

What Can't Stop

Time: About 20 minutes **Who to involve:** You, plus anyone who takes requests for GIS work

Why this matters

When a hurricane, cyberattack or building closure hits, you will not be able to do everything. The first step in continuity planning is deciding, ahead of time, which GIS services have to keep going and which can wait.

Continuity planners call the must-keep-going work your essential functions. You will find your top three here. The other worksheets build on them.

Step 1. List the GIS services you provide

Write down each service your GIS team delivers. Be specific. "GIS support" is too broad. "Keeping 911 address points current" is just right. Aim for 6 to 10 services.

GIS service	Who relies on it	What happens if it stops for a day?
<i>Example: Emergency maps and dashboards for the EOC (Emergency Operations Center)</i>	<i>Emergency management, EOC staff</i>	<i>Decisions are made without current maps of damage, shelters and closures</i>
<i>Example: Public web map updates</i>	<i>General public</i>	<i>Maps stay a little out of date. Little immediate harm</i>

Tip: think about the requests you got during your last emergency activation, not just your everyday work.

Step 2. Test each service

Go down your list and ask three questions about each service. If the answer to any one of them is yes, put a star next to it.

- ☐ Does it support life safety or emergency response? (For example, 911 addressing or EOC mapping.)
- ☐ Is it required by law, regulation, contract or a formal agreement?
- ☐ If it stopped, would other essential work stop too? (For example, the platform everything else runs on.)

Step 3. Choose your top three

From your starred services, pick the three that would cause the most harm if they stopped. For each one, estimate how long it could be down before the harm becomes serious. Planners call this the maximum tolerable downtime. A rough guess in hours or days is fine.

#	Service that can't stop	Why it can't wait	Longest it could be down
	<i>Example: 911 addressing support</i>	<i>Dispatchers need correct addresses to send help</i>	<i>About 4 hours</i>
1			
2			
3			

Step 4. Name what can wait

Deciding what to pause is just as useful. It frees people to work on the top three. List two or three services you would put on hold, and for how long.

Service you would pause	For how long?
<i>Example: New data layer projects</i>	<i>Until the event is over</i>

Bring this forward

Copy your top three services into Worksheet 2. That is where you find out what each one depends on.

What It Runs On

Time: About 30 minutes **Who to involve:** Your GIS staff, plus a quick check with IT

Why this matters

Every GIS service depends on people, software, data and a place to work. On a normal day those are all there. In a disruption, some of them will not be.

The gaps between "normal day" and "bad day" are your weak spots. Finding them now is how you fix them before you need them.

How to fill this in

- Write one of your top three services from Worksheet 1 at the top of each table.
- For each row, write what the service needs on a normal day.
- Then ask: if that were gone tomorrow, what is the backup? If there isn't one, write "None." That is a gap, and it is exactly what you are looking for.

Example: Emergency maps for the EOC

Needs	On a normal day	If that's gone, the backup is...	Gap?
People	One GIS analyst builds all EOC maps	None. No one else has done it	Yes
Software and licenses	ArcGIS Online; ArcGIS Pro license on one office computer	Backup laptop, but its license is not set up	Yes
Data	Parcels and roads on the network drive	No offline copy	Yes
Place and equipment	GIS office, large-format plotter	EOC has a workstation; no plotter	Partly
Partners and vendors	IT help desk; state GIS clearinghouse	Esri support line (number not written down)	Partly

Service 1: _____

Needs	On a normal day	If that's gone, the backup is...	Gap?
People			
Software and licenses			
Data			
Place and equipment			
Partners and vendors			

Service 2: _____

Needs	On a normal day	If that's gone, the backup is...	Gap?
People			
Software and licenses			
Data			
Place and equipment			
Partners and vendors			

Service 3: _____

Needs	On a normal day	If that's gone, the backup is...	Gap?
People			
Software and licenses			
Data			
Place and equipment			
Partners and vendors			

Your biggest gaps

Look at every "Yes" in the Gap column. Which three worry you most? These are strong candidates for your 30-day plan in Worksheet 4.

1.

2.

3.

