

Hewlett Foundation Education Cohort on Leadership Transitions

LEARNING MEMO

Phase III: Final Summary + Worksheet
(September 2023- March 2024)



**Leadership
Learning
Community**

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ABOUT LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

Leadership Learning Community (LLC) is a national organization and network of changemakers. We invite leaders, particularly those from historically excluded communities like Black, Indigenous, immigrant, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities, to live out the compelling vision of liberation - one which seeks power, joy, and thriving for all people. To do this, we facilitate and encourage unlearning oppressive structures, engaging communities of practice that create new cultural norms, and the development of tools and frameworks that allow us to align our values and actions. Together, we create spaces for leaders to run, fund, and study practices rooted in collective liberation (rather than systemic oppression). We call this liberatory leadership.

CONTEXT

While the first two memos were text and graphics, this third synthesis centers on a transition worksheet that participants used to strategize around succession planning. We hope this will be a tool that the social good sector may benefit from.

There is also an accompanying short video sharing the learnings and voices of participants and LLC that can be found at Leadership Learning Community's website¹. While there are a number of resources on executive transitions available, we hope the multimedia will provide a more accessible perspective for the sector.

In total, our learnings confirm that transitions are messy and inevitable; sharing real life examples will, we hope, help to normalize all of this.

First Synthesis: [Opportunities from the discovery and exploration phase](#) (May 2023)

Second Synthesis: [Learning from virtual circles and in-person convening](#) (September 2023)

Third Synthesis: Final summary + Worksheet (April 2024)

Primary Audience: The primary audience for this final synthesis will be the broader philanthropy and nonprofit sector, in order to provide a sharable resource for organizations and leaders thinking about or navigating leadership transitions.

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<https://leadershiplearning.org/publications/hewlett-foundation-education-cohort-on-leadership-transitions/>

Transition Planning Worksheet

The worksheet begins with you – the person creating the plan. Ground in who you are and what you’re considering while drafting a transition plan, whether personal or for an organization. Use this page as a reminder of your objectives.

Name:

(optional) **Title/Role:**

Who is this for? Circle one:
Personal or **Organizational**

Values you intend to hold

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Examples: Transparency, Equity, Legacy, Care, Adaptability, Resilience, Humility

What is possible with a successful transition/ succession plan?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Reflections on this leadership transition cohort, succession planning and anything you want to remember to include.

A: ASSESSMENT

Understanding where you are/the org allows leaders to lean into transparency and collaboration with staff and stakeholders. For organizations, the framework the Hewlett Education Cohort used and adopted was the STARS Framework by Michael D. Watkins.

- Start-up: Assembling the capabilities (people, budget, technology) to get a new program/department/organization off the ground.
- Turnaround: Saving a department or entire organization widely acknowledged to be in serious trouble.
- Accelerated Growth: Managing a rapidly expanding organization.
- Realignment: Re-energizing a previously successful organization that now faces problems.
- Sustaining Success: Coming in on the heels of a highly regarded leader with a stellar record of accomplishment.

WHAT IS YOUR HIGH LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION? (E.G. REALIGNMENT)

WHY? BACK UP YOUR ASSESSMENT WITH FACTS. WHAT DO YOU KNOW TO BE TRUE? WHAT OPPORTUNITIES + RISKS ARE PRESENT?

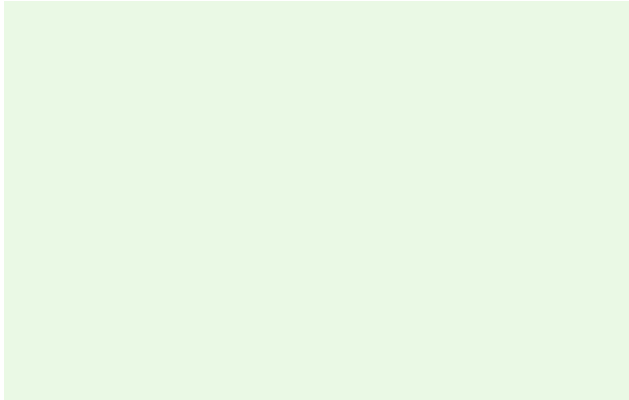
STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)

