

# SUCCESSION PLANNING CHECKLIST

## for non-profits and other organizations

→ This broad-based checklist is based on content from the "Succession Planning" audio podcast, available through Volunteer Yukon's website at [www.volunteeryukon.ca](http://www.volunteeryukon.ca).

Non-profits and other organizations need to ensure that they have mechanisms in place that will keep their operations running smoothly over time, with the least possible disruption, whatever changes occur in their workforce or Board of Directors. Succession planning is long-term planning that touches on every aspect of an organization and may be undertaken by Board members, the Executive Director and/or other staff. Succession planning primarily involves human resources management, including the following considerations:

### 1. Preparing for Change

Recognize that organizational change is guaranteed to happen and that staff and Board member changes will also happen.

Be alert to large scale socio-economic trends and pay attention to corresponding developments within your organization.

Ensure that adequate documentation is in place to identify organizational history, vision, goals, and procedures.

Ensure that effective structures are in place to protect current employees during periods of upheaval (e.g., during a shift in leadership, financial cut-backs, etc.).

Build capacity now (i.e., invest in staff/volunteers) in order to prepare for the future.

### 2. Identifying Organizational Needs

Be familiar with Acts and Agreements that affect your organization (e.g., Umbrella Final Agreement, Societies Act, Employment Standards Act); keep abreast of legislative changes.

Create 'competency frameworks' for Board/staff/volunteer positions: clearly identify the personal values, skills, knowledge, and experience required by your organization.

Obtain and consolidate feedback from all colleagues/departments regarding your organization's needs.

### 3. Hiring and Recruiting

Make a case by case determination on internal vs. external hiring.

Perform internal recruitment whenever possible: look to the needs of current staff, allow for professional advancement.

Fairness in hiring = clarity about the criteria for the role (transparency). Have ready an up-to-date job description and list of qualifications for each position in your organization.

Implement measures to prevent two of the most difficult hiring scenarios: (a) everyone applies, and (b) no one applies.

Board member and other volunteer recruitment can be very challenging: identify a pool of possible replacements before you need them (e.g., through networking).

Identify ways to transfer operational knowledge from previous/current staff to new staff; goal is to have the smoothest staff transition possible.



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### 4. Staff Evaluations

- Can be formal or informal, but should be based on the job descriptions.
- Should be delivered at least once a year, in a positive reinforcement context, as opposed to a single shot 'intervention' when performance is poor.
- Can be used as an opportunity to let employees know how much their work is appreciated; consider offering constructive criticism well before the actual evaluation so that employees have a chance to make adjustments and earn a glowing review.
- Should be offered with the intention of supporting professional growth and development and with the objective of maintaining or improving performance.
- Consider incorporating employee self-evaluations, as part of a 2-way dialogue.
- Volunteers, too, appreciate feedback on their performance, as well as the opportunity to express their views on their work.

### 5. Mentorship – developing talent for the long-term

- Mentors cannot be 'assigned'; they are chosen by their protégés. When contemplating a possible mentorship, look for a good match, conducive to a productive relationship.
- Style of mentorship will vary based on the two people involved, but a supportive, encouraging relationship is essential: protégés need to feel free to ask questions and need room to explore and experiment.
- Develop a mentor-friendly culture at your organization: encourage people to become mentors, offer some guidelines for mentorship, and take the idea of mentorship seriously.

### 6. Leadership – identifying key positions and people to fill them

- Look for leadership potential:* Leaders step forward and take on challenging assignments; they are visionaries who see the 'big picture'; they are collaborative and always mindful of the people they serve; they give power away and empower others; they are compassionate, secure, self-aware, and committed to the truth even when it isn't personally flattering. Where they show up, things get done.
- Recognize that there are many different styles of leadership – some leaders may be less visible than others, but no less effective.
- Support leadership qualities/tendencies in staff and volunteers so that they are well prepared to assume key positions when vacancies arise.

### 7. Risk Management

- Focus on Board, staff, and volunteer retention:* losing an individual who plays a pivotal role in your organization can seriously undermine its operations. Identify and create incentives for personnel to stay with the organization.
- Anticipate unforeseeable/unavoidable staffing changes due to illness, retirement, or other reasons, and build capacity in existing personnel (e.g., transfer technical knowledge, offer professional development opportunities, etc.).
- In your organization's Action Plan/forecast budget, allow for the time/cost associated with staff and volunteer turnover.