy involved in pandemic planning efforts all employees should be designated as belonging in one of four classifications based on the nature of their work with the business – from essential to non-essential (see classification chart on page16). These classifications allow your business to better plan for the potential on and off-site challenges. Employee classification also helps identify those employees that are good choices for cross-training.

Once each employee has been classified, factors associated with each classification must be addressed. Factors can vary based on the type of business. It is helpful in the delineation of factors to speak to a few key employees in each classification. Employees can offer deeper insight into the factors that will affect planning than can typically be offered by supervisors.

The costs associated with each classification, be they mitigatory pre-event costs (i.e., home set-up of equipment and cross-training) or a result of the operating structure during an event (e.g., will there be reduced output, will there be additional costs involved in 24/7 operations, etc.) must be discussed and evaluated to determine if they are costs the business can afford.

Decisions about how healthcare costs and pay will be handled must be addressed for each classification. It is recommended that regardless of the classification existing healthcare provisions continue to be subsidized. In regard to pay, decisions need to be made at each classification level regarding how pay will be handled. The options for pay vary from enhancement pay (e.g., an additional $2 an hour for those working on-site during pandemic event operations), to actual pay, to static pay (e.g., regular salary or an average of hourly pay over the past few months to create a static pay amount), to output pay (e.g., per unit pay), to reduced (e.g. three–quarters or half the static pay amount) or no pay.

Employees should be advised either in the employee handbook or as an addendum to the employee handbook how healthcare and pay will be handled in a pandemic event. In the event of absences based on illness, pay sources such as sick-leave and vacation pay can be utilized as options for supplementing lost pay. Also, note should be taken of the opportunity for employees to take leave without pay under the Family Medical Leave Act. Other issues that arise during classification discussions that are pertinent to employees should also be in the handbook (e.g., childcare provisions, mental health care, cross-training expectations, etc.).

Employee Classification Chart

Classification 1	Classification 2	Classification 3	Classification 4
Essential to operations & must work at physical work location	Essential to operations & must work, but can work from home	Not essential to operations, but can work from home	Not essential to operations, not necessary for them to work
Factors to consider: triggers for essential operations only mode; creation of social distancing norms within the workplace; moving to a 24/7 schedule; cross-training; implementation of rigorous stay-at-home policy; and addressing essential operations manpower depth	Factors to consider: required resources and equipment; testing of capability; back-up IT support; cross-training; employee illness; and possible change in expectations to outputs instead of hours worked	Factors to consider: cross-train for essential operations and test cross-train capabilities monthly	Factors to consider: cross-train for essential operations and test cross-train capabilities monthly
Cost: reduced productivity based on workplace social distancing; and additional costs associated with 24/7 operations	Cost: at home set-up & support; monthly testing of home setup; and potential reduced productivity	Cost: maintaining healthcare & pay; if cross-trained – same issues as cross-trained classification	Cost: maintaining healthcare & pay; if cross-trained – same issues as cross-trained classification
Pay issues: actual hours, static amount or pay enhancement	Pay issues: actual hours, static amount or output	Pay issues: depends on utilization – if no utilization - static pay, reduced pay or no pay	Pay issues: depends on utilization – if no utilization - static pay, reduced pay or no pay
Other: childcare provisions, physical health & mental health	Other: power shortages, equipment failure & mental health	Other: employee morale & retention, maintaining cross-train competency & mental health	Other: employee morale & retention, maintaining cross-train competency & mental health

4 - Create a communication protocol

Communication with employees, customers and vendors is an important part of maintaining business operations. In a pandemic event this communication may be more challenging to maintain even at the most basic level. To ensure that basic communication is maintained, a communication protocol should be established that addresses the procedures and mechanisms that will be used for communication. These protocols should focus on addressing communication needs with three main audiences: employees, customers and vendors and utilize any or all of the following mediums: telephone, internet, television, radio (public/external and business-centric/internal) and printed information (this option is only available to some businesses).

It is easiest to create the protocols by focusing on one audience at a time. The first and arguably most important audience to address is employees. With employees the following areas should be addressed: employee check-in (i.e., if the employee is ill or unable to come to work based on caretaking responsibilities); daily updates regarding scheduling, reporting sites and operational procedures for those on the job; and, general information regarding the pandemic, full-capacity resumption timelines, and generic pay and healthcare matters.

