# Testing business continuity plans

Business continuity testing ensures the department’s business continuity plans (BCPs) remain current, fit-for-purpose and effective.

Type 1: Walkthrough self-assessment

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| **Description:** Discussion that steps participants through each step of the plan  |
| **Best use:** * ensures the BCP team is aware of the content of the BCP
* ensure BCP team is aware of their responsibilities
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| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** | **Example objectives** |
| * Easy to prepare
* Easy to organise
* Not costly
* Good learning and development tool
* Builds plan completeness
 | * Individual roles not under pressure
* Does not examine the effectiveness of response options
* Evaluates broad principles only e.g. resources
 | * Staff are aware and understand their roles and responsibilities
* Ascertain (at a high level) if the plan is current/relevant, complete and accurate
* Check logical flow of the actions
* Identify gaps, weaknesses or inconsistencies
* Identify strategies or additional details to address gaps, weaknesses or inconsistencies
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**More information:**

* BCP team members are brought together in a discussion-based, informal environment and provided with the opportunity to systematically step through each element of their plan to identify gaps or omissions.
* The walkthrough self-assessment is the initial phase of testing and, as such, objectives should be kept relatively simple, with a focus on identifying gaps in the plan.
* The test facilitator will generally walk through the BCP and discuss how they would handle a business disruption based on what has been documented in the BCP.
* Feedback is then sought from participants identifying areas of the plan that have missing information, require further clarification or are incorrect, for example:
* Is there a work around strategy if your function had no access to ICT, buildings, or key staff were unavailable?
* Is this the right sequence of actions? Is this the right person for the task specified? Do the timeframes look practicable?
* What other resources would be required to carry out this plan?
* Are all interdependencies identified (functions that you rely on to perform your function, and/or functions that rely on you to carry out their function?)
* Who else needs to be notified? Who else might be impacted if a particular process could not be carried out?
* Is the contact list current and accurate?

Type 2: Supervised tabletop walkthrough

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| **Description:** Facilitated discussion using a scenario to test the plan |
| **Best use:** * establishes effectiveness of chosen strategies
* identifies gaps, bottlenecks and weaknesses
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| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** | **Example objectives** |
| * Interactive
* Easy to prepare and perform
* Provides good initial validation
 | * Provides only a superficial test of the plan and team capabilities
* Does not provide a true indication of how effective the BCP may be in the event of a real business disruption
 | * Increase BCP team awareness and understanding of the BCP
* Develop BCP teamwork
* Demonstrate viability of the BCP to meet current needs
* Prioritise BCP activities
* Verify that BCP strategies and actions flow logically
* Verify that resources identified support business continuity requirements
* Identify discrepancies or inconsistencies, including alignment with other plans
* Resolve issues with plan strategies and alignment
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**More information:**

* The ‘tabletop’ differs from the walkthrough self-assessment test as it requires more challenging thinking from participants.
* A hypothetical disruption scenario is presented and participants then determine what actions and decisions are required to respond to the scenario, while referring to the BCP for guidance. The participants can role play to simulate responses and act out critical steps.
* As the scenario unfolds the facilitator asks the participants questions relating to the scenario, which leads to a group discussion on roles and responsibilities, coordination and decision making that is required. For example:
* What strategy should the function adopt to respond to the scenario? Who makes this decision?
* Who does what first/next? What is the sequence of actions? How long would it take? What resources are needed to perform this action? Where would you get this information from?
* What is the alternative?
* What could prevent activity from proceeding?
* What information would the other function require from you?
* Who else needs to be notified? Are they on the contact list?
* What could happen if the function could not be resumed within the MAO period?

Type 3: Process or plan simulation

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| **Description:** BCP teams perform BCP activities in a simulated “real life” environment |
| **Best use:** * validates plan contents are actionable
* confirms adequacy of time and resource allocations
* builds team decision making and interactions
* validates specific response capabilities
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| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** | **Example objectives** |
| * Provides a level of reality/baseline
* Fosters/encourages team interaction and decision making
* Validates plan content
* Multifaceted – can test information flow, communication, coordination and decision making
 | * Timely and costly to prepare scenarios
* Exercise control needed
* May require significant resources
* Increased expense
 | * Indication of decision-making capabilities
* Confirm appropriateness of communication strategies and their operational effectiveness, including currency of contact lists
* Confirm timeframes for specific actions
* Confirm actions are sufficient to resume the critical business functions within the prescribed maximum acceptable outage time/s
* Confirm effectiveness of manual workarounds in a ‘real life’ situation
* Confirm resources needed to meet plan are available and work as intended (e.g. back up data, BCP kits, remote access)
* Confirm linkages with other plans/interdependencies
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**More information:**

* A process or plan simulation requires BCP teams to perform specified business continuity activities in a simulated ‘real life’ environment i.e. typically using recovery locations and resources that would exist in the event of an actual activation of the BCP. The pace of the test play can be controlled to provide collective training development. Alternatively, participants can be invited to respond as they would in real life.
* Partial scenario simulations are most often used to validate specific components of BCPs. Examples may include:
* After hours telephone tests to ensure BCP team members are contactable outside of normal business hours.
* Off-site tests to confirm data/systems are able to be restored.
* Recovery of specific systems or technologies to prove in isolation that business procedures are accurate and effective.
* Testing specific workarounds to prove that critical business functions can continue to operate with reduced or no IT systems.
* Accessing data to validate currency.
* Linking in with other BCP teams.

