



Succession Planning Tool

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All too often, nonprofits rely heavily on one or two leaders who fill multiple roles. Some of these individuals may be well known in the community and seen as key to the organization's success. For major donors, strong leaders may be both positive and negative. A successful executive director can make dramatic positive changes and move the needle. Still, the concern arises when donors are unclear about how programs and long-term plans would continue if that leader left. Ensuring continuity is critical to building confidence.

Having a clear and transparent plan in place in the case of a sudden executive transition can give your donors the confidence to invest in a sustainable strategy. There are many excellent tools available online to help nonprofits develop a succession plan. In this guide, we have included the initial questions you and your Board should ask to begin the process and template policy.

A nonprofit organization's Board of directors is responsible for overseeing this process and its annual review, just as they are responsible for the transition of an executive director. If you do not have a plan or the current plan needs to be updated or reviewed, create a one-time taskforce to address this issue. Use this set of questions to start the planning process.

1. Does your organization have a succession plan in place that is updated annually?
2. If yes, is your organization in a position to implement a succession plan that was previously approved?
3. Has the organization identified all mission-critical positions and developed a succession plan for each one?
4. If the critical leader is suddenly unable to work or retires, have you identified internal candidates for the job?
 - If the answer is yes, is that person prepared?
 - Do they have the required leadership style, financial knowledge, and necessary experience to take charge of the organization and continue uninterrupted services?
 - If the answer is no, what is your plan for hiring another leader can lead your organization in the manner and direction necessary?
 - Does everyone within the organization know who will fill the position until the Board can meet and appoint someone officially?
5. Do you have a list of primary funders and major donors who should be notified in the case of a sudden transition?
6. Is the leader the primary fundraiser for the organization, and if so, would your organization sustain a decline in income or fundraising activities without the executive?

7. Does the Board have a process laid out to include hiring a search firm and creating a search committee?
8. Will the organization lose institutional knowledge and contacts if your executive were to leave suddenly? Are there critical projects for which this person might have sole responsibility?
9. Do the job descriptions of your critical leaders align with their actual roles and responsibilities?
10. Have you created a single, secure document that identifies where essential documents are located, the contact information of key vendors and funders, and account and password information for electronic devices, bank accounts, etc.?

Disclaimer: This document is a template only and was created to assist at the beginning of the succession planning process. It is not a legal document and should be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors and any legal counsel they deem appropriate.

Emergency Succession Plan Template

Policy and Procedure

In the event of an unplanned absence of the Executive Director, the staff or Board Member who is first aware of the situation is to immediately inform the Board Chair or Vice-Chair. As soon as it is feasible, the Chair should convene an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee to affirm the procedures prescribed in this plan or to make modifications as the Committee deems appropriate. The Board should be notified, and a full Board meeting called as soon as possible. A majority vote by the entire Board is needed to affirm the actions of the Executive Committee. As part of this process, the Executive Committee is empowered to enact this plan without further approval.

Interim Leadership

As part of this plan's annual approval, an emergency succession plan has been developed with identified positions that will be tapped to fill the vacancy role temporarily. The Executive Committee will enact the temporary leadership plan organizational chart.

The person appointed as interim will have the full authority for decision-making and independent action as the permanent Executive Director. The Board will provide the interim with a temporary salary increase or stipend equal to the entry-level salary of the position they are filling.

Board Oversight

In the case of an interim Executive Director, the Executive Committee shall be responsible for oversight, monitoring, and support. In the case of another critical vacancy, the assigned supervisor will oversee the interim.

Communications Plan

The Board Chair or designee will notify the remaining staff members and members of the Board of Directors of the delegation of authority.

All media contact will be managed by _____. At no time should any member of the Board or staff discuss the situation with the media, and all calls will be referred to the identified person immediately.

As soon as possible after the interim ED has approved, Board Members and the interim ED

will communicate the temporary leadership structure to key external supporters identified as part of the annual review of this plan.

The decision about when the Executive Director returns after a short-term or long-term absence should be determined by the Executive Director and the Executive Committee and in compliance with applicable state and federal laws. It is recognized that extended leave of absence or partial return to work may be detrimental to the organization's long-term health. The determination of the maximum amount of time allowed should align with the best interests of the organization and clients.

Temporary Absence Limit

A temporary absence is one of less than three months, or one that accumulates over a period of time according to intermittent leave such as provided under FMLA, that arises unexpectedly, in which it is expected that the critical leader will return to his/her position once the events precipitating the absence are resolved.

Search Process

Once it is determined that the Executive Director will not be returning to the position, the Board of Directors will appoint a Search Committee within seven days to plan and transition to a new Executive Director. The Board will also consider the need for an outside search firm based on the Board's capacity to manage the transition and search. It is critical that the search process not be delayed and that the Search Committee is fully committed to identifying and approving a new Executive Director without delay.

The following should be provided as attachments to this document:

1. Current Board Roster with Contact Information
2. Current Critical Position Job Descriptions
3. Current Organizational Chart
4. Transition Organizational Chart
5. Sample RFP for Search Firm
6. List of:
 - a. Critical contacts,
 - b. Documents,
 - c. Accounts
 - d. Location of secure passwords,
 - e. Vendors, key donors, contract managers, and key funders with contact information