

Succession Planning Toolkit for Nonprofit Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Organizations

Nonprofit Sustainability Technical Assistance



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What is Succession Planning?

Succession planning in the nonprofit sector is typically defined as the thoughtful and organized planning for transitions in key leadership positions (e.g., Executive Director, Director of Finance, Board President, etc.) for an organization. In other words, the planning for the successors of key positions within an organization is essential for sustainability of any sexual assault and/or domestic violence organization. Succession planning is also the process an organization goes through to determine its future and how it will pursue its goals while acknowledging that the personalities in leadership will change. Succession planning is also a component of good human resources planning and management.¹

Succession planning is generally practiced within the corporate world and highly encouraged in the nonprofit sector. However, not many sexual assault and/or domestic violence organizations have written succession plans for executive director transitions. Quite often, these organizations develop their “emergency plan” when the executive director leaves or exits the organization. This plan will typically include the hiring and recruitment process for the executive director and may include other key elements of an orientation process, which makes the process go more smoothly for the entire organization.

This toolkit will broaden the definition of succession planning to not only focus on the transitions of key leadership positions (e.g., executive director, associate director, or key management positions) but also focus on succession planning for all staff and board of directors, as each of these positions are essential to the leadership and sustainability of the organization. We believe that good succession planning includes solid organizational planning in preparing for any staff and board transitions within the organization. Succession planning leads to overall organizational sustainability as the organization creates and institutionalizes systems and processes to solidify its operations at all levels.

All nonprofit sexual assault and domestic violence organizations can benefit from succession planning, regardless of their size. While it is unlikely that you’ll have designated successors for every position (especially in organizations with fewer than ten staff), developing and implementing a succession plan can further build and strengthen your organization by enhancing and creating a learning orientation for your board and staff, building the capacity of your organization’s operations, and enhancing your organization’s services to the community.

¹ Succession Planning – HR Planning, HRCouncil.ca. <http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/planning-succession.cfm>

There are generally three approaches to leadership succession planning:

1. Crisis Succession Planning: This is a thoughtful, prepared plan by the organization's board and staff to address the unexpected departure of the organization's executive director (or any other key leadership position) that may occur with only a few days or weeks' notice. The crisis plan allows for the uninterrupted performance of executive or key functions of the organization by outlining the process or steps in appointing an acting/interim executive director or other leadership role.
2. Departure-Defined Transition Planning: A course of action that the board, executive director, and management staff can develop and utilize when leadership staff begins thinking about leaving the organization. This form of transition planning focuses on communicating the transition to staff, key partners and stakeholders of the organizations (i.e., funders, etc.), conducting an organizational assessment, building organizational capacity and sustainability, recruiting and hiring a new executive or leadership staff, and celebrating the transition.
3. Strategic Leadership Planning: This ongoing process identifies core competencies, skills, and knowledge needed by your organization in the next five years along with a plan to develop those competencies in your existing staff (and board) or to recruit those competencies as you build and hire staff in the future. This strategic leadership planning is usually coordinated and tied with your organization's strategic plan.²

Succession planning supports the departing person, the incoming person, and the staff of the whole organization. Thoughtful succession planning:

- Eases the next person's or successor's learning curve
- Ensures continuity for the staff, board of directors, and the organization
- Ensures smooth transition for the departing staff
- Sets priorities and communicates vision of the organization and the staff roles/functions
- Shares information across staff
- Provides consistency/transparency of goal setting
- Ensures stability of the organization's programs and services

Succession planning can also ensure a fundamental understanding of overall organization key philosophies (anti-racism, anti-oppression, etc.), history, and core values are maintained in writing and offered in staff/board training processes, so everyone understands the core values and framework that influence the organization's approach to services and decision-making. Using the organization's values and philosophies in succession planning helps to ensure the approach to services is not dependent on individual personalities, but is rooted in the organization itself.

² Executive Transitions Initiative (ETI): Strategic Leadership Development Toolkit, Leading Transitions, LLC, http://www.leadingtransitions.com/pdfs/ETIToolkit_4.pdf

Why is Succession Planning Important?

