



SUCCESSION PLANNING: Keeping your mission on track

Emergency Succession Plan Decision Template for Covid-19

How to Use This Decision Template

This plan was initially designed to make proactive decisions before a possible emergency transition occurred. We have pivoted the plan to be more reactive to today's more immediate needs. Realizing that your needs may include more than succession planning for the Executive Director, we have added Appendices with a shortened staff succession template which you can reproduce for any position and a streamlined Emergency Operations Checklist.

If you suddenly find yourself an Acting Leader, we suggest you start with the Emergency Operations Checklist. We've identified the most basic information that you'll need to communicate, find policies, and keep delivering your mission. This list isn't meant to be exhaustive or complete. Some of the categories may not apply to your organization and/or some categories specific to your organization may be missing. Please modify as needed.

In the main decision template, your decision points are highlighted in yellow. In some cases, example information has been provided to spur your thought process.

Your Board of Directors should approve the succession plan for the CEO. Staff succession decisions can be made by the CEO. Because of all the uncertainty and fast rates of change, this is a good time to stay in close touch with your Board.

In addition to the plan itself, we'd like to share some free resources with you.

- One of our partners, Risk Alternatives, focuses on risk management all the time. Their Covid-19 page is updated regularly and contains many helpful links. <https://riskalts.com/coronavirus-nonprofit-risk-page/>.
- Nonprofit HR also has HR-focused Covid-19 resources, templates, free webinars, etc. Their resource page can be found at <https://www.nonprofithr.com/covid19/>.
- The Council of Nonprofits has similarly compiled some very helpful resources including a template for a business continuity plan. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/nonprofits-and-coronavirus-covid-19>
- BoardSource is also opening their Ask-An-Expert program for free to non-members. https://boardsource.org/resources/nonprofit-board-member-respond-covid-19/?utm_campaign=R%2BS&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8a1703PQw_KT1pSDkMv9tdbuwDiHHk4xGxvac3oKyl-Jc8n092sfmYai0y2HRFgOfDLbfmHty8cFcwBoufkHQgKchjUg&hsmi=85035690&utm_source=hs_email&utm_content=85035690&hsCtaTracking=35773ce8-140d-4c7a-833d-5ee4795c4b98%7C4d41b4fe-f072-46c1-8120-9e12aa8d3a68#resources

1 Procedures for the Appointment of an Acting CEO in the Event of 2 an Unplanned Absence of the CEO

3
4 This emergency succession plan ensures continuity in the leadership and management of the
5 organization's core functions in operations, internal and external communications, fund
6 development, finance, and human resources during an unplanned absence of the CEO. It
7 provides Board and Staff with a shared understanding and knowledge of roles and
8 responsibilities.

9
10 The Board of Directors recognizes that this is a plan for contingencies due to the CEO's sudden
11 departure – temporary or permanent. If the organization is faced with the unlikely event of an
12 untimely vacancy, the organization has in place the following emergency succession plan to
13 facilitate the transition to both interim and longer-term leadership. It is designed to promote
14 confidence for the community (board, staff, donors, volunteers, partner agencies, broader
15 community, etc.) and the staff that the organization remains stable and strong during a
16 transition with a leadership and management structure to support its mission.

17
18 This plan is designed for the short term to steady the organization, and when appropriate to
19 serve as a bridge to the Board's longer-term succession policies. While some of the policy
20 decisions relating to succession are relevant for short-term absences, this plan is created to
21 stand alone based on the immediacy of the need for clear direction under these circumstances.

22 23 Definitions

24 This document is applicable to the following situations in which a CEO cannot fulfill his or her
25 responsibilities:

- 26 • A short-term, temporary, unplanned absence
- 27 • A long-term, temporary, unplanned absence
- 28 • A sudden permanent departure

29
30 An **unplanned absence** is one that arises unexpectedly in which it is anticipated that the CEO
31 will return to his/her position once the events precipitating the absence are resolved. A **short-**
32 **term absence** is defined as **three months or less**. A **long-term absence** is expected to last more
33 than three months. A permanent change is one in which it is firmly determined that the CEO
34 will not be returning to the position.

35
36 This **emergency succession plan** names specific people and roles for temporary succession only.
37 **Succession policies**, defined separately, outline the process and make advance decisions about
38 how executive transition will be handled when seeking a permanent new executive.

41 **Procedures and Conditions**

42 In the event of an unplanned absence of the CEO, the staff or Board Member who is first aware
 43 of the situation should immediately inform the Board Chair (or another member of the
 44 Executive Committee if the Board Chair is not available) of the immediate or soon to occur
 45 absence. This plan is to be activated as soon as the absence occurs.

46
 47 As soon as it is feasible, the Chair should convene the **Executive Committee**, preferably online or
 48 by phone, to review the procedures prescribed in this plan. Any actions resulting from this
 49 discussion should be communicated to the full board so that each member of the board of
 50 directors is fully informed and engaged.

