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What is Succession Management?

“It may take several years for an organization to get to the position of having a succession plan articulated. The first step - acknowledging the need for a plan is often the hardest. Once that step is taken, the organization can move forward and plan for the future.”

Eileen M. Johnson, ASAE

Succession Management is an agency’s plan and process to identify and secure the necessary talent to ensure continuity in key positions and to develop and retain that talent for the future. The Board of Directors’ chief responsibility is to replace and integrate the new Executive Director. The Executive Director’s responsibility is to replace key leaders in the agency. A good Succession Management Plan will answer these key questions:

- What kind of business environment are you going to be in?
- What leadership do you need in the future?
- What leadership capability do you have now?
- What leadership potential do you have for the future?
- What action plans will help you realize your leadership potential?
- What can you do better in the above process?

Feeding America Network Took Kit: Succession Management

Three Approaches to Successful Planning

1. *Strategic Leadership Development* is an ongoing practice based on defining an agency’s strategic vision, identifying the leadership and management skills necessary to carry out the vision, and recruiting and maintaining talented individuals who have or who can develop those skills.
2. *Emergency Succession Planning*’s primary goal is to prepare for an unexpected departure of a key manager. It is useful to have plans for all senior staff and board positions as well. Identify the key positions in your agency. The standby might be a board member or volunteer. Your board should be closely involved in emergency back-up planning for the Executive Director position.
3. *Departure-defined Succession Planning* is recommended when a long-term leader has announced his or her departure two or more years in advance. It includes identifying agency goals going forward; determining which tools a successor will need to have in his or her skill set to achieve those goals; and devoting significant attention to building the capacity of the board, managers and systems to sustain funding and programs beyond the current executive’s tenure.

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A Succession Readiness Checklist

When the following conditions are in place, an agency can expect a relatively smooth transition to new leadership whenever it might occur. An agency might determine which elements below are

lacking in its current operations and then create a “succession plan” or “capacity building plan” that identifies activities and timelines for filling the gaps. The agency is then ready for leadership transitions, foreseen or unforeseen.

- A strategic plan is in place with goals and objectives for the near term (up to three years), including objectives for leadership talent development.
- The board evaluates the executive director annually on general performance and achievement of strategic goals.
- The board, based on its annual self-evaluation, is satisfactorily performing its major governance jobs—financial oversight, executive support and oversight, policy development and strategic planning.
- The executive’s direct reports, based on annual evaluations, are judged as solidly skilled for their positions.
- The top management team:
 - Has a solid team culture in place in which members support one another and can reach decisions as a group efficiently and harmoniously;
 - Shares leadership of the organization with the executive in having significant input to all major agency decisions;
 - Can lead the organization in the absence of the executive; and
 - Has authority to make and carry out decisions within their respective areas of responsibility.
- Another staff person or board member shares important external relationships (major donors, funders, community leaders) maintained by the executive.
- A financial reserve is in place with a minimum of three months’ operating capital.
- Financial systems meet industry standards. Financial reports are up to date and provide the data needed by the board and senior managers responsible for the agency’s financial strength and viability.
- Operational manuals exist for key administrative systems and are easily accessible and up to date.
- Top program staff have documented their key activities in writing and have identified another staff person who can carry their duties in an emergency.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Foundation Center: A Resource List for Succession Planning

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/topical/succession.html>

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<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Other/B/BuildingLeaderfulOrganizationsSuccessionPlann/Building%20Leaderful%20Organizations.pdf>

Compasspoint Emergency Succession Plan

http://www.compasspoint.org/assets/520_emergencysuccessionplanmo.pdf

The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online: <http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> For additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: afc@foodbankofalaska.org

NEXT MONTH: Local Resources, Local Partnerships