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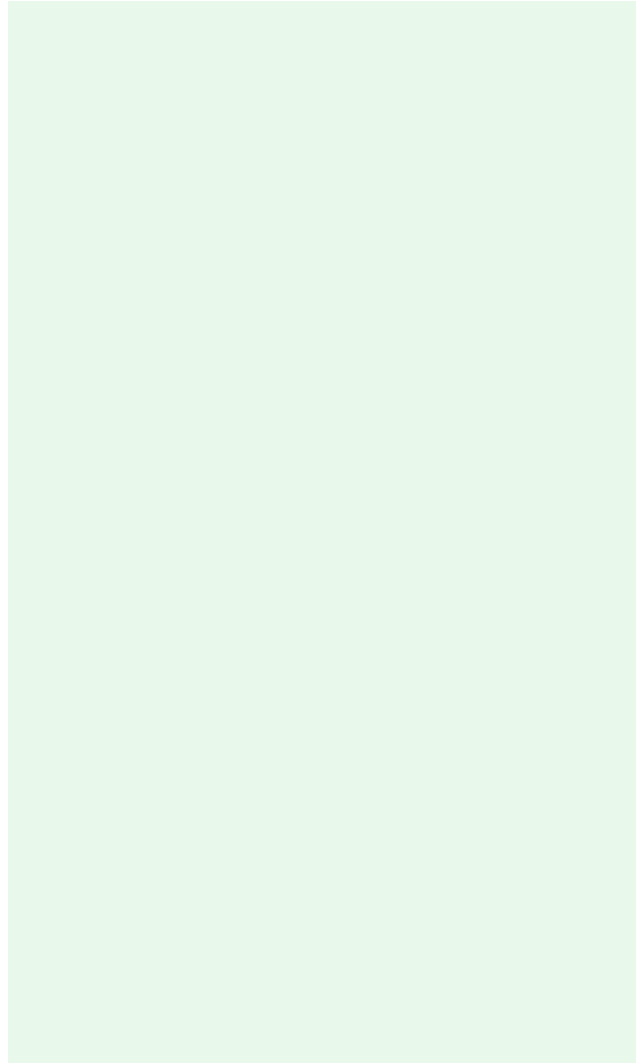
B: STAKEHOLDERS AND ROLES

Identify the “who”: Stakeholders, critical roles, and resources involved. Which roles are essential for the organization to fulfill its mission?

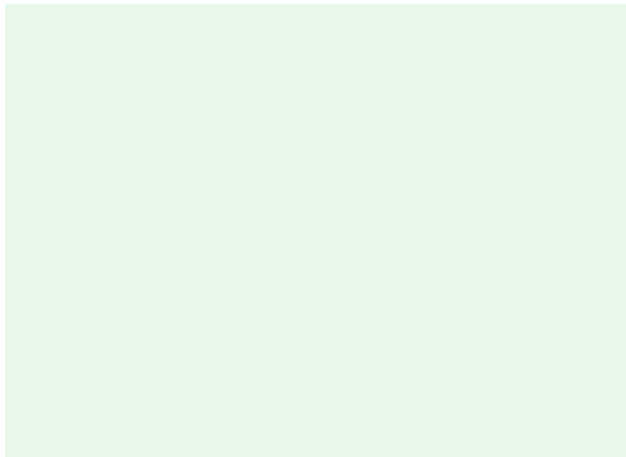
WHICH ROLE(S) IS THIS TRANSITION PLAN FOR (E.G. A PERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, GOVERNANCE BOARD)?