More than one communication mechanism should be used for both access and redundancy purposes. A secure web site for employee access and service provider email accounts are valuable tools for communicating with employees, but may not be accessible to all employees off-site or may suffer provider interruptions during a pandemic event when the reliance on internet service providers is projected to climb exponentially. Recorded telephone messages are another communication avenue that can be utilized. By using keyed entry choices a variety of messages can be conveyed – some can remain static for a period of time while others can be updated daily. This approach requires some existing phone capabilities. Smaller businesses with only one or two lines can identify a secondary line as an employee call-in line and simply let that line go to a recording in a pandemic event.

Television and radio can also be used, but they are less reliable and do not offer the opportunity to provide anything but basic information which is often too limited to meet most businesses' needs. Businesses that have access to a radio system internal to the business (such as those used in trucking) may be able to rely on that system to convey some information.

Businesses should designate two mechanisms for communicating with employees either as being "in-the-alternative" communication methods (i.e., if you do not have

internet, then use the telephone method) or as primary & secondary (i.e., the business will utilize internet, but if that fails will use the telephone method as a backup).

When dealing with customers, businesses should consider the ways in which customers access the business. For some businesses, this entails visiting a web page, for others it may be via a telephone call or visiting a physical business location. The way that the customer accesses the business should be one of the communication mechanisms used. That means communication for some businesses will include signs on business doors or fliers that accompany business deliveries (which can be tricky where the spread of disease is concerned). The same mechanisms used for employee communication can also be used for customers (albeit with different access points than those used by employees). The challenge is in letting customers know how to access this information. Using the advertised contact number or a known web site for the business is easier than using television or radio.

The type of information that should be disseminated to customers is: the business status (open or closed) and the hours of operation (or expected reopening date); changes in the business's operating procedures (e.g., all sales are going online and there will be no more in-store pickups, delivery will now be the only option); the measures being taken to protect employees and customers; the number or web site where more information can be found; and, the value the business places on the customer and appreciation for the customer's patience and understanding during this trying health crisis.

The approach with vendors can be similar to the approaches above, but should also include pre-event conversations and agreements on protocols to be used. In addition to establishing communication protocols it is important to discuss what measures will be taken in regard to products and service delivery to lower the chance of disease spread between the businesses. In talking to vendors about communication protocols and interaction during a pandemic event, the business may discover vendors do not have pandemic plans in place. If the vendor supplies a product or service that is essential to the business, businesses should investigate alternate vendors that do have such plans.

All communication protocols should be shared with employees, customers and vendors well in advance of an event and tested occasionally to ensure that they operate in the way the business envisions they will.

5 - Cross-train employees

The key to dealing with the absenteeism involved in a pandemic (which is estimated to be between 15-40% over a prolonged period of as long as 18 months) is building greater depth in each critical function. Under normal operating conditions, critical functions should have a depth of three (two if the function is easily replicated and detailed with specificity). In planning for a pandemic event the goal is to double or triple your depth through cross-training. The ability to double or triple depth is tied to the number of employees, their classifications, the resources the business has available, and the technical or educational expertise required for the function. Not all functions can be easily cross-trained (e.g., electrical lineman).

In examining cross-training options it is best to both cross train within the classifications and across the classifications. When cross-training within classifications there are typically obvious areas where cross-training can be easily accomplished. Cross-training that is contained within a specific department or unit is less time and cost-intensive. Employees that work together in the same department or unit on a day-to-day basis are more likely to understand how the function fits into their overall operations, are easier to put in place for once a month on-the-job refresher training, and are more likely to retain the training.

In cross-training on this level it is important to note a couple of issues. First, employees that work closely together in one department or unit may be absent at the same time at a higher rate than across the remainder of the business. Cross-training within the department is good, but this proviso underscores the rationale for cross-training outside the department.

Second, while swap training is a good approach (Mary trains for Sue's functions and vice versa), it is problematic if the function consumes an employee full-time and if both employees in the swap perform critical functions. In swap training, try and pair employees that do not perform a critical function with those that do. Also, be cognizant of creating swap training scenarios wherein the function only accounts for a percentage of the employee's overall job description. If the swap training pairs employees who each spend 50% of their time doing different critical functions the ability to perform two critical functions can now be built into one employee.

In preparing for a pandemic event it is important to look at cross-training across the classifications. This may mean having to move outside existing departments or operational units to create the required depth. In this situation it is important to think of activities in "skill set families". Employees who routinely work with one type of menu-driven computer software that serves a function not designated as

critical are a good match for critical functions that use menu-driven computer software. There are many "skill set families" within each business. Examples include: computer skills, organizational or logistical skills, technical skills, and management skills.

