CEO Transition Plan
Bob Harris, CAE

The final reputation of an organization’s executive director may be his or her effective planning for a smooth transition upon departure. The board of directors should be made aware as to what steps to take if the chief staff officer were to depart suddenly. Services and operations should not be interrupted because of an unexpected or planned succession.

These points guide the CEO in drafting the organization’s succession document. Share the plan with board and staff, and provide a copy to legal counsel, accountant or insurance agent.

Appoint an Interim CEO – Upon notice of the CEO’s departure, appointed one senior staff person to act as the interim executive director to carry out the responsibilities of the organization. This should continue until a new CEO is named and begins employment. This senior staff person would not be considered a candidate for the position.

Appoint a Selection Committee – The board should appoint a CEO Search Task Force to interview applicants. The current board chair should act as the task force chair or appoint an individual to serve in that capacity.

Members of the task force should be qualified active volunteer leaders of the organization. Individuals selected for approval should possess the necessary skills and previous experience of hiring a CEO (in a nonprofit organization.) The composition of the task force should be diverse, including active past chairs of the board, members of the board; and active volunteer leaders with organization membership investment credentials, among others. The senior staff person will provide administrative support for the task force.

☐ Resources – Task force, with staff help, should contact allied professional organizations that can offer help in identifying candidates and qualification.

☐ Seek CEO Candidates – Notice of job opening should be prepared and submitted to like-organizations. Additionally, local or regional advertising may be considered.

☐ Identify Potential Candidates – All suggestions and nominations of candidates should go to the task force. Candidates who are well qualified for positions as executive director do not usually job hunt. [Many will seek a position at another organization only when invited to do so or as referred by a reliable source.]

Other Succession Elements
Include the locations of important information documents for easy access.

☐ Governing Documents
☐ Operating Manuals
☐ Insurance Files
☐ Tax Files
☐ Passwords and Codes
☐ Backup Records and Tapes
☐ Safe Deposit Box
☐ Spare Keys
☐ Names of Insurance, Legal and Accounting Consultants
☐ Leases and Contracts

Also include a note to the board as to who, when and how to inform the membership of a CEO transition.
- **Contact Candidates, Obtain Information** – When all resumes are received, the task force should contact the applicants and request any additional data, if needed.

- **Consider Resumes** – The task force should carefully review the resumes and performance records of all candidates. Evaluate the applications based on the job requirements and core values established by the board.

- **Interviews** – The task force should interview the top candidates. It should use the same interview guide and format so all candidates are considered equally.

- **Check References** – Carefully check references of the top candidates. Also conduct a credit and criminal check so that no past history slips by and arises after hiring. In addition, the task force may contact other staff and volunteer leaders within the industry in order to gather information the traits of candidates.

- **Evaluate Candidates** – Evaluating the competency and qualifications of applicants through brief interviews is often a difficult task. The task force should evaluate the finalists and provide *one* final recommendation to the board of directors.

- **Board Selects the New CEO** – The board will ratify the final candidate. A unanimous selection by the board is good member and public relations. It increases the prospect of a harmonious relationship between the board and the CEO. It also strengthens the organization and community members’ confidence in the board and staff.

- **Notify Candidates** – After the board ratifies the new CEO the task force should notify each candidate interviewed for the position. Then strategically introduce and market the new CEO to the membership and allied organizations.

Be sure to consult with legal, accounting and insurance counsel in the development and implementation of the plan.

**Note:** Bob Harris, CAE, conducts leadership orientation and strategic planning. He is author of the Association Self-Audit Process® manual. Contact bob@rchcae.com.