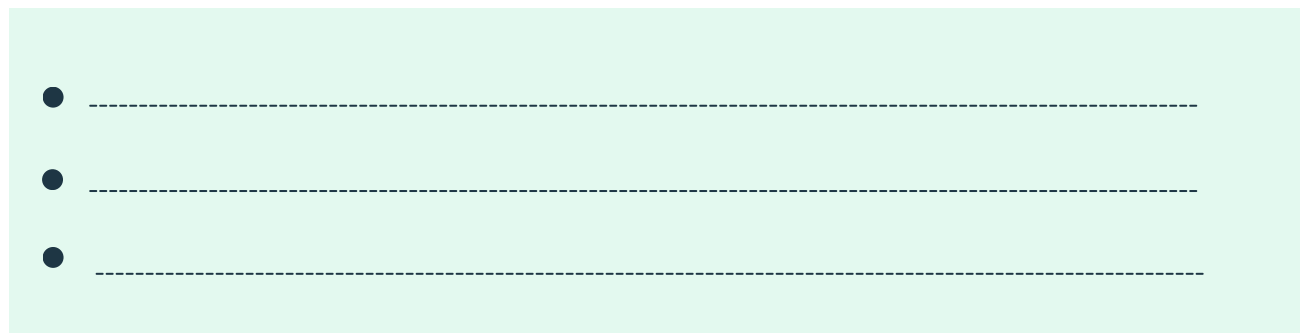
WHO MUST YOU WORK WITH TO FINALIZE THE PLAN ? WHAT MIGHT THEIR ROLE BE (INCLUDING EXTERNAL SUPPORT)?



WHO WILL OVERSEE THE TRANSITION? (E.G. THE BOARD, A COMMITTEE OF BOARD + STAFF + CONSULTANTS, AN INDIVIDUAL, A CONSULTANT)



STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)



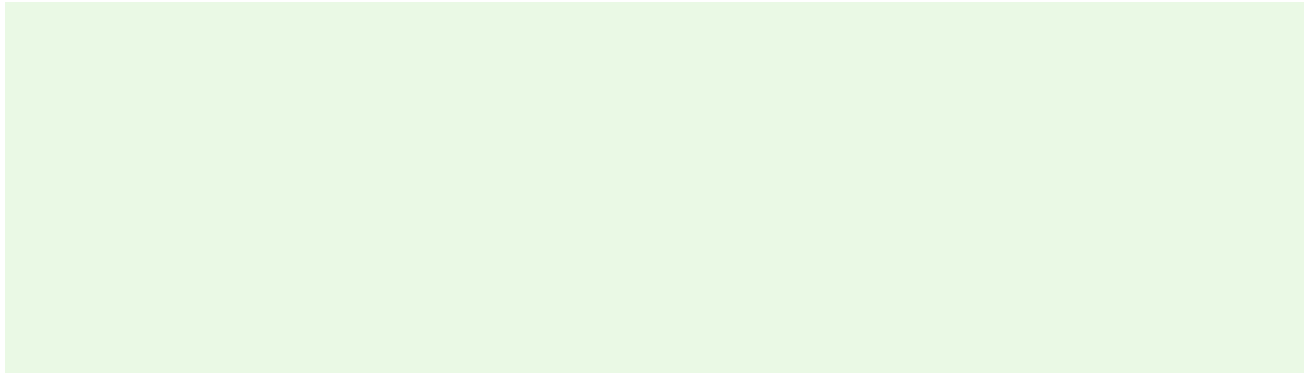
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C: PEOPLE AND CARE

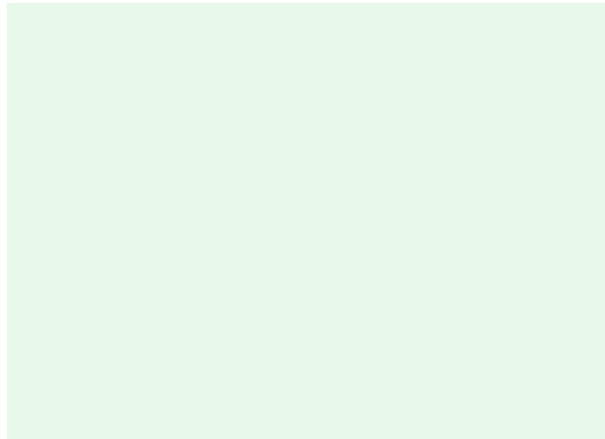
Emotions in transitions are high for everyone, but they are only sometimes named or addressed directly. This is an invitation to embrace human messiness and emotions with compassion.

