

Continuity of Operations (COOP) Preparedness of NCAA Division I Athletic Departments

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Introduction

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), continuity planning is a fundamental responsibility of public institutions and private entities to US citizens. Colleges and universities are no exception to the rule. Many colleges and universities have crisis management plans; however, most do not include procedures that provide for displaced athletes, or alternate facilities to perform their sport (Wolverton, 2005). According to Wheatman (2001), athletic departments must be proactive in preparing for unexpected events that may result in loss of revenue, student displacement, or sport program elimination. The logistical problems faced in the aftermath of sport emergencies could be prevented through proper planning (Fried, 2010). Previous studies conducted at NCAA Division 1 athletic departments revealed gaps in risk management, emergency preparedness, and training and exercises (Baker, Connaughton, Zhang, & Spengler, 2007; Beckman, 2006; Cunningham, 2007; Hall, Fos, Marciani, & Zhang, 2011). There is currently no research examining the continuity of operations (COOP) preparedness of college athletic departments. The purpose of this study is to examine the COOP preparedness of NCAA Division 1 athletic departments and determine whether there are significant differences among athletic programs based on geographic location; conference membership; student enrollment; presidential declared disaster experience; athletic budget; and type of institution (public vs. private).

The National Continuity Policy Implementation Plan defines continuity of operations as the continuation of essential functions and services across a broad spectrum of hazards, such as natural, manmade, or technological emergencies (Petersen, 2007). This can be achieved through the development, maintenance, and training and exercise of a COOP plan. Henderson (2005) states that even if a university has a COOP plan in place, each organizational unit within that university should be responsible for its own specific disaster preparation and response assignments. This includes university athletic departments. The FEMA Continuity Program Management Cycle (CPMC) provides the following standards for COOP planning and preparedness: essential functions; delegation of authority; orders of succession; continuity facilities; communications; vital records management; human capital; test, training, and exercise programs; devolution of control and direction; reconstitution operations; program plans and procedures; risk management; budgeting and acquisition of resources; and continuity plan implementation (FEMA, 2009). These standards served as the framework for COOP preparedness in this study.

Methods

Participants of this study included a stratified, voluntary sample of athletic directors and facility directors from NCAA Division 1 athletic programs (N=344). Approximately 91 participants successfully completed the online survey for a response rate of 26%. The survey instrument addressed two separate categories: 1) continuity of operations preparedness (26-items); and 2) general demographic information (geographic location, conference membership, student enrollment, presidential disaster experience, athletic budget, and type of institution). Continuity of operations preparedness questions were derived from the FEMA CPMC standards. Question items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale and categories were defined as: 1 = no progress (no progress has been made toward achieving the identified continuity requirement); 2 = limited progress (preliminary efforts have been initiated such as plans to develop this aspect of the capability); 3 = moderate progress (significant efforts are underway but important gaps remain); 4 = substantial progress (efforts in this area are established and mature, with few non-significant gaps); and 5 = objective achieved (requirement is fully achieved with regard to this capability) (FEMA Continuity Evaluation Tool, 2009). The total score from the 26-items was used to measure the institution's level of preparedness. The survey instrument was tested for content and face validity using a panel of experts (n=4). Data analysis included descriptive statistics and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with an alpha level set at 0.05.

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Results

FEMA Region 1 (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont) reported the highest level of preparedness (3.83 +/- 0.63). Three conferences reported means under 3.00, including Missouri Valley (2.65 +/- 0.23), Southern (2.60 +/- 0.78), and Southeastern (2.78 +/- 0.78). The Sun Belt Conference had the highest level of preparedness (3.63 +/- 0.93). Institutions with 5,001 to 10,000 students reported the lowest level of preparedness (3.35 +/- 0.82). Interestingly, institutions that had experienced a presidential declared disaster reported lower levels of preparedness (3.28 +/- 1.27) than institutions that had not experienced a presidential disaster (3.43 +/- 0.78). Private institutions reported higher levels of preparedness (3.51 +/- 0.72) than public institutions (3.41 +/- 0.84). The ANOVA yielded non-significant findings related to geographic location; conference membership; student enrollment; presidential disaster experience; and type of institution. However, there was a statistically significant difference for COOP preparedness in relation to budget ($F(3, 85) = 3.135, p = .030$). A post hoc test was conducted using Tukey's HSD test. Statistically significant differences were reported between the 9.5-14.5 million and the 14.5-27 million groups. Further examination of the question items reveals that schools are better prepared in areas of identifying essential functions (3.65 +/- 0.94), delegations of authority (3.76 +/- 0.98), and communications (3.62 +/- 1.02). Institutions scored low in relation to recovery and reconstitution (2.94 +/- 1.08), development of training plans (2.88 +/- 1.26), and conducting exercises (2.79 +/- 1.21).

Discussion/Implications

Continuity of operations preparedness of NCAA division I schools overall fell below 4.0 on a 5.0 scale, indicating that significant efforts are underway but important gaps remain. Furthermore, some athletic conferences reported scores below 3.0, indicating very limited progress. There were no statistically significant differences based on geographic location, conference membership, student enrollment, presidential disaster experience, and type of institution. These findings oppose the geographic proximity, temporal proximity, size of organization, and ownership of organization (private vs. public) as influential factors for COOP proposed by Dunaway (2010) and Woodman (2007). Athletic departments should be concerned with the perceived lack of COOP preparedness. Specifically, there is a need for improvement in training and exercises which support the previous studies of Beckman (2006) and Baker, et al. (2007). The NCAA governing body should address gaps and aid policy makers in the implementation of standard COOP measures. In conclusion, athletic departments should review and adhere to FEMA's guidelines and standard procedures for COOP preparedness.