Common gaps in GIS shops: a software license tied to one computer, no offline copy of key layers, admin passwords only one person knows, and no agreed place to work if the office is closed.

If You're Out Tomorrow

Time: About 20 minutes **Who to involve:** You and the people who would cover for you

Why this matters

In many GIS teams, one person holds the know-how, the passwords or the only license for a critical service. If that person is sick, evacuated or caring for family, the service stops.

This worksheet checks who could step in for each of your top three services, and whether they could find what they need without calling anyone.

Part A. Who could step in?

For each top-three service, name who does it now and who would cover. Use job titles, not just names, so the answer still holds when people change jobs. Then be honest about the last column.

Service	Who does it now (role)	Who could step in	Could they do it tomorrow without calling you?	What would they need?
<i>Example: EOC mapping</i>	<i>GIS Analyst II</i>	<i>GIS Analyst I</i>	<i>Partly</i>	<i>Written steps; ArcGIS Online admin rights; the EOC map template</i>

Answer Yes, Partly or No. "Partly" and "No" are useful answers. They tell you where to start.

Part B. Where is it?

Your backup can only step in if they can find what they need. For each item, write where it is today and whether someone else could reach it during a network or power outage.

Do not write passwords on this sheet

Write down where credentials are kept (for example, "IT password manager" or "sealed envelope in the IT safe"). Never the passwords themselves.

Item	Where it is today	Does someone else know?	Reachable with no network?
Admin sign-ins for ArcGIS Online, ArcGIS Enterprise or other GIS platforms			
Software license details and support contract numbers			
Written step-by-step instructions for your top three services			

Item	Where it is today	Does someone else know?	Reachable with no network?
Contact list: GIS staff, IT, your emergency management contact, vendors			
Offline copies of your most important data layers			
Map templates and saved projects you use in emergencies			
Where to work if the GIS office is closed			
Other:			

Bring this forward

Any "No" in Part A or Part B is a good candidate for your 30-day plan in Worksheet 4.

Your Next 30 Days

Time: About 15 minutes **Who to involve:** You, then your supervisor and your emergency manager

Why this matters

A continuity plan is built one small step at a time. You do not need a finished plan to make your team safer. Three concrete steps in the next 30 days is a strong start.

Step 1. Pick three first steps

Look back at the gaps you found in Worksheets 2 and 3. Choose three steps you can finish in 30 days. Small and done beats big and planned. Need ideas? See the list below.

#	First step	Who will do it	Done by (date)	Done?
	<i>Example: Cross-train GIS Analyst I on building the EOC situation map</i>	<i>GIS Analyst II</i>	<i>Nov 15</i>	

Ideas for first steps

- ☐ Meet with your emergency manager (see Step 2).
- ☐ Cross-train one person on your most critical service.
- ☐ Write a one-page "how to" for your most critical service.
- ☐ Download offline copies of your most important layers and note where they are stored.
- ☐ Print your contact list and keep a copy somewhere other than the GIS office.
- ☐ Confirm where admin sign-ins are kept and that a second person can get to them.
- ☐ Make sure a backup laptop has working GIS software and a license.
- ☐ Agree on where GIS staff will work if the office is closed.

Step 2. Talk to your emergency manager

Your agency may already have a continuity of operations (COOP) plan. GIS should have a place in it. Bring these worksheets to a short meeting and ask:

- Does our agency have a COOP plan? Is GIS in it?
- What does emergency management expect from GIS in the first 24 hours of an event?
- Do you agree with our top three services? Did we miss anything?
- Where would GIS staff work if our office were closed?
- Who should we coordinate with in IT and in neighboring agencies?

Who I will meet with:

When:

What I learned:

Where to go next

These four worksheets cover the basics: what can't stop, what it depends on, and who can step in. A complete continuity plan goes further. It also covers risk assessment, how the plan is activated, alternate work sites, what happens if the whole team is unavailable, and regular training and exercises.

Keep your completed worksheets together. They are a strong starting point for your full plan.

Continuity Atlas is a continuity planning tool built for GIS departments that walks you through the rest. Learn more at giscontinuity.com.