Resource: [Learnings from death doula Stephanie Yazi gives insight into how.](#)

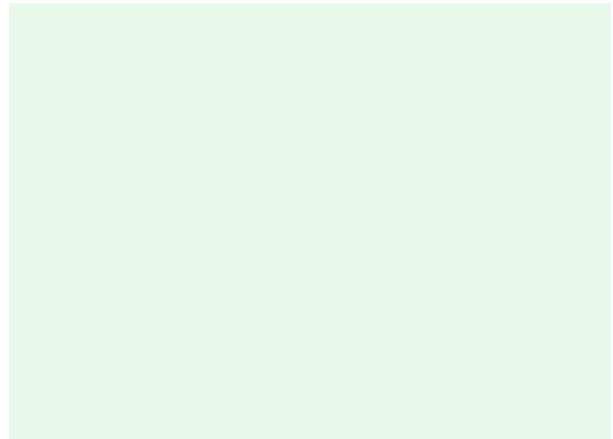
HOW DO YOU WANT YOURSELF, STAFF, CONSTITUENTS, AND/OR STAKEHOLDERS TO FEEL?
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE STEPS TOWARDS THIS GOAL?
WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED? (E.G. RITUALS, SPACE FOR REFLECTION, RETREATS)



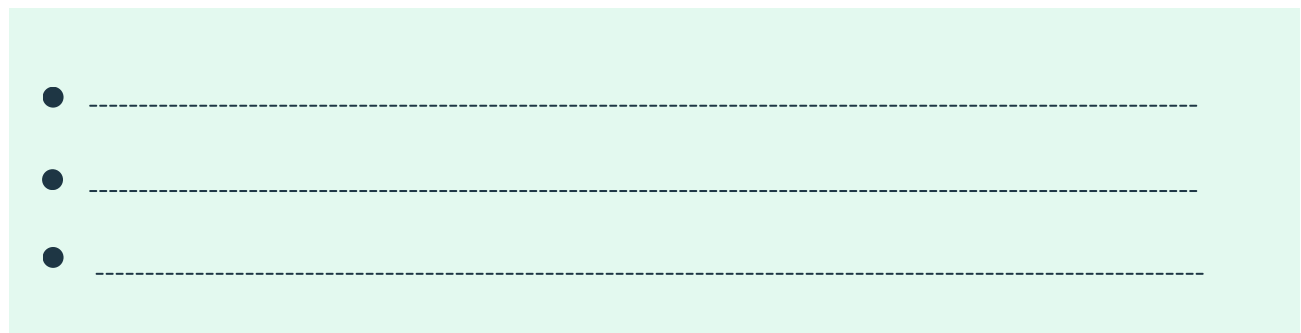
WHAT ARE YOU EXCITED ABOUT REGARDING THIS TRANSITION?



ANY FEARS OR NERVOUSNESS ABOUT THIS TRANSITION? WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MITIGATE THE RISKS YOU'RE PERCEIVING?



STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)

