Preparing for the Inevitable:
A Succession Readiness Checklist

When the following conditions are in place, an agency can expect a relatively smooth transition to new leadership whenever it might occur. An agency might determine which elements below are lacking in its current operations and then create a "succession plan" or "capacity building plan" that prescribes activities and timelines for filling the gaps. The agency is then ready for leadership transitions, foreseen or unforeseen.

- A strategic plan is in place with goals and objectives for the near term (up to three years), including objectives for leadership talent development.
- The board evaluates the executive director annually on general performance and achievement of strategic goals.
- The board, based on its annual self-evaluation, is satisfactorily performing its major governance jobs—financial oversight, executive support and oversight, policy development, and strategic planning.
- The executive's direct reports, based on annual evaluations, are judged as solidly skilled for their positions.
- The top management cohort, as a high performing team:
    - Has a solid team culture in place in which members support one another and can reach decisions as a group efficiently and harmoniously;
    - Shares leadership of the organization with the executive in having significant input to all major agency decisions;
    - Can lead the organization in the absence of the executive; and
    - Has authority to make and carry out decisions within their respective areas of responsibility.
- Another staff person or board member shares important external relationships (major donors, funders, community leaders) maintained by the executive.
- A financial reserve is in place with a minimum of three months' operating capital. Financial systems meet industry standards. Financial reports are up to date and provide the data needed by the board and senior managers responsible for the agency's financial strength and viability.
- Operational manuals exist for key administrative systems and are easily accessible and up to date.
- Top program staff have documented their key activities in writing and have identified another staff person who can carry their duties in an emergency.

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