51
 52 In the event that the CEO is unable to fulfill their duties, the position of Acting CEO will be filled
 53 by the **[Position Title/Board Member]**. Should the standing appointee to the position be unable
 54 to serve, the back-up appointee for the position of Acting CEO will be the **[Position Title/Board**
 55 **Member]**.

56
 57 Any Board Members serving in an Acting staff leadership role will **resign from / take a leave of**
 58 **absence** from the Board of Directors for the duration of their acting staff role. That Board
 59 Member will be eligible to be readmitted to Board of Directors by board vote **immediately/one**
 60 **month** after leaving the acting staff role.

61
 62 *It is possible, under extenuating circumstances, to share leadership responsibilities for the short*
 63 *term. If this is the right solution for your organization, delineating functions can make roles clear.*
 64 *If you can designate a single Acting CEO, then please delete through line 69.*

65

Function	Who
<i>example: Communication</i>	<i>Name</i>
<i>example: Overall financial, check signing & budgeting</i>	<i>Name</i>

66

67 Acting shared leaders will meet by **phone/online 2x weekly** at a minimum to coordinate. Any
 68 news deemed significant will be shared with the **Executive Committee / Board Chair / Full board**
 69 via **email/board portal/virtual meeting**.

70

71 **Authority and Compensation of the Acting CEO**

72 The person appointed as Acting CEO shall have the authority for decision-making and
 73 independent action. However, the following actions require **executive committee/board**
 74 approval.

- 75 • Changes in the organization’s vision, mission or values
- 76 • Significant program or delivery changes due to Covid-19
- 77 • Taking on financial commitments (leases, loans, etc.)
- 78 • Sales or purchases of organizational capital assets exceeding \$XXXX

- 79 • Spending over a certain amount
- 80 • Making investment decisions
- 81 • Starting new or discontinuing existing programs
- 82 • Hiring and firing of key staff, including named personnel on grants
- 83 • Changes in staff pay: increases, decreases, bonuses
- 84 • Changes in staff benefits / policy unless required by law
- 85 • Starting new or discontinuing existing fund raising events
- 86 • Modifying the communications plan and its limits
- 87 • Other
- 88

89 The board agrees to consider bonus compensation for the Acting CEO either upon the return of
90 the CEO and/or if they serve in this capacity for 3 months or more.
91

92 Board Oversight of the Acting CEO

93 The Executive Committee shall be responsible for monitoring and supporting the work of the
94 Acting CEO, with the Board Chair serving as the liaison and primary communicator with the full
95 Board.

96
97 The Board Chair and/or their designee will be responsible for weekly meetings with the Acting
98 CEO focusing on support, ensuring that they have the resources required to perform their
99 temporary duties, and receive assistance from other board members as needed. As
100 appropriate, the [Position Title] may also be asked to join these meetings.
101
102

103 Leadership Communications Plan

104 Immediately upon transferring the responsibilities to the Acting CEO, the Board Chair or
105 designee will notify remaining staff members and members of the Board of Directors of the
106 delegation of authority.

107
108 As soon as possible after the Acting CEO has begun covering the unplanned absence, Board
109 Members and the Acting CEO shall communicate the temporary leadership structure to key
110 internal and external supporters as delineated below.

111
112 We will seek to keep messages consistent across all stakeholder groups and protect personal
113 health information as appropriate.

114
115 *Optional:* [Name] will act as the primary spokesperson for the organization.
116

117
118
119
120

121

Example Communication Plan – Adjust priorities to meet your organization

Phase	Entity (e.g. funder, donor, partner)	Communication Method	Person Responsible	Where is the contact information?
1	Board Board Chair	verbal	CEO	current roster maintained by Executive Assistant
	Governance Committee	verbal	Board Chair	
2	All other board members	verbal	Governance Committee	
	Partner Chair	verbal	Board Chair	
	all other Partner board members	verbal	Partner Chair	
	Staff Directors - Operations, Development, Policy and Finance	verbal	CEO	Current roster maintained by Executive Assistant
	Executive Assistant	verbal	CEO	
	Assistant Directors - Case Management, Programs, and Clinical	verbal	CEO & Directors	
All other staff	verbal	Directors		
3	Donors All donors who have given more than \$100,000 in the last year	verbal	CEO & Board	Current roster maintained by the Director of Development
	Donors who have given more than \$50,000 in the last two years	verbal	CEO & Board	
	Donors who have given \$1000 or more in the last year (email only)	Email	CEO & Director of Development	
	Key partners CEO of ABC	Email	CEO & Board	With assistance from Director of Operations and Director of Development for current contacts
	CEO of DEF			
	CEO of all agencies where we have a formal contract for services or partnership - currently			
	• A			
	• B			
	• C			
	• D			
• E				
• F				
• G				
Government Contractors A B	Email	Staff Directors	with assistance from	

Partner Project Officer (key staff change is a required notification)			Director of Operations
Private Foundation Grantors - for Foundations with whom we have a two+ year relationship:			with assistance from
• A			Director of Operations and Director of
• B			of
• C			Development
Clients	Mixed	Staff	staff
Volunteers	Mixed	Staff	directors to assist in
Other Community Contacts	Will vary	Will vary	generating the current (at the time) list of anyone else
Media	Consider, Press release, website update	Named Spokesperson?	