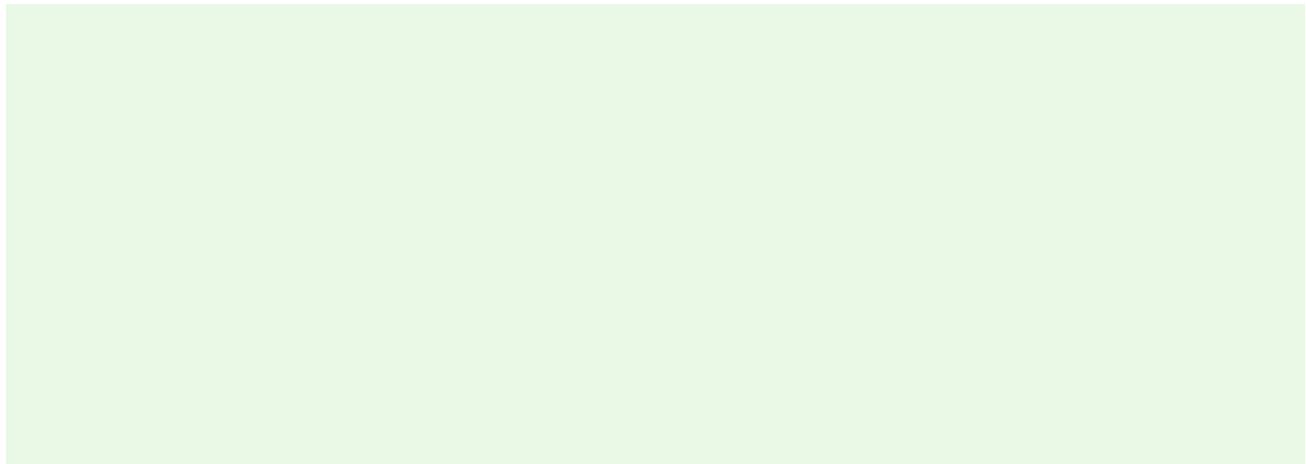


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D1: EQUITY AND LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP

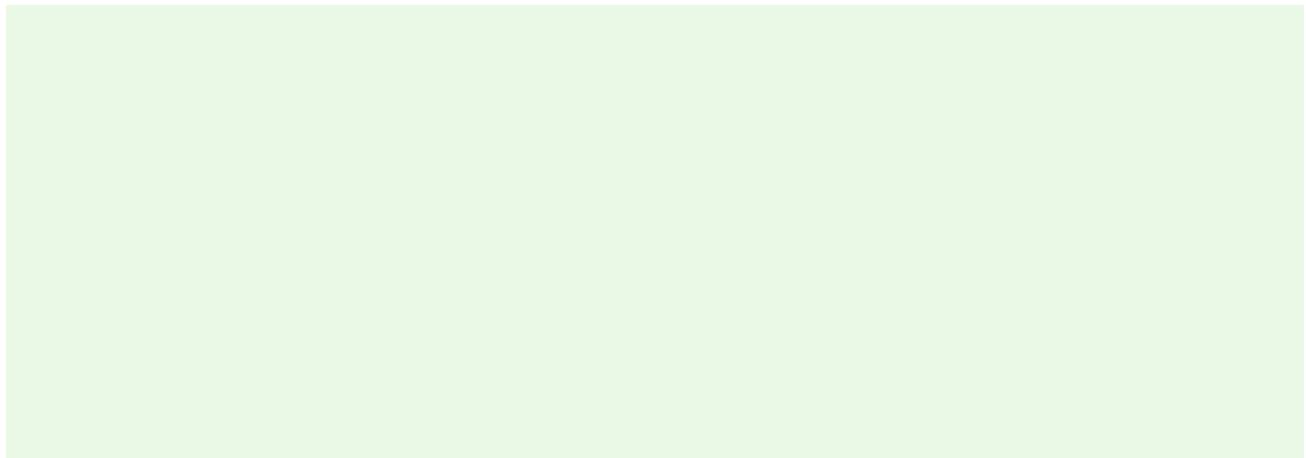
How does equity and liberatory leadership show up in transitions? Oftentimes, leadership transitions are used as an opportunity for organizations to put in action values and goals around racial equity. Below are reflection questions drawn from the lessons of LLC's work, the [Hewlett Education Cohort](#), [Brilliant Transformation: Toward Full Flourishing in BIPOC Leadership Transitions](#), and the [Race Equity Toolkit for Leadership Development](#).

BE CLEAR ON WHY YOUR ORGANIZATION WANTS A RACIALLY DIVERSE TEAM. EXPLORE LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST EXPERIENCE. INVESTIGATE THE CONDITIONS IN PLACE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION TO RETAIN STAFF AND LEADERS OF COLOR. JOT DOWN YOUR NOTES BELOW.



Liberatory leadership invites leaders to start outside of systems of oppression in creating a more just and equitable society. It prioritizes the empowerment of historically excluded communities, challenges traditional power dynamics, and emphasizes the importance of love, wholeness, and interdependence. Get started by adopting a learning stance and an evaluative mindset.