Cross-trained employees must regularly practice their cross-trained skill to retain it. It is recommended that employees perform in their cross-trained capacity at least once a month. It is important that not all cross-trained employees have their skills reinforced at the same time. Cross-trained employees should have an opportunity to work with the primary employees and other cross-trained employees on these performance days. The greater the exposure cross-trained employees have to the breadth of employees they may be working with in their cross-trained capacity, the better.

Cross-training comes with additional considerations that must be addressed. Will cross-trained employees be paid at the cross-trained position wage when they are doing the position in earnest? If the function is one to be performed off-site, can the business afford to outfit cross-trained employees? What is the down time and are there any potential issues if cross-trained employees are set-up for off-site capability after the onset of a pandemic? Will productivity of cross-trained employees be lesser in the short-term? What types of errors are most likely to occur during the performance of the function and how can those being cross-trained be best prepared for those? Does this affect insurance coverage, bonding, additional training mandates, human resource requirements, etc. in relation to the cross-trained employees? Will the business incur additional potential liability with a cross-trained employee? Do cross-training expectations need to be worked into job descriptions, employee handbooks and employee evaluations?

While cross-training can seem complex given the discussion above, in practice it is the only way to guarantee that your business is able to maintain the employee depth that may be necessary. Spending time on the dialogue on the front-end can alleviate many of the challenges in effectively using cross-trained employees.

6 - Implement healthy workplace policies

One of the most effective things a business can do to combat the effects of a pandemic is to implement healthy workplace policies. These policies should address employee behaviors, workplace accommodations, stay-at-home and return-to-work policies, and repercussions for noncompliance. Businesses should recognize that strong policies and procedures in this type of event can not only safeguard employee health and minimize business operations, but also help protect the business from potential liability based on a claim of negligence.

Businesses should create an environment where healthy behaviors are fostered. Signs that illustrate proper hand washing technique should be prominently posted in every restroom. Hand sanitizer should be available in key locations throughout the business facilities and in employees work areas. Posters reinforcing proper cough and sneeze technique should be utilized and tissues should be readily available. Employees should be encouraged to throw a tissue out immediately after sneezing or coughing into it. Employees should be cautioned about touching their faces with their hands and should be encouraged to avoid physical contact with others in the workplace.

Employees should be provided antibacterial cleaning cloths and encouraged to regularly wipe down their workspace. Areas of high contact (e.g., door knobs, hand rails, elevator buttons, and entry lock key pads) should be cleaned regularly to lessen the potential of spreading infection. Employees should not share telephones or keyboards (if sharing must occur, the items should be thoroughly wiped down with an antibacterial cleaning cloth prior to use by a different employee).

For those employees that must work at the business location (as opposed to at home) the business should employ social distancing practices that maintain a distance of at least six feet between employees. Meetings should not be held in a conference room where attendees must sit in close proximity. Meetings should be held either over the phone or electronically via intranet or internet.

Alternative work schedules should be created to minimize the number of employees in the same area. Businesses that normally operate from 9-5 may need to begin around the clock operations to maintain a healthy workplace. Alternative scheduling is also helpful in the event schools are closed as it allows parents to take opposite shifts so that neither parent needs to miss work. Alternative scheduling can result in increased productivity, but employees may find the relative isolation a bit unsettling. Alternative scheduling may require additional security and support needs and will result in increased electricity usage. If a business is considering putting alternative

scheduling in place, insurance provisions, city codes, worker safety regulations, etc. should be checked to ensure that the business remains compliant with mandates.

Businesses should put in place rigorous stay-at-home and return-to-work policies. This requires specific delineation about the triggers that would cause an employee to stay at home and the conditions that must be met for return to work. Typically, business policies inadvertently encourage employees to come to work when sick by requiring doctor notes, limiting sick days available and using days absent as part of an evaluation assessment. Rigorous stay-at-home and return-to-work policies require that very specific parameters on both illness and wellness be set. This may include indicating an acceptable temperature range, an absence of repetitive coughing, no outward appearance of illness, etc.

Stay-at-home polices may also address exposure to an infected person. In exposure restrictions there may be secondary questions as to extent of exposure. Working out at the same gym as a confirmed case is not the same as providing care for a child with a confirmed case. This is a touchy area and one that is most likely to result in employees minimizing the extent of their exposure. This is also very difficult to police unless it is a known family illness that the employee took time off to provide care for. If exposure restrictions are put in place they should be emphasized as part of the business's efforts to maintain a healthy workplace for all employees. In that framework, employees are more likely to comply and pressure their co-workers to comply.