Type 4: Full (end-to-end) simulation

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| **Description:** Full scale test under a simulated “real life” environment for multiple critical business within a single coordination BCP or across multiple coordination BCPs (for example, disaster or emergency simulation affecting multiple areas)*(Must have senior management approval)* |
| **Best use:** * validates the interaction between groups and interdependencies
* confirms overall recovery time
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| **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** | **Example objectives** |
| * Provides a complete check of the plan
* Validates interaction between groups and interdependencies during recovery effort
* Validates recovery time objectives
* Highlights multi-agency communications and coordination issues
* Highlights response issues
* Highlights equipment issues
 | * Very costly
* Significant time to plan, prepare and develop
* Requires large number of participants
* Can require multi-agency commitment
* Interruption to business (cost) can be significant
* The most difficult test to prepare for and perform
* Can be difficult to manage
* Carries risk
 | A full end-to-end simulation tests all aspects of the plan in its entirety to:* confirm plan strategies and actions are effective to restore normal business functions within stated timelines
* prove the effectiveness of internal and external interdependencies
* validate planned communication channels with all stakeholders
* confirm effectiveness of escalation processes
* confirm readiness and maturity of the BCP teams to respond to and recover from a business disruption
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**More information:**

* Full end-to-end testing of all aspects of the BCP using a scenario to enable response and recovery strategies to be deployed.
* Designed to include everyone who is likely to be involved in a response. They are particularly beneficial where a high-risk has been identified and the response and recovery plans need to be fully tested.
* Full end-to-end simulations (or live tests) are costly, disruptive to normal business operations and difficult to prepare. They are therefore not undertaken lightly.
* To perform a full simulation senior management must clearly understand the reasons for to proceeding with the test, and the scope and objectives must be fully explained, including:
* agreeing on the scenario, extent and aim of the test with senior management
* establishing a multi-disciplinary test planning team to set agreed objectives for each area to be tested
* sketching out and developing the main events of the test including timetables
* determining and confirming the availability of any outside agencies or external suppliers who will participate in the test
* listing all of the facilities required and confirming their availability (e.g. buildings, transport and equipment)
* ensuring that all communications listed prior to the test have been tested prior to the test
* checking that facilitators for each stage of the test are clearly identified and properly briefed
* ensuring that all test participants are fully briefed
* ensuring that all staff not participating in the test are clearly identified, properly briefed and have good communication with ‘test control’ throughout the test
* if the test links multiple activities or functions which are independent of each other, confirming that each has been tested prior to the test
* if required, arranging catering and/or toilet facilities
* agreeing on and preparing a detailed set of recommendations, accompanied by actions, persons responsible and timeframes
* preparing a clear, concise summary to be distributed to all participants, together with recommendations
* discussing with senior management and agreeing on outcomes and future tests.

BCP testing schedule

A schedule of testing, approved by the business continuity owner, is a requirement within the [Business continuity management procedure](https://ppr.mpe.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/business-continuity-management-procedure).

A forward-looking schedule ensures thorough and regular testing of BCPs.

The following example test schedule encompasses a three-year period and is designed to ensure comprehensive testing and exercising of all BCPs within a division/branch or region (in this case, a business area with three BCPs – one recently identified).

Notes on testing:

* testing the call-tree and updating of contact lists is required quarterly for all BCPs
* plan activation within a disruptive event is equivalent to a type 4 simulation and contributes to testing requirements
* BCP tests and activations are recorded in the Testing and activation log within the Business impact assessment and planning tool.

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| **BCP** | **Year 1** | **Year 2** | **Year 3** |
| ALL BCPs | * Update contact list and check call tree (quarterly)
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| BCP 1 | * Type 2 – Walkthrough scenario: loss ICT to test manual workarounds
 | * Type 3 – Simulated scenario: loss ICT to test data accessibility
 | * Type 2 – Walkthrough scenario: loss of ICT, addressing backlog and returning to BAU
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| BCP 2 | * Type 3 – Simulated scenario: test processes relating to interdependent function
 | * Type 2 – Walkthrough scenario: not enough staff to meet minimum service levels
 | * Type 2 – Walkthrough scenario: loss of ICT
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| BCP 3 (new) | * Type 1 – Walkthrough self-assessment
 | * Type 2 – Walkthrough scenario: relocation to another building
 | * Type 3 – Simulated scenario: relocation to another building to test communication plan
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