WHAT LEARNING QUESTIONS COULD BE ASKED DURING A TRANSITION? IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU OR YOUR ORGANIZATION ENSURE THAT THIS QUESTION WILL BE ASKED, ANSWERED, AND ASKED AGAIN DURING THE TRANSITION PROCESS?



D2: EQUITY AND LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP

A REMINDER TO BREATHE. YOU'VE BEEN DEEP IN STRATEGY. TAKE A MINUTE TO REGROUND PHYSICALLY. CHECK IN WITH YOUR BODY AND FEELINGS. WHAT KIND OF CLUES ARE THEY GIVING YOU TO YOUR NEEDS RIGHT NOW? FOR THIS PORTION, WE INVITE YOU TO DOODLE, FIND AN ANALOGY, PEN A POEM, OR SIMPLY MEDITATE A BIT ABOUT THIS TRANSITION.



IN YOUR DREAMIEST OF DREAMS, WHAT WOULD A LIBERATORY TRANSITION PROCESS OR PLAN LOOK LIKE? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE? (E.G. EASEFUL, EMPOWERING, LOVING, CONFIDENT, DONE BY SOMEONE ELSE)

A large, empty light green rectangular area intended for writing or doodling.

STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)

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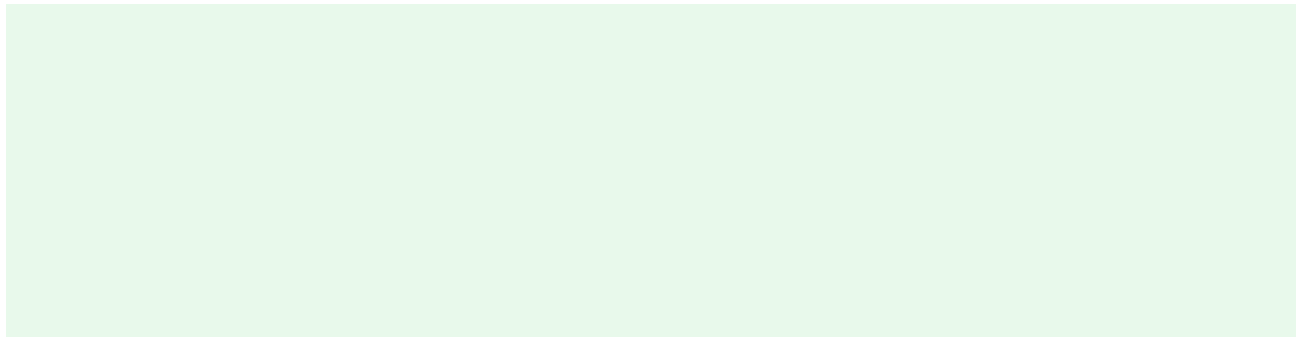
E1: SUCCESSION PLANNING

For organizations readying for leadership transitions, here are some strategic questions to start with.

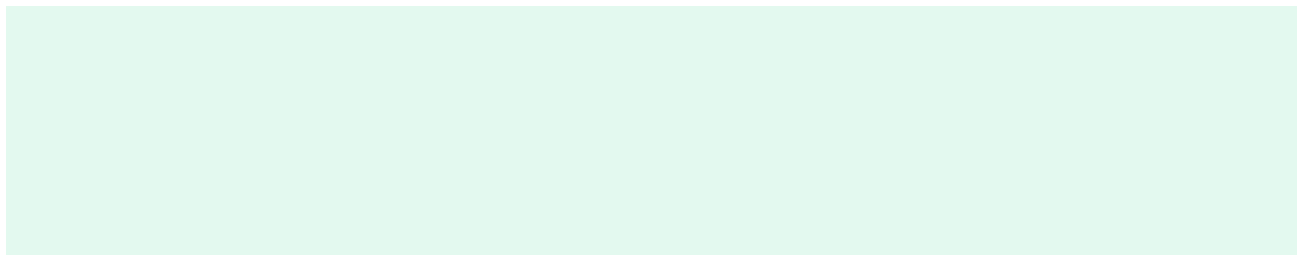
IS THERE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STRUCTURAL SHIFTS IN THE ORGANIZATION THAT YOU ARE SEEING NOW? FOR EXAMPLE, WILL THE ORGANIZATION BENEFIT FROM CONSIDERING DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP OR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE? E.G. CO-LEADERS; MERGER.



