

## Planning for Leadership Transition

San Diego  
January 2016

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## Why the interest in Leadership Transition, Succession Planning?

- New Standards
- Generational Shift Anticipated
- Sustainability Concerns

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## Planning for Leadership Transition

- Leadership Transition is inevitable
- Protects the stability and sustainability of the organization
- Leadership Transition – WHEN planned for – most common catalyst for transformative organizational evolution
- Leadership Transition – when NOT planned for – most common catalyst for organizational demise

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### Common Challenges to Successful Transitions – CACs and Chapters

- Failure to recognize wealth, value of Institutional knowledge
- Packaging, passing along things like vision, history, relationships
- Lack of documentation for day-to-day, month-to-month tasks, activities
- Long-term leadership often relationship-based
- Domino effect – when founder or long-time director leaves, other tenured staff often follow

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### Common Challenges to Successful Transitions – CACs and Chapters

- Deep bench needed but rarely in place
- Not budgeting for costs
  - Advertising, candidate interviews/travel, interim or acting directors
- Identifying viable candidates
  - Unique nature of job/organizations
  - Need to look forward

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### Common Challenges to Successful Transitions – CACs and Chapters

- Resistance to change
  - Different for different people
  - Failure of new hire to appreciate staff, team or Board struggles with change
- Never a good time
- No cookie cutter approach

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**Challenges to Successful Transitions  
...When Planned, Anticipated**

- Finding time to focus on transition issues
  - *Exiting E.D. often focused on tying up loose ends*
- Time invested in process – too much OR too little
- Lack of Board understanding about what the job entails
  - *Don't know what to look for in new hire*
- Board not prepared/poised for success
  - *Members lack expertise, experience for transition process*

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**Challenges to Successful Transitions  
...When Planned, Anticipated**

- Failure to recognize need to pass along institutional memory, history (soft knowledge)
- Failure to clarify role of exiting executive director in transition (prior to and after new hire is made)
- Lack of active Board support for new hire
  - *Funders, Team, Membership, Key Stakeholders, Staff, etc.*
  - *Gaps in communication about process, expectations*

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**Challenges to Successful Transitions  
...When Planned, Anticipated**

- Feelings about exiting director
  - *Especially if it is a founding or long-time leader*
  - *Emotional connections*
- Failure to provide relevant orientation to new hire
  - *Information, history – how much is too much*
  - *Board backing away once hire is made*

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### Challenges to Successful Transitions ...When Unplanned, Unexpected

- Lack of plan causes panic, anxiety
- Anxiety leads to paralysis or knee-jerk reactions
- Focus on crisis vs action plan
- No bread-crumbs trail
- Confusion about who is in charge, who is leading leads to tension
- Impact on Org. Chart, Roles, Responsibilities

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### Challenges to Successful Transitions ...When Unplanned, Unexpected

- Capacity Issues – How to maintain service delivery
- Resistance to value of hiring an Interim
- Lack of financial resources for search/hire, engaging Interim
- Lack of Board understanding about what job entails; existing staff relationships
  - *Whether other staff capable, competent to pick up some/all of duties*
  - *What to look for in new hire*

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### Challenges to Successful Transitions ...When Unplanned, Unexpected

- Emotions high and varied
  - *Anger, grief, abandonment, anxiety*
- For single-employee organizations, may be long gap with no one in place to lead
- New hire inherits traumatized staff, Team, membership
- New hire inherits already troubled Board
- No opportunity for passing along institutional memory, history from predecessor

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### Strategies for Making Transitions Successful

- Ability to see it as a process vs an isolated event
- Acknowledging impact of change on all stakeholders (Staff, Board, Tea, Membership)
- Acknowledging variations in how people deal with change
- Strong Board already in place prior to transition
- Strong staff already in place prior to transition – Bench Strength

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### Strategies for Making Transitions Successful

- Strong organization – financially, programmatically, etc.
- Shared Identity - understanding of mission, vision by Board, Staff, Team, Membership
- Prior history with transition, turn-over positive
- House in order (policies, procedures, protocols documented)
- Institutional history documented to extent possible

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### Strategies for Making Transitions Successful

- Clear understanding of roles, expectations
  - Board
  - Staff
  - Interim or Acting Directors
  - Exiting Director
  - New Hire
- All actions strategic, intentional, forward thinking

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### Strategies for Making Transitions Successful

- Written Plan in place that is:
  - Familiar
  - Transparent
  - Realistic
  - Current
  - Flexible

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### Key Components to Successful Succession Plans

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### Succession Plan Components

- Temporary Vacancy (30 days or less)
- Temporary, Short-Term Vacancy (30-60 days)
- Temporary, Long-Term Vacancy (60+ days)
- Permanent Vacancy (Planned and Un-Planned)

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### Succession Plan Components

- Authorization to implement
- Clear assignments of responsibility
- Comprehensive notifications strategy with timelines included
- Identify priority functions of position (ensure it is current and complete)
- Assign responsibility for each priority function

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### Succession Plan Components

- Acting Director candidates (if applicable)
- Cross-Training plan
- Authority, Restrictions of Acting Director
- Compensation for Acting Director
- Board Oversight, Support to Acting Director

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### Succession Plan Components

- Interim Director options (if applicable)
- Cross-Training plan
- Authority, Restrictions of Interim Director
- Compensation for Interim Director
- Board Oversight, Support to Interim Director

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## Succession Plan Components

- Communications Plan, Strategy
  - *Assignments and timelines for communications with various stakeholders*
- If permanent vacancy:
  - *Transition Committee*
    - Composition
    - Authority

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## Succession Plan Components

- Resources, Attachments
  - *Contact Info for Resources:*
    - State Chapter and RCAC
    - State or local non-profit management orgs
    - Interim Director Contact Information
    - Executive Search Services
    - Transition Management Consultants
    - Transition Coaches for Exiting, Incoming Directors

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## Succession Plan Components

- Resources, Attachments
  - *Current, Accurate Job Description*
  - *Current, Accurate Organizational Chart*
  - *Updated, Accurate Information and Contact Inventory*

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## RCAC Challenges in Supporting CACs and Chapters with Transitions

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## RCAC Challenges

- Capacity
- Diversity of organizations, models
- Ability to respond in timely manner
  - *Notifications often not timely*
  - *Other obligations may preclude immediate response needed when unplanned transitions occur*
- Lack of confidence in own expertise, experience, ability to effectively assist
- Need effective tools to share with CACs, Chapters

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## RCAC Challenges

- Executive Director often the "gate keeper"
- Need to develop, earn reputation as reliable resource
  - *Boards, MDTs, Membership*
- Need to acknowledge, but not judge, emotional aspects:
  - *Fear of punishment*
  - *Loss of reputation – admitting failures*
  - *Embarrassment over state of records*
  - *Feeling helpless – appearing weak*

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## RCAC Challenges

- Messaging and Motivation
  - How to make need for intentional, proactive succession planning receivable:
    - Executive Directors
    - Boards

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