When we discuss succession planning, there are helpful insights to apply from Marcus Lemonis, of the popular CNBC show, *The Profit*, when he addresses the three P's of a successful organization as part of his organizational analysis and transformation:

1. People: the staff and leadership of an organization
2. Process: how the organization functions and develops/provides their product or services, including their internal operations (i.e., financial management, policies, procedures, etc.).
3. Product: the organization's product (or services, as it applies to nonprofits).

He believes that organizations often struggle when there is a breakdown or weakness in any of the three P's.³ The three P's or principles can also apply to nonprofit organizations. Successful nonprofits will have very strong and healthy people, process, and product.

Succession planning is fundamentally tied to strengthening the three P's as it builds and strengthens the people (staff), process (operations), and product (services) of any nonprofit sexual assault and/or domestic violence organizations. Succession planning also provides the opportunity for an organization to further invest and strengthen the three P's of your organization.

In terms of the **people**, succession planning must directly involve all levels of the organization ranging from the board of directors, executive director, and management staff to line staff and perhaps even volunteers. It must encompass the continual strengthening of the staff and board by providing ongoing orientation, training, mentoring, and professional development opportunities. Through these ongoing training and mentoring opportunities, the staff and board of directors can grow and further develop their skills, which can further enhance the operations and services of the organization. It also improves the organization's ability to manage any future board and staff transitions.

The **process** of the organization is essentially the overall operations of the organization (i.e., how the organization functions and operates on a daily basis). This includes everything from the mission and vision of the organization, core values, history, philosophy (including anti-racism and anti-oppression framework), policies, procedures, funding requirements, and anything else that should influence or frame the services our organization provides to survivors and our community. Organizations can use

³ Marcus Lemonis Bio: The Profit, CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/marcus-lemonis-bio/>

succession planning to improve and further institutionalize the overall process of the organization, as it provides an opportunity to assess and improve policies, values statements, and the like. By strengthening and improving the organization's operations and capacity, succession planning also increases the organization's preparedness and readiness to manage any staff changes or transitions.

The **product** represents the services provided by our organization; in other words, it is "what" our organization provides to the community. It includes the services to survivors and their families, resources, materials, community education, and any other services that represent the mission and vision of the organization. Assessing current services and the strategic plan can help an organization clearly define their desires and goals for the succession plan. Succession planning, in turn, can strengthen services by ensuring all the organization's plans are aligned with the services it provides.

Why Do We Need to Include Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Work in Succession Planning?

It is essential that organizations working to end domestic violence and sexual assault understand and demonstrate their commitment to anti-oppression and anti-racism work. As the anti-rape and anti-domestic violence movements were founded on the framework of anti-oppression and heavily influenced by the civil rights movement, many programs have embedded this framework and philosophy in their organization's history, core values, mission, philosophy, and training materials for their staff, board, and volunteers. An anti-oppression/anti-racism framework must be embedded in succession planning for your organization, as it is a core philosophy of our movement. This framework will further strengthen the staff, board of directors, organization's operations and processes, and most of all, the services to the survivors and our community.

Practicing anti-racism and anti-oppression work is an ongoing commitment that is vital for the best services to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. The commitment to promoting racial equality and anti-oppression efforts should be implemented and integrated all levels of succession planning for the organization from the people, to the process, and product (the services we provided to survivors in our community). Succession planning can further demonstrate our commitment to anti-oppression and anti-racism work along with building strong and sustainable organizations. These efforts should be modeled by the leadership and board of the organization to promote, practice, and lead the organization's anti-racism and anti-oppression efforts. As we seek to break down barriers and work to make our services accessible to underserved and marginalized communities, we need to ensure that we also break down the barriers to promote racial equality and diversity among our staff and board to truly reflect the community that our agencies serve.

As anti-oppression and anti-racism are vital to the work in our movement, they are core values for the organization in how it operates. Succession planning can ensure the core values and philosophies of work are institutionalized and will continue to be integrated in all facets of the organization on an ongoing basis. Succession planning also ensures that these key values and philosophies will be embedded and rooted in how staff conducts their work on a daily basis and reaffirmed in how the organization functions and delivers services on a continual basis.