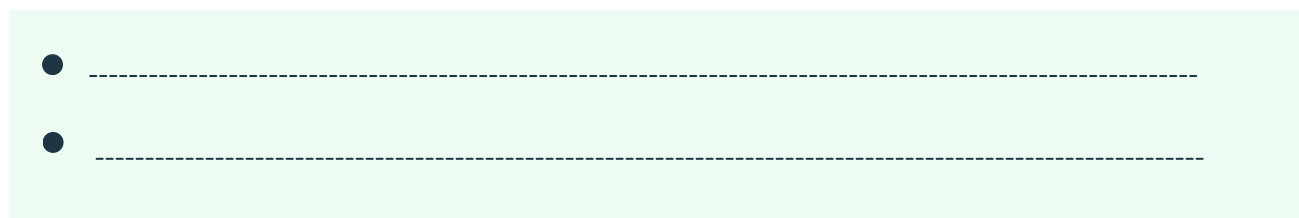
ASSESS INTERNAL CAPACITY AND STRUCTURES IN PLACE. WHAT IS POSSIBLE WITH CURRENT RESOURCES? ARE THERE BIG SHIFTS THAT MUST HAPPEN INTERNALLY? WHAT REDUNDANCIES AND SKILLS ARE NEEDED? ARE THERE RESOURCES FOR THIS?



DO YOU NEED OR PREFER EXTERNAL SUPPORT? ARE THERE RESOURCES FOR THIS?



STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)



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E2: SUCCESSION PLANNING

There are many succession plans and they vary in length and details. For organizations readying for leadership transitions or interested in updating their exiting plans, here are some key components of a succession plan. The next page will also explore unexpected, emergency transitions.

Please rate the succession planning components below based on this scale:

- 1 = Need to start
- 2 = Draft or outline in place
- 3 = Needs updating
- 4 = Almost complete
- 5 = Fresh and Final



Job description for role

1 2 3 4 5



Transition Committee established

1 2 3 4 5



Timeline

1 2 3 4 5



Interim leadership structure established

1 2 3 4 5



Knowledge transfer plan

1 2 3 4 5



Communications internally

1 2 3 4 5



Communications externally

1 2 3 4 5

TIMELINE

Do you have deadlines or target dates in mind for key milestones? What are they?

INTERIM LEADERSHIP

Is there a scenario where the organization might need to appoint interim leadership during the recruitment of a permanent candidate? Who will be the interim leader (e.g. internal candidate or consultant)? Factors may relate to organizational assessment.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PLAN

How will the current leader share their knowledge with the interim or successor? Some organizations arrange for consulting time with the former leader, some build in intentional overlap, others may just have a memo.

E3: EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COVERAGE PLAN

This work often looks like an emergency succession as it accounts for unexpected transitions, and can also support vacation, sabbaticals, and medical leave. This plan is meant to stabilize the organization so it may still perform its mission.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL DUTIES HELD BY THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP?

Duties	APPLICABLE? Y/N	Where is this information held?
Payroll		
Finances (audits, signing checks)		
Contracts and Grants		
Staff Management		
Board Management		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

TEMPORARY LEADERSHIP PLAN: WHO ARE THE INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN STEP INTO FILLING THAT WORK (E.G. SIGN OFF ON PAYROLL, CONTRACTS, AND AUDITS, FILL OUT REPORTS TO FUNDERS, SUPERVISE STAFF, ENGAGE WITH BOARD)?

DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY: DEFINE WHO MAKES ESSENTIAL DECISIONS SUCH AS WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. THIS COULD BE THE SAME PERSON AS ABOVE, THE BOARD CHAIR, OR A COMMITTEE.

F: COMMUNICATION + WHEN

A key part of planning for a transition is communications: what to say, when, and to whom about an anticipated or emergency transition. This forces entering territory that feels risky. Thinking through messaging to different audiences can help mitigate that risk.

