

Thinking About Succession Planning

Recent national surveys of nonprofit leadership have highlighted the mass retirements of baby boomers in the next five to ten years, and a serious concern about who will replace them in leadership roles. Speculation about this large executive transition has created anxiety for institutions of all kinds as boards of directors ponder how to maintain stable and sustainable operations and improve programs and services in a challenging fiscal climate.

Although most museums, if they think about it at all, put the emphasis on executive transition, succession planning can cover a broad spectrum of strategies that build the overall capacity of the organization. When considered in the context of overall goals and objectives, it can be a positive stimulus for self-assessment, evaluation, personal and organizational development, and continuity for board, staff, and the executive.

Some benefits that can come from succession planning that is tied to a strategic plan can include:

- Policies and plans for emergency executive transitions
- Protection against disruptions of business and expenses of recruiting [key person]
- Plans for board recruitment and engagement
- Personal development and career planning for the executive
- Identification and development of staff leadership [tied to annual evaluations]
- Awareness of functional and social roles and accountabilities [drop dead]
- Assessment of market competitiveness [salary and benefits]
- Plans for executive transition, including:
 - The director's departure
 - Search Committee and Budget
 - Options for interim leadership
 - Assessment of skills and personal qualities
 - Recruitment, interviews and hiring
 - Planning the transition
 - Introducing the new director
 - Evaluating goals versus expectations
 - Coaching if necessary

The process begins with open communication about the need for succession planning as it relates to organizational goals, with a commitment to development of both human and financial capital on a strategic basis.