Who is responsible for Succession Planning? Who should be involved?

The executive director and the board are ultimately responsible for the succession planning for the organization. They start the process and include other staff and board members in developing the written information about the core values, philosophies, and history of the organization along with the training processes (i.e., staff development opportunities), and checklists. Succession planning will be most effective if it involves staff at all levels of the organization.

The board should also assess and review their board orientation, evaluation and ongoing training needs as part of the succession plan. Specifically, the board can document key processes and procedures as part of the succession plan that current and future board members need to know in order to perform their jobs. Board officers can include key information in their job descriptions as they mentor other board members to move into the officer positions when their terms are completed.

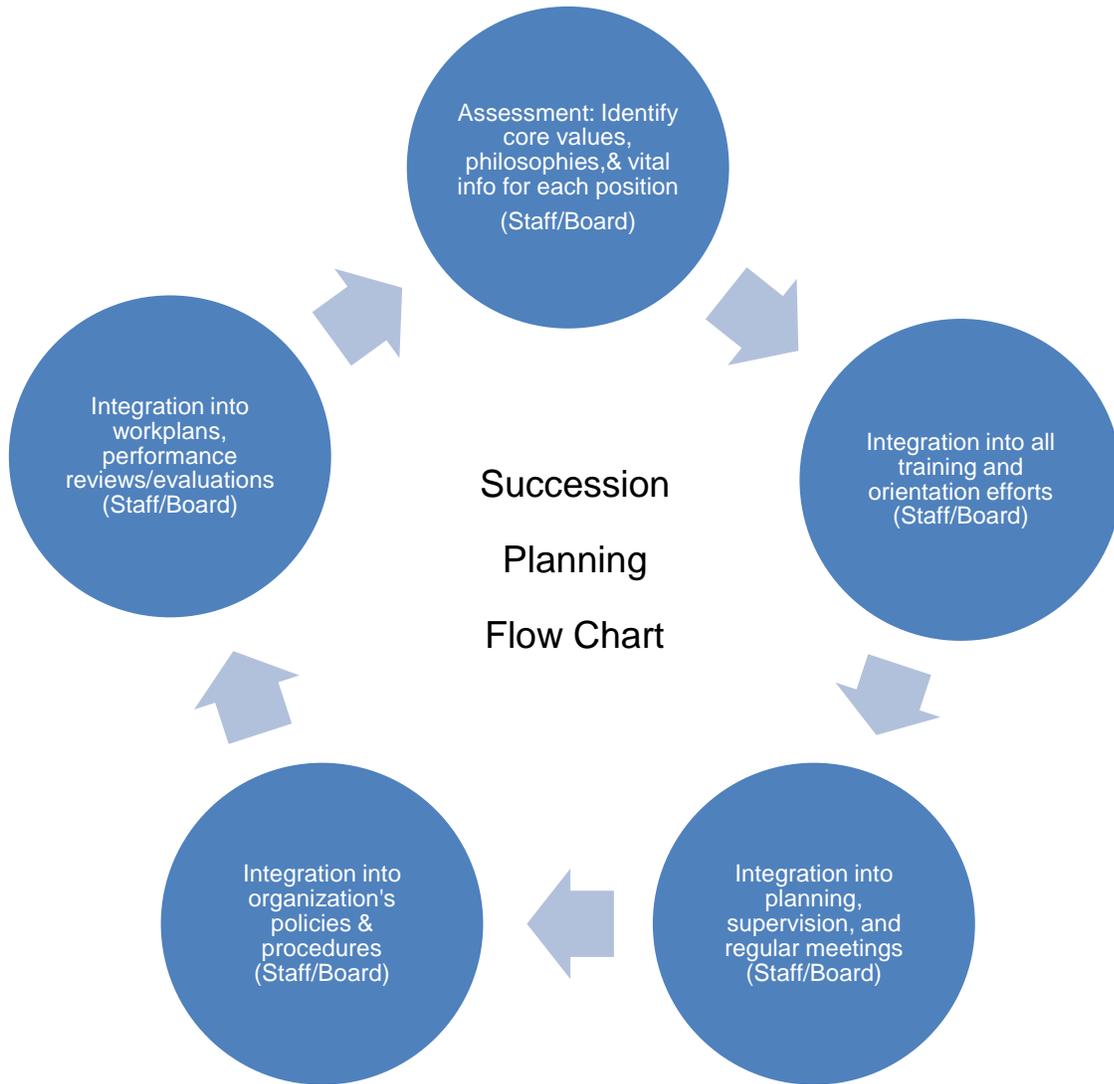
The board can include the framework of succession planning in their orientation and training processes by including the organization's core values and philosophies in the orientation materials and training along with other key board materials. The organization's history, core values, and philosophies should influence and inform the board and staff in how they make decisions and operate on an ongoing basis.

