Succession Planning for Nonprofits

The unexpected departure of a nonprofit’s leader can cause organizational chaos. A nonprofit may establish policies and procedures to guide leadership transitions—unplanned and planned—to prevent damage to the organization and its work.

Introduction

Succession planning—putting in place policies and procedures to ensure smooth and orderly leadership transitions—helps nonprofits prevent organizational chaos and harm to programs and projects if crucial staff or officers depart unexpectedly. Succession plans may also detail the procedures for handling routine or expected leadership changes (e.g., a plan might call for the formation of a search committee to find a new executive director and specify the composition of the committee) and shape efforts to develop staff so that they are ready to step into leadership roles within an organization.

This guide provides links to guides, articles, and model succession plans to help organizations optimize their succession planning. See the Succession Planning library topic at ConservationTools.org for these and other resources.

Guides

These guides provide an in-depth look at the need for and strategies to implement effective succession planning in an organization.

Nonprofit Executive Succession-Planning Toolkit

Emergency Succession Planning

Building Leaderful Organizations: Succession Planning for Nonprofit

Staying Engaged, Stepping Up: Succession Planning and Executive Transition Management for Nonprofit Boards of Directors

Articles

These shorter articles outline key elements of succession planning and offer concise tips to establish or improve a succession plan.

“Succession Planning for Nonprofits—Managing Leadership Transitions”

“The Importance of Linking Leadership Succession, Strategy, and Governance”

“Blending Nonprofit Succession Planning and Executive Transition: A Successful Case”

“A Practical (and Possibly Proactive) Approach to Leadership Transitions”

“Nonprofit Succession Planning: It’s Not Just for the CEO”

“Avoid Transition Trauma with a CEO Succession Plan”

“The Board’s Role in Nonprofit Succession Planning”

Model Succession Plans

Organizations can use these model plans to craft or inform their succession plans and policies.

Model Succession Plan (CompassPoint Nonprofit Services)

Model Emergency Succession Plan (Third Sector New England)

Model Succession Plan Policy (Texas Council for the Arts)

The most recent version of this guide and related resources can be found online at ConservationTools.org/guides/170

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