Succession Planning Offerings from NPO Solutions
Prepared by NPO Solutions and Received by The L.A. Trust Board of Directors
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Introduction
Succession Planning is an essential way to ensure an organization stays functional during periods when key personnel are in transition or are absent. A good succession plan makes sure responsibilities are covered during the transition period, while also seeking to streamline and minimize the duration of the transition process. Finally, succession plans should also help accelerate new personnel into operating effectively in their new roles.

In their most basic form, succession plans are a list of responsibilities to be covered and steps to be taken under various contingencies. However, at their best, succession plans are regularly updated, deeply integrated processes with linkages to leadership development, organizational strategy, and the capture of institutional knowledge.

Succession Planning Overview
The framework below outlines the phases of our succession planning process.

- **Capturing Institutional Knowledge**
  - Identify members in key leadership positions
  - Consolidate the knowledge of key leadership positions.
  - Annotate a set of strategic plans, org charts, budgeting processes, stakeholder maps, etc. with nuanced information.

- **Defining the Role**
  - Revisit and update the formal descriptions of key roles.
  - Additionally, capture the less tangible aspects required of the role: cultural fit, stakeholder relationship needs, etc.

- **Planning the Transition**
  - Plan who will temporarily cover which responsibilities.
  - Develop a streamlined process for evaluating and hiring new leadership to fill the missing role.

- **Onboarding New Leadership**
  - Set out prioritized steps for relationship building.
  - Create a plan for key staff and board members to share important contextual and captured institutional knowledge.
Capturing Institutional Knowledge
In this first phase of the process, a Succession Planning Task Force is formed comprised of organizational leaders and board members. The key personnel that are identified as requiring succession plans work alongside the task force to capture, distill, and consolidate the important, nuanced details of the organization and its context that don’t show up on a logic model or strategic plan. The goal is to help the new leader quickly understand the vision of the previous leader and how various strategies and operations align to pursue that vision. By walking through and annotating key organizational documents alongside other organizational leaders and board members, this step prepares a detailed map for the future leader, as well as knowledgeable guides who can support the eventual transition.

Defining the Role
In addition to updating the formal job descriptions for the key positions, this step seeks to capture the often implicit expectations of a leadership role and the qualities that help produce success. This will likely include aspects such as the role this position has played in the organization’s culture, how this position has supported various stakeholder needs, how responsibilities have been delegated to staff, etc. This aims to help the new leader understand what will be expected of him/her in the new relationships. This reflection is also valuable for setting accurate and useful criteria by which to judge applicants for the position. If feasible, a short-list of potential succession candidates may be created based on these criteria.

Planning the Transition
This step of planning the transition is often what comes to mind when people think of succession planning. Here the Succession Planning Task Force lays out a process for filling the vacant position and allocates the responsibilities of the absent position across appropriate staff and board members for the interim period. This part of the plan also includes a communications strategy for keeping the organization’s key audiences—the staff, the Board, funders and partners—up to date regarding the transition and helps manage their expectations regarding how operations may be affected.

Onboarding New Leadership
Finally, the last step of the succession plan should be focused on setting the new leader up for success. This means having a list of priorities laid out for him/her, along with details on where he/she can get information and support on various issues from staff and board members. Task Force members who helped the previous leader capture the nuances of the position should spend time with the new leader reviewing the documentation that was created as part of that process. There should also be an adaptable timeline in place that carves out time for building rapport with staff, board members, funders, and other key stakeholders.
Aligning Succession Planning with Leadership Development

Given that external hires for leadership roles have higher rates of failure and often perform less well than internal hires, succession planning is ideally connected to the talent development processes within an organization to maximize the identification and preparation of future leaders. A regularly conducted 9-box evaluation, customized with criteria appropriate for the organization, can be used to help recognize high-potential staff and identify the experience they need to grow into higher level roles.

The 9-box grid method independently evaluates individuals’ current performance alongside their future potential to recommend if they are ready for greater responsibility or how they become better prepared to step into a higher level position.

### Nine-Box Leadership Development Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>POTENTIAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mastery in Role</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Performance/ Focus on Current Position</td>
<td>1A. Not Yet Full Performance/ Focus on Current Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A. Exceptional Performance/ Focus on Current Position</td>
<td>3B. Exceptional Performance/ Growth to Bigger Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev. Focus: Continue developing in current position; tap for coaching, special assignment or task force</td>
<td>Dev. Focus: Ready for one-level promotion is functional area of expertise with broader responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev. Focus: Target ways to achieve greater results and improve competencies for growth position; consider lateral move.</td>
<td>Dev. Focus: Preparing for potential one-level promotion in functional area of expertise or for broader responsibility in current position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev. Focus: Target key areas for improvement or re-assign to lower level of organization.</td>
<td>Dev. Focus: Check for appropriate job match or other problems; may be new to position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Succession Planning Deliverables

Ultimately the succession planning process produces:

- A set of annotated organizational documents and frameworks detailing the nuances of the leaders’ vision and strategies.
- A revised formal job description and a deeper description of the expectations and qualities important for the position.
- A detailed action plan for temporarily delegating the unmet responsibilities as the organization seeks, evaluates, and hires a replacement.
- A communications plan for keeping stakeholders informed and managing expectations.
- A set of priorities for the new leader and a process for developing important relationships.