All healthy workplace policies should have repercussions for non-compliance (up to and including termination). Employees should be informed that a disregard for these policies is a disregard for the business's continued operation. While most employees care enough about themselves, fellow workers and the business's viability to comply absent the threat of discipline, there seems to always be at least one employee who ignores the rules. Employees that are found to be non-compliant should be written up and the focus of the discipline should be insubordination with existing policy. The acknowledgment that the employee signed (see step 7 in this guide) will come in handy in supporting the insubordination disciplinary action should there ever be any question regarding the fairness or validity of the action. Should the business create policy and not enforce it, the business is left open to litigation from employees who relied on the reasonable enforcement of the policies to help keep them safe and became ill because the policies were not reasonably enforced.

7 - Educate your employees

The final step in preparing for a pandemic is educating employees about the business's plan, policies, procedures and expectations. Every employee should be mandated to attend an informational meeting that explains how the business will address key issues in a pandemic event. As a part of this informational meeting employees should be given a folder that includes pertinent information on policies and procedures related to operational, human resource and healthy workplace initiatives. Additionally, information on individual preparedness should be included. The information in the folder should be briefly reviewed in the meeting. Employees should be verbally informed at the meeting that any violation of the policies and procedures set forth in the folder will result in disciplinary action, up to and including, termination.

Employees should be asked to more deeply review the information in the folder at home and to sign an acknowledgement that indicates that they have reviewed and understood the material (individual items in the folder should be listed with check boxes so that the employee has to actually check off each item) and that they are aware that violation of the polices and procedures in relation to such an event will result in disciplinary action, up to and including, termination. The form should provide a space for the employee to print and sign their name and it should also be dated. The return of the form must be required of all employees and it should be returned within a week of the informational meeting. The business should indicate to employees at the time the folder is distributed where employees should direct any questions they may have regarding the information provided. Signed acknowledgements should be placed in employees' files.

The folder should be retained at the employees' home and should contain at a minimum: the communication protocol for employees; healthy workplace policy and procedure information; a Frequently Asked Questions sheet on absence, health care and insurance, and compensation issues; and, a pamphlet on individual preparedness.

This informational meeting is an opportunity for the business to assure employees that steps are being taken to protect them and their jobs. If possible, the top executives of the business should at least make a brief statement at the meeting to emphasize the importance of the message and the level of value placed on informing employees of the business's preparedness actions. Informed employees are more likely to act rationally and stick with the business in a pandemic event.

+ Resource center

The goal of the resource center is to supply a few basic templates as well as web site suggestions for additional resources to both enhance your pandemic planning and preparedness efforts and to facilitate your continued continuity planning. Resources for employee preparedness are also included to enable businesses to help inform their employees' preparedness efforts.

The below resources are just a small sampling of the many resources available online. Businesses are also encouraged to contact sector-specific (e.g., health, transportation, finance, energy, etc.) national level representative organizations for additional sector-focused planning assistance. Those sectors that are deemed critical infrastructure sectors by the Department of Homeland Security (see page 7 of the Critical Infrastructure Pandemic Planning Guide for a list) should take the time to review those materials and resources specifically.

Business pandemic planning resources:

Business Planning Checklist	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf
Flu.gov- workplace planning	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html
CIDRAP Business Source	http://www.cidrapsource.com/source/index.html
CDC- workplace guidance	http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/workplace.htm
Critical Infrastructure Pandemic Planning Guide	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/CIKRpandemicInfluenzaGuide.pdf
King County- business planning resources	http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu/businesses.aspx
San Mateo- planning template	http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/vgn/images/portal/cit_609/18/23/898776981businesstemplate-101206finaldraftandforms.pdf

Pandemic information and educational resources for businesses:

ND Department of Health	http://www.ndflu.com/swineflu/
Centers for Disease Control	http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu
World Health Organization	http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html
Flu.gov	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/
Trust for America's Health	http://www.healthyamericans.org/report/64/pandemic-flu-frontlines
H1N1 News & Resources	http://www.emssolutionsinc.wordpress.com/
FL Public Health - 5th Guy	http://www.5thguy.com/
Take the Lead	http://www.pandemicflu.gov/takethelead/index.html
All-Hands Community	http://www.all-hands.net

Personal pandemic & general preparedness resources to share with employees:

Ready.gov	http://www.ready.gov/america/index.html
Shelter-In-Place	http://www.ci.fargo.nd.us/CityInfo/Departments/Fire/GeneralInformation/Shelter-In-Place/
CIDRAP	http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/content/influenza/panflu/resources/personpanprep.html
Ready Moms Alliance	http://www.readymoms.org/
Diversity Preparedness.org	http://www.diversitypreparedness.org/Topic/Subtopic/Record-Detail/18/topicId__15767/subtopicId__15901/search__pandemic/resourceId__17367/
National Organization on Disability	http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=1564
King County Public Health	http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/preparedness/pandemicflu.aspx

General business continuity planning resources:

Ready Business	http://www.ready.gov/business/index.html
Ready Business Mentoring Guide	http://www.ready.gov/business/mentor/index.htm
Continuity Central	http://www.continuitycentral.com
FEMA Guide for Business & Industry	http://www.fema.gov/pdf/business/guide/bizindst.pdf
Open for Business	http://www.disastersafety.org/resource/resmgr/pdfs/OpenForBusiness_new.pdf
SBA Disaster Planning Guide	http://www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance/disasterpreparedness/index.html
Contingency Planning & Management	http://www.contingencyplanning.com/

The templates that follow are intended as examples and should be modified accordingly to best fit individual businesses' needs. There are no absolute ways to gather or store information in the continuity planning arena. Businesses should use the formats that work best for them which may mean taking bits and pieces from a variety of other documents.

http://www.grandforksgov.com/publichealth/documents/quickstartguidepandemicsforbusiness.pdf

General Risk Assessment Tool

Hazard/Event	Frequency (0 - 5)	Physical Safety Impact (0 - 5)	Emotional Impact (0 - 5)	Economic Impact (0 - 5)	Reputation Impact (0 - 5)	Recovery Difficulty Impact (0 - 5)	Sub-total: Frequency + Impacts	Probability of Hazard/ Event (0 - 3)	Total: Probability x Sub-total

0 = no likelihood/impact; 5 = highest likelihood/impact

The columns offered in this example are purposely generic. Businesses should determine what factors matter most to their assessment and include them. Other factors such as the impact a hazard or event has on the local community (e.g., flooding or tornado) or the global community may affect a business (e.g., pandemic) and may be valuable to include in the risk assessment tool.

Acknowledgement is given to NDSU Business Continuity and Crisis Management students whose discussions over time have served to hone risk assessment tools to be more user friendly, accurate, and business specific.

Business Impact Analysis

Function: _____

Completed by: _____

Date: _____

Hazard/Event	Impact on Function (0 - 5)	Length of Interrupt[1] (0 - 5)	Function Impact on Other Functions (0 - 5)	Reliance on Outside Support to Resume Function (0 - 5)	Cost of Function Repair (0 - 5)	Impact of Function Loss for 24+ Hours (0 - 5)	Sub-total	Probability of Hazard/ Event (0 - 3)	Total: Probability x Sub-total

1: 0= no interrupt
   1= less than 4 hours
   2= 4-8 hours
   3= 8-16 hours
   4= 16-24 hours
   5= more than 24 hours

In detailing interruption times, businesses should use timeframes that make sense to them. Interruption times can be measured in increments from minutes to days and can be varied (for the sake of analysis) from function to function.

Critical Function & Resources Information Collection Sheet

Business unit or department:	

Business function:	

Business function description:	

Detailed steps to complete this function:	

Supplies, equipment, additional resources etc. required for this function and their provider:	

If this function has to be performed at a specific time or on a specific schedule state specifics:	

Does this function require the use of a specific location or have unique facility requirements?	

Names of employees trained to perform this function (indicate "P"-primary, "S"-secondary, "CT"-cross-trained):	

For every normal business day that this function cannot be performed estimate the following:

Loss of revenue:		Increased costs:	

Fines or penalties due to missed deadlines:		Regulatory fines or penalties due to missed deadlines:	

Legal liability personal damage public harm:		Loss of good will, public image, embarrassment:	

If this function can be performed for a period of time at a reduced operating efficiency state at what efficiency and for what duration:	

Additional information:	

Name of person completing this form:		Date form completed:	

Do not complete this section – for department head to complete only

Can this function be performed off-site?		Does position have sufficient employee depth? If no, additional depth necessary.	

Estimated cost of off-site performance (include equipment, supplies, off-site support and training):	

Additional information:	

Name of person reviewing this form:		Date reviewed:	