122
123

124 Completion of Emergency Succession Period

125 The decision about when the absent CEO returns after a short-term absence should be
 126 determined by the CEO and the Executive Committee. They will decide upon a mutually agreed
 127 upon schedule and start date. Written release by a medical practitioner may be required. A
 128 reduced schedule for a set period of time may be allowed, by approval of the Executive
 129 Committee, with the intention of the CEO working his/her way back up to a full-time
 130 commitment.

131
 132 If the CEO will be unable to return after a short-term absence, the Board should invoke the CEO
 133 Succession Policies.
 134

135 Checklist for Emergency Succession Plan

- 136 **Succession plan approval.** This succession plan will be approved by the full Board of
 137 Directors. This plan should be reviewed annually by the _____.
- 138 **Attachments.** The organizational chart, the CEO job description and the Board roster should
 139 be attached.
- 140 **Important Organizational Information.** The CEO check list should be completed and stored
 141 with this document. See Appendix B.
- 142 **Communication.** The CEO should share this plan with those in line for the Acting CEO
 143 position and document their willingness to serve if needed. Additionally, all staff designees

144 defined in Appendix A should similarly know their roles and indicate their willingness to
145 serve.

- 146 **Copies.** Copies of this Emergency Succession Plan and attachments should be maintained by
147 the Board Chair, the CEO, and stored with the Board minutes and personnel files.
148 Additionally, copies should be stored in cloud storage such as Dropbox or Google Drive. Any
149 password files should be stored with additional security and limited access.

150 ***Approval and Signatures***

151

152 Date Submitted for Review: [Date]

153 **Emergency Plan Approved by:**

154

155

156 Signed: _____ Date: _____

157

[Name]

158

Chief Executive Officer

159

160

161

162 Signed: _____ Date: _____

163

[Name]

164

Chair, Board of Directors

165

166

167

168 **Appendix A: Succession Designees for Staff Leadership**

169 **In this section, identify the management positions that may need to be filled in an emergency situation.**

170

Position to be Filled	Person Filling Position	Temporary Reporting Line	Limitations
<i>example: CFO</i>	<i>J. Mendez</i>	<i>Acting CEO</i>	<i>Check signing to be designated to COO</i>
<i>example: Director of Programming</i>	<i>See responsibility split below</i>		

171

172

173 **Responsibility Split for *Director of Programming*** **Re-create this table as often as needed**

Function	Who	Temporary Reporting Line	Limitations
<i>example: ABC Program oversight</i>	<i>B. Hoya</i>	<i>Report to CEO</i>	<i>Budget changes require approval</i>
<i>example: Data Management & reporting</i>	<i>L. Smith</i>	<i>Report to CFO</i>	

174

175 **Appendix B: Emergency Operational Checklist**

176 The checklist provided here is a shorter version of our full CEO Checklist. We’ve tried to
 177 prioritize information that would be necessary in an emergency situation. These checklists are
 178 general, however, and may contain too many or too few categories for your organization.

179 Please feel free to modify the tables to better fit your organization.

180

181 Most tables have a “Password #” column. For items with password protection, the password
 182 should be documented in a separate, numerically referenced document (or documents) which
 183 can be accessed only as needed. Once Acting Leaders have stepped down, passwords should
 184 be reset.

185

186

187 ***Personnel***

INFORMATION	LOCATION / MAINTAINED BY	PASSWORD #
Staff Roster		
Payroll Vendor		
Job Descriptions		
Human Resources: Other Contracts		
Employee Handbook		

188

189 ***Board***

INFORMATION	LOCATION / MAINTAINED BY	PASSWORD #
D&O: Contact information		

190

191 **Finance & Fund Raising**

INFORMATION	LOCATION / MAINTAINED BY	PASSWORD #
Financials: Budget		
Financials: Cash Flow		
Bank information		
Financial policies (signing, reserves, separation of duties, etc.)		
Government Reporting / Filing (Key Dates)		
Funder/Grant Reporting (Key dates)		
Funding events (Key dates, Chairs)		

192

193 **Communications**

194 List of regular communication channels & media applying to both internal and external
195 communications.

MEDIA	PUBLICATION FREQUENCY	MANAGED BY	PASSWORD #

196

197 Other Communications

INFORMATION	LOCATION / MAINTAINED BY	PASSWORD #
CEO Email		
CEO Calendar		

198

199 ***Information Technology***

INFORMATION	LOCATION / MAINTAINED BY	PASSWORD #
Network Administrator		
Web hosting: Vendor and contract		
Email hosting: Vendor and contract		
Cloud software (e.g. Office 365, Dropbox, QuickBooks, eTapestry, backup): contract, password location		

200

201 ***Facilities***

202 Complete this for all facilities that your organization uses whether owned, leased, or lent.

INFORMATION	LOCATION/MANAGEMENT	PASSWORD #
Buildings: Management		
Buildings: Maintenance		
Contracts/Leases		

INFORMATION	LOCATION