

Emergency Succession Planning Key Questions for the Executive Director

If you were suddenly injured and unable to work, would the leaders of your board or your management team know the following?

QUESTION	YES	NO	TO DO
1. Does your organization have an emergency succession plan that outlines a process for appointing interim leadership and new permanent leadership if required?			Follow the guidelines provided by GCN or view the sample plans on the website of the Texas Commission for the Arts or other resource sites recommended by GCN.
2. Who else in your organization could readily outline the top-most trends, challenges and opportunities for your sector and organization?			Ensure that board meeting agendas regularly include discussion of strategic issues, an updated SWOT.
3. Is your board and management team well briefed on the strategic plan and the annual plan for the current year of it?			Have regular team meetings with management or all employees to make sure everyone understands the relationship of their work to key outcomes.
4. Is your staff team prepared to carry on with uninterrupted operations in the event of your absence?			Provide cross-training. Leadership and talent development. Encourage independence. Delegate.
5. Do you have written policies and procedures that clearly outline decision making authority?			Study policies and procedures of like-size organizations in your sector. Go to BoardSource. Don't reinvent.

QUESTION	YES	NO	TO DO
6 Do staff leaders regularly coordinate their work as a group and individually as needed?			Ensure that staff meetings take place and that projects involving multiple departments include regular meetings.
6 Are work processes documented?			Ask department heads to document key processes.
7 Are your files up-to-date, labeled, well organized and assembled?			Ensure that key documents such as contracts, grants, long-term pledges and banking information are documented and known to a board member. Include passwords & alarm codes.
8 When you walk out the door, how much crucial institutional information walks out with you? Are there key business records that are kept only under your hat?			Begin to document donor calls. Dictate notes and store voice files if necessary.
9 Are there key donors, stakeholders, or other relationships that only you are aware of or handle exclusively? Who else should know? Who else can be introduced into those relationships?			Spread the weight of key relationships among staff and board members, as appropriate. This creates institutional confidence rather than the sense of one person as the organization.
10 What else could you do to ensure leadership continuity and operational sustainability in your organization in the event of an emergency?			Understand that you can't do all of this. Not quickly. With your board, create a plan for prioritizing these steps.

Key Questions for Board Leadership

In the event of a planned or emergency short-term absence of the chief executive of the nonprofit you chair, would you know?

	YES	NO	TO DO
1. Does your organization have an emergency succession plan that outlines a process for appointing interim leadership and new permanent leadership if required?			Follow the guidelines provided by GCN or view the sample plans on the website of the Texas Commission for the Arts or other resource sites recommended by GCN.
2. What committee of the board follows trends, challenges and opportunities for your sector and organization?			Ensure that board meeting agendas regularly include discussion of strategic issues, an updated SWOT.
3. Is the board well briefed on the strategic plan and the annual plan for the current year of it?			Ensure reviews of the strategic plan, current progress, road blocks and board contributions to progress are reviewed regularly at board meetings.
4. Does the board fully understand the role of the executive director and his/her functions?			Ensure that the board performs an annual review of the ED and participates in knows priorities related to the strategic and operational plan.
5. Does the board have a specific focus for its role in fulfilling the strategic plan? Beyond fiduciary oversight, strategic planning, board giving and serving as ambassadors, what is the board uniquely positioned to do more effectively than staff?			With the executive director, ensure that a full board meeting is dedicated to identifying the board's specific role in meeting the strategic plan.

	YES	NO	TO DO
6 Does the board conduct an annual self-assessment to ensure it is meeting goals and contains the diversity, expertise and contacts required for success?			Develop a self-assessment tool based on the many available online from BoardSource and other resources recommended by GCN. A strongly functioning board provides stability in the event of a temporary or permanent unplanned departure of the ED
6 Does the board’s structure support the work of the organization?			As a part of the board self-assessment and identifying the board’s primary focus, ensure the structure is tailored to the organization’s needs. This will also allow the organization to endure upheaval and better provide for smooth transition.
7 Has the board reviewed how do-able the executive director’s job is? Is the compensation commensurate with market rates required in the event the ED must be replaced?			As a part of the annual review of the ED, consider whether the job is feasible for one person. Make salary adjustments to market, even if the ED is reluctant to accept money that could be used for programs.
8 Is the organization properly staffed and are systems up to date?			Ask the executive director for a staffing assessment to see if key staff are overworked and whether churn could contribute to difficulty developing staff.

	YES	NO	TO DO
9 Are there key donors, stakeholders, or other relationships that only certain board members handle exclusively? Who else should know? Who else can be introduced into those relationships?			Spread the weight of key relationships among the executive director, staff and other board members. This creates institutional confidence rather than the sense that a key board member's departure
10 What else could you do to ensure leadership continuity and operational sustainability in your organization in the event of an emergency?			Understand that you can't do all of this. Not quickly. With your board, create a plan for prioritizing these steps.