All staff should be included in identifying and improving organizational processes and procedures that can be improved. They can assist in documenting the critical information, history, and processes that are essential for incoming staff and board to know to be successful in their role. Additionally, succession planning can be integrated into staff orientation, staff work plans (see sample, p. 14), supervision meetings, staff meetings, and staff development opportunities.

The executive director's role is to ensure the succession plan is implemented along with identifying opportunities for succession planning to be integrated and addressed in the organization's trainings, meetings, and existing staff or board planning processes. The executive director ensures the succession plan is institutionalized throughout the organization to promote the organizational sustainability.

As an initial plan is developed, this plan should ultimately be reviewed and approved by the executive director and/or board of directors. The final succession plan for each position should be implemented and integrated as part of the ongoing training and staff development processes of the organization.

Succession Planning Flow Chart



What Can We Do Now to Prepare?

It is always challenging to find time to prepare. However, making time for succession planning is an opportunity to assess and strengthen your overall organization's capacity and sustainability.

To begin your planning process for succession planning, the following checklist identifies key items to include in your succession plan:

- ✓ Organization's mission statement, history, core values, and philosophy statements
- ✓ Job descriptions for each staff position and sample work plans (including program deliverables and due dates) of key responsibilities;
- ✓ Organizational charts
- ✓ Checklists of key resources, grant information (i.e., deliverables, etc.) for each staff positions;
- ✓ Passwords for each staff person (for email, voice mail, website, cell phone, social media, grant web sites or portals, bank accounts, or any other accounts);
- ✓ Program or grant reports and due dates/deadlines;
- ✓ Key contact info or relationships with partners, funders, etc. for each staff position (including the partner's role and history of the relationship with the organization)
- ✓ Training plans for staff development or specific job orientation processes. The staff training plans should include cross training of key duties, so another staff person can fill another position during a leave of absence or unexpected departure. It is important to provide cross-training opportunities for staff for advancement opportunities within the organization and to provide advancement for staff of color within your organization.
- ✓ Procedures for client service plans, specifically for terminating or transitioning a client to another staff person. These plans should include the process of terminating services with the staff person who is departing and if there will be a staff person serving the client in the interim, etc.

Organizations will want to do some overall assessment and reflection to influence each position's succession plan. Questions to be addressed include:

1. Where does the organization want to be in the next 5 years? 10 years?
2. What does the organization need to get there?
3. What does the organization have in place now to attain the 5-year goal? 10-year goal?

4. What are the gaps that need to be filled?
5. What are the organization's services and strengths? What supports those strengths? How are they documented or institutionalized so that new staff, board, or leadership will know?
6. Does everyone at the organization have all the information they need to successfully do their job? If not, what is missing and how can you improve this process?
7. What is the existing orientation and training process for staff and board? Is the current orientation and training integrated and informed by the organization's mission, history, core values, and philosophy (e.g., anti-oppression/anti-racism)?

These questions will help the leadership staff and board to understand the organization's status, strengths, needs, and the areas for improvement for succession planning.