The message can vary depending on the purpose of sharing. Here are some examples:

- **Brief announcements** for a wider audience. “Exciting news, a transition is happening...”
- **High level messaging** which may include an outline of the transition process and timeline.
- **Deep communication** including 1:1 meetings, regular updates, and group conversations that facilitate meaning making and illuminate clarity in the process, roles, and next steps.

LIST ALL THE PEOPLE / GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO NEED TO KNOW ABOUT A TRANSITION IMMEDIATELY. WHAT DO THEY NEED TO KNOW AND BY WHEN?

LIST EVERYONE ELSE WHO WILL EVENTUALLY NEED TO KNOW.

STEPS TO TAKE AND/OR QUESTIONS TO ASK (AND TO WHOM)

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Outline of Succession Plan

This is a boilerplate outline of a succession plan. Please customize, add or omit other sections as you see fit. Remember to update your plan regularly.

Statement of purpose of the succession plan (e.g. To mitigate organization risk when a leader leaves/is removed from role):

Values that will guide the transition:

Identify which roles will be covered by the plan, and if there is a job description in place for these roles (e.g. This plan accounts for a planned transition by [a person, executive director, director, board]):

Identify who will oversee the transition (e.g. The board, a committee of board + staff + consultants, an individual, a consultant will oversee the transition once an event triggers the transition to take place)

List the responsibilities of the person/committee who will oversee the transition in chronological order (e.g. develop a timeline, appoint an interim leader, manage knowledge transfer, communicate to stakeholders, implement a leadership search)

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Outline of Executive Leadership Coverage Plan

This is a boilerplate outline of an emergency succession plan. Please customize, add or omit other sections as you see fit. Remember to update your plan regularly.

Temporary Leadership Plan - List of duties that must be held when the executive leadership is unavailable:

Temporary Leadership Plan - Identify what documents or portals must be accessible and where they are located:

Temporary Leadership Plan - Identify who (one or more people) has capacity, knowledge, ability, and legal capacity to perform the duties listed above:

Decision-Making Authority - identify who makes critical decisions for the organization when the Executive Leadership is out of the office (e.g. the board, a committee of board + staff, an interim director):

Accompanying Plans

Please customize, add or omit other sections as you see fit. Remember to update your plans regularly.

Offboarding plan (e.g. the current executive director will develop an offboarding plan that includes how knowledge transfer will take place, when their role will end, what capacity they may be involved, if any) :

Interim leadership plan (e.g. the deputy director and director of programs will step in as co-interim directors. Their role will be to...):

Recruitment plan (e.g. the board will prioritize internal candidates; a recruiting firm to recruiting firm to hold an international search.):

Onboarding plan (e.g. list goals for the first three months, six months, year and three years. Name ongoing role of transition committee.):

Communications plan (e.g. list who will be communicated to by whom, when, and what level of information):

Resources and References

Transition consultants:

- Bess Bendet (bess.bendet@gmail.com <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bess-bendet-9749a61/>)
- Ananda Valenzuela (hello@anandavalenzuela.org) <https://anandavalenzuela.org/>
- Jill Eisenhard (jill@jkeisenhard.com) <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jill-eisenhard-b80683b>
- Elsa Rios <https://strategiesforsocialchange.com/services/leadership-transitions/>
- Christa Gannon <https://www.theltc.org/coaching>
- TSNE <https://tsne.org/executive-search-and-transition/>

Resources mentioned above:

- Learnings from Death Doula Stephanie Yazzi - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yikw0NLWvsZQcm_XHOHuH89Bfmtk-ga3/view?usp=sharing
- Hewlett Education Cohort Memos - <https://leadershiplearning.org/publications/hewlett-foundation-education-cohort-on-leadership-transitions/>
- Race Equity Toolkit for Leadership Development - <https://leadershiplearning.org/publications/race-equity-toolkit/>
- Brilliant Transformation: Toward Full Flourishing in BIPOC Leadership Transitions - <https://www.rsclark.org/resources#brilliant>