



Succession Planning – Case Study

This case study is presented as a guide to help Divisions of Family Practice with their succession planning. Our appreciation goes to Vantage Point for their input and assistance.

Introduction

Succession planning helps organizations assess where they are going, identify the people they need to get there, and then plan for, recruit and develop their human resources based on a vision of the future.

This paper focuses on succession planning as an outcome of three key strategies - culture, planning and strategic recruitment - that must be at work in an organization in order for continuity of qualified leadership and planned organizational growth to take place.

What is succession planning? Simply put, it is the process of identifying and developing people who are already within your organization to take on future leadership roles.

Why is it important? People are the most important assets of every volunteer-driven organization. It takes time to identify people who are committed to your vision, to engage them and bring them up through the organization from attending their first event to joining a working group or committee, and one day putting their name forward for election to the board. Retirements, resignations or more sudden and unexpected losses of key people – including your board members or executive director - can be devastating to an organization that is unprepared. A succession plan can ensure that your division always has the right people to deliver your mission, and that those people are well-equipped with key information and a deep understanding of the organization's purpose and priorities.

The Essential Elements of Succession Planning

In this case study we'll look at the essential components of succession planning and break each one down into how-to tips.

1. Develop the culture

A succession plan is more than a document that sits on a shelf. It is an ongoing commitment, usually with strong engagement and support of the senior leadership, to develop your people. It is an organizational culture that recognizes that this investment in individuals is for the good of the whole organization.

- **Start with your vision, mission and values.** This is how you will clearly articulate your purpose to volunteers who want to understand how they fit into the larger puzzle and how



they can make a difference. After all, research indicates that 96 per cent of people work with volunteer organizations because they believe in the cause.

Your mission and vision are also the starting point for your strategic plan, which clarifies the division's goals and priorities and helps board members and senior staff to make key organizational decisions and evaluate success.

Your vision statement should be aspirational. It describes what the division wants to become – the ideal future, the destination. It should resonate with all your members and give them a shared sense of purpose, direction and inspiration. In developing your vision, answer these questions:

- What will success look like?
- What does the division want to be in its fullest state of development?
- How does the division want to be viewed by members and stakeholders, including the communities it serves?

For example:

The _____ Division of Family Practice will be a full partner in the development and growth of the primary healthcare system in _____. Family physicians, patients and primary health care partners will all be able to see the benefits that the Division brings to _____.

The mission statement is more practical. It describes the fundamental purpose of the division and guides your overall aims and activities of the division. It is linked to the vision and values of the organization and is the starting point in developing a strategic plan.

A mission statement answers these questions:

- What is the division's purpose? Who are we?
- What does the division do? Why are we doing it?
- What is our role?

For example:

The _____ Division of Family Practice is a non-profit society that is led by and for family physicians practicing in _____. The Division will work to:

- Improve patient care
- Increase family physicians' influence on health care delivery and policy
- Provide professional satisfaction for physicians

- **Cultivate Leadership from within the Organization.** Engaging people who are already involved with your division and bringing them up the pyramid of engagement (pictured below) is the best way of sustaining the organization and ensuring committed, knowledgeable future leaders.



The vertical dimension of this engagement pyramid represents the intensity of engagement, with light engagement at the bottom and high intensity, deep engagement at the top. Its horizontal dimension represents the number of people involved. Combine the two and you get a pyramid with lots of mildly engaged people at the base and a small number of deeply engaged people at the top.

As it relates to retention, it's important to note that new members won't suddenly jump from the very bottom of the pyramid to the very top. You must nurture the relationships with individuals and gradually move them up the rungs, increasing their commitment and involvement each step of the way.

Continually work to form relationships with new people. Learn their interests, skills and experience. Cultivate their engagement by creating opportunities for them to be more involved. To that end, it is effective to have a variety of volunteer roles that have varying commitment and time requirements.

2. Plan, Plan, Plan

Organizations that enjoy long-term, sustainable success aren't just lucky. They plan for success by giving their people opportunities to learn and grow within the organization as outlined above. They also provide proper training, clarity of roles and responsibilities and transfer of knowledge to help leaders in their roles.

- **Transfer knowledge** – Sharing knowledge within the organization can ensure that, in the case of a sudden or even interim transfer of responsibility your board of directors and/or executive director know where to find all the information necessary to keep the organization



functioning effectively. This is often managed through the development and maintenance of an “information inventory.”

Information – including documents and contact information – from the following areas of your Division operations should be gathered and accessible for review at all times:

- Finances and payroll
- Banking
- Insurance
- Legal
- Human resources and membership
- Facilities
- Service contracts
- Fundraising
- Authorizations and approvals

The inventory (see sample template in Appendix 1) should be completed and reviewed annually to make sure that in unplanned or planned transitions, organizational leadership has direct access to vital information necessary for making strategic leadership decisions.

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities** – It is a good idea to develop positions descriptions for your board and committee members. This helps your organization by identifying the skills and attributes needed for each position. Remember to update these continually. Role descriptions should not be driven by the characteristics and responsibilities of the current position holder, but should be adapted and expanded as needed to achieve your vision and strategic objectives.

Linking position roles to your mission statement can help candidates understand how they can contribute to the big picture. Role descriptions can also spell out time commitments and accountabilities, so people know what they are getting themselves into and what they will be responsible for.

Similarly, the board and any working group or committee of the board should be guided by clear terms of reference. These articulate the purpose, objective(s), and composition of the board or committee, as well as how often it will meet and to whom it is accountable. For example, is your board a working board or a governance board? This answer depends on the roles your directors play, and is likely based on where your division is in its evolution.

Templates for role descriptions and terms of reference can be found in the Governance Handbook (and link to it here).

- **Have a rigorous “on boarding” process** – When you recruit a new director(s) to your organization, or a new volunteer in any significant leadership role for that matter, it is important to take the time to properly orient them to the organization. This not only equips



them to represent the division externally, but it will give them the confidence they need to excel.

Board support can take the form of any or all of the following:

- A board toolkit or handbook
- An orientation to the board & organization
- An opportunity to meet with other board members and/or staff
- A mentor within the organization – perhaps another director or former director

3. Strategic Recruitment

Recruiting involves identifying people with the skills, competencies and qualities your organization needs now and in the future. Remember, this doesn't just mean bringing new people into the organization; it also means identifying those already within the division who have what you will need in the future and then developing them to move into leadership roles.

In order to determine the people the division needs, the board should ask itself:

- Where is your division in its life cycle, on the continuum of start-up, adolescent, mature or stagnating/declining?
- What diversity are you looking for in terms of gender, race, cultural background, age, community connections, leadership style, thinking style, skills and experience?
- What motivates potential board members? People are motivated by what's in it for them – i.e. a belief in or personal connection to the cause, or a desire to use their skills. They aren't motivated by desperation, so focus on the positive drivers.