Succession planning is not a one-time event or document, but a living process in the organization. There are key opportunities to discuss and include succession planning in the following meetings or activities within your organization:

- Annual performance review meetings: The performance review meetings allow the supervisor and staff to discuss professional development goals and opportunities to develop the staff person's skills in alignment with the plan.
- Staff work planning and supervision meetings: The supervisor should include discussion of succession planning in the supervision in terms of mentoring and professional development needs.
- Strategic planning and visioning sessions: The board and staff should include discussion of succession planning in any strategic planning and visioning sessions of the organization. As the strategic planning process would address the needs of the entire organization, succession planning needs to be incorporated into these discussions.
- Staff and/or board training sessions: When training sessions are being developed for the staff and board, the training needs to be viewed from a succession planning lens in terms of how it will develop staff skills and enhance the organization's ability to deliver services aligned with the mission.
- Ongoing anti-racism or anti-oppression training sessions for staff and/or board: Anti-oppression and anti-racism trainings are essential to the succession plan, as it is a key philosophy and value that all staff and board should know and practice.
- Regular board of directors meetings: This can be an ongoing agenda item for the board to address at each meeting. It can be regular check-in item to review the

progress and next steps for the succession plans as they develop and change for each position.

- Regular staff meetings. ⁴ This can also be an ongoing agenda item for staff to review at each meeting to discuss progress or next steps to be taken to help the organization move forward on the succession plan. By placing the succession plan as an ongoing agenda item, it will demonstrate the organization's commitment to succession planning along with promoting an organizational culture focused on preparedness, mentoring, and developing its staff and board.

Each of these meetings provides key opportunities to discuss, update, and address the succession planning needs of the organization along with preparing staff to transition into another position when needed. The succession plan helps to promote overall stability and sustainability of your organization when it is implemented.

Overall, an effective succession plan can increase staff morale and promote staff retention as individual staff can increase their skills and experience along with valuing the organization's commitment, time, and value for their employees. The organization benefits by staff retention and managing staff transitions to ensure continuity of quality services to the survivors in our community. Succession planning supports organizational systems that strengthen and solidify the organization's processes and services.

⁴ Succession Planning for Coalitions, Resource Sharing Project (RSP).
<http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/succession-planning-coalitions>

Sample Succession Planning Checklist

Executive Director's Checklist:

- Organization's mission statement, history, core values, and philosophy statements.
- Job descriptions for each staff position and sample work plans (including program deliverables and due dates) of key responsibilities.
- Organizational chart and identification of lines of supervision
- Checklists of key resources, grant information (i.e., deliverables, etc.).
- Passwords for email, voice mail, website, cell phone, social media, grant websites or portals, bank accounts, or any other accounts.
- Work plans for each staff person (including the ED and management staff).
- List of program or grant reports and due dates/deadlines.
- Key contact info or relationships with partners, funders, etc. (including the partner's role and history of the relationship with the organization).
- Training plans for staff development or specific job orientation processes.
- Client service plan procedures, specifically for terminating or transitioning a client to another staff person, if the ED also provides direct services.

Board of Directors Checklist:

- Organization's mission, history, core values, and philosophy statements. If the organization does not have documented information about the core values and philosophy statement (anti-oppression, anti-racism), this is an opportunity to identify and develop the organization's core values and philosophy that should inform and influence the decisions, policies, and services of the organization.
- Job descriptions for the board members and key information that the board officers and members need to know in order to do their job in addition to their job description.
- Bylaws, board (and committee) minutes, roster, board manuals, and other key documents that all board members need to have.
- Current or previous strategic plans.
- Board orientation procedures.
- Current Board training plan.

Sample Staff Work plan

Staff Name
Title
Date

| Goal/Objective #1: | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Key Activities | Anticipated Timeframe | Deliverables Produced | Completion Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Goal/Objective #2: | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Key Activities | Anticipated Timeframe* | Deliverables Produced | Completion Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Goal/Objective #3: | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Key Activities | Anticipated Timeframe | Deliverables Produced | Completion Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Staff/Professional Development | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Key Activities | Anticipated Timeframe | Deliverables Produced | Completion Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Self-care | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Key Activities | Anticipated Timeframe | Deliverables Produced | Completion Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Every staff member should have a work plan that details their work to be completed (as it relates to their job description, grant objectives and/or deliverables, etc.) over a set period. The work plan should include the following:

- Tasks/activities related to grant objectives/deliverables (including targets like number of people trained, clients served, etc.)
- Reports to be completed (staff reports, board reports, grant/program reports)
- Meetings/trainings that the staff person needs to participate in (e.g., professional development, mentoring, anti-racism/anti-oppression, cross training, etc.)
- Professional and staff development goals that not only enhances or builds their respective professional development but can also build the organization's capacity
- Self-care activities (*always important as our agencies engage in trauma-informed work and strengthen our overall staff!*).

The work plan serves as a roadmap for each staff person and can be modified with review and approval by their supervisor. Modifying work plans as needed to fit current needs ensures ownership by each staff person of the work and/or projects they are responsible for.

Work plan adapted from North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault, www.nccasa.org

How Do We Navigate the Barriers to Succession Planning?

It is often a challenge for nonprofit organizations to engage in succession planning due to a variety of barriers listed below. However, it is possible for any nonprofit organization to overcome these barriers to effectively develop and implement the succession plan to strengthen their organization.

Most nonprofits lack the additional resources (i.e., staff, funding, etc.) to hire a consultant, provide additional training, or engage in any extra activities as they may be a small nonprofit or rely on very limited or restrictive grant resources for their programming. As these agencies are interested in engaging in the succession planning process, they can begin integrating succession planning efforts or discussions in their existing meeting and training processes (along with integrating it as part of their grant related activities that relate to training). Succession planning does not need to be a separate program of the organization but can be integrated into existing staff and board meeting/training efforts that are focused on the goal of succession planning. As noted in previous sections, succession planning is an overall organization effort to strengthen and build the capacity and sustainability of the organization.

Quite often, nonprofit organizations are faced with the lack of time to complete various projects or planning efforts until our organization encounters a crisis with a key staff departure. Succession planning is focused on building the organization's preparedness and readiness for these staff and board transitions. It is a proactive step to build the organization's capacity and readiness for these changes. It is also an opportunity to engage in thoughtful discussion to plan and build the staff, board, and overall organization's capacity on many levels to prepare and prevent the crisis mode in which our agencies often operate. The buy-in and investment may take time but it is critical to begin these conversations and discussions with the staff and board. By beginning these conversations and taking small steps, it can gradually build the investment for the succession planning process.

Succession planning is made more difficult when the organization has not identified the gaps of the various skills or expertise in the organization, or believes they cannot gain or develop those skills without extra funding or resources. Through succession planning, they can assess and identify these gaps, and begin planning for the appropriate training and cross-training efforts for their staff and board so their organization can build, grow, and sustain the overall organization capacity. It is also a key opportunity to build the existing strengths of the organization along with ensuring that the organization's key history, philosophy, core values, and skills are part of the overall staff and board training processes.

Unfortunately, all agencies face oppression and racism within our communities and in our work with survivors. However, the greater challenge is often evaluating and confronting the oppression and racism that exists within the organization itself. How often do you offer training on anti-oppression and anti-racism for the staff and/or board? Do you allow and have regular and open discussions about anti-oppression and anti-racism with the staff and/or board meetings? How many of the staff and board are from communities of color and/or marginalized communities? How are they engaged and involved in decision-making within the organization? Succession planning provides the opportunity to further identify and address the gaps as it relates to anti-oppression and anti-racism. An effective succession plan will include these core or essential values/philosophies that need to be integrated and sustained within the organization for future generations.

The materials in this toolkit were adapted from:

- Succession Planning for Nonprofits of All Sizes, Blue Avocado. <http://www.blueavocado.org/content/succession-planning-nonprofits-all-sizes>
- Succession Planning for Coalitions, Resource Sharing Project. <http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/succession-planning-coalitions>
- Succession Planning for Nonprofits – Managing Leadership Transitions, National Council of Nonprofits. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/succession-planning-nonprofits-managing-leadership-transitions>
- Succession Planning – HR Planning, HRCouncil.ca. <http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/planning-succession.cfm>
- What HR Managers Need to Know About Succession Planning, the Balance. <https://www.thebalance.com/succession-planning-1918267>

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