

Many public agencies, including the federal government, are now beginning to address how to deal with the loss of experienced staff in management and supervisory positions by establishing succession planning models to ensure continuity of service and excellence in government. This article introduces key elements of an effective succession plan. This outline serves as merely an introduction to the concept and in no way represent an actual plan. Simply, it is intended to begin the process of exploring the issue in your organization.

1. Begin discussion with top management to secure “buy-in” and support, which is absolutely essential in the planning and implementation of succession plans in any organization.
2. Determine how to integrate succession planning into the organizational strategic plan. Then, identify individuals who will champion the notion of succession planning as an essential component of organizational projections.
3. Establish a process for identify “critical management” positions coupled with a determination of the future requirements (knowledge, skills, abilities, temperament, etc...) for each position.
4. Create a process for clearly disseminating the organizations succession planning process to high-potential individuals.
5. Review information on “high potential” individuals, including performance plans, experience, salary history, career goals, etc.
6. Identify training and development needs of all individuals in the organization, including high potential individuals who are interested in becoming a part of the organizational leadership succession plan.
7. Monitor and provide feedback on progress toward developing leadership skills to candidates.
8. Review recruitment and selection strategies, processes and needs to ensure a continuous flow of quality individuals entering into the organization.
9. Outline possible timelines for succession, which benefits both the agency and individuals who are leaving and those who might assume new roles.
10. Identify resources that may assist in the planning, evaluation and implementation of an effective succession planning model. Resources may include journals, magazines, presentations or similar publications. Other government agencies that are effectively implementing succession planning are also a good source.



Succession Planning: Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders Today

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Once an organization clearly identifies the components of its succession plan, it is imperative to move into the next step of the process, which is the implementation phase. Like the planning stage, this phase has several important components worth mentioning:

1. A determination of the level of commitment from senior executives or agency director. This must be more than a casual, “yeah that sounds good.” Senior executive commitment should include a firm commitment to incorporate succession planning into the agency’s strategic plans. Additionally, if possible, it is beneficial to establish management’s commitment as the organization’s vision.
2. The development of written policies and procedures that outlines the organization’s leadership development process.
3. Establish a succession planning committee or leadership development team with members of the executive team. This team should also have the responsibility for making recommendations to the director on process, selection and goals improvement.
4. Develop a communication process that clearly outlines the requirements, criteria for selection, positions and high potential candidates.
5. Obtain feedback from employees, identify best practices in succession planning in government; develop a pilot program; and begin the implementation keeping in mind that periodic reviews and evaluations may require adjustments of processes during the implementation phase.

Conclusion

Rather than a single, dramatic movement, the transition or succession of any agency, business or organization should be a smooth flow of events that occurs over time. Like a well-run relay race, the handing over of an organization should be graceful, carefully & strategically planned and well executed to guarantee the continued success of said organization. As stated earlier, the main objective of this piece was not to serve as a guide. Instead, this article should challenge and encourage members or teams in government to begin the process of carefully evaluating individual roles and ensure that each agency explore or evaluate existing talent, while garnishing new talent and cultivating a succession plan that will ensure the continuity of effective and efficient leadership development throughout generations. While recent events have caused more organizations to seriously look at succession planning, demographic projections suggest that as the baby boomers continue to depart the workforce in increasing numbers, agencies will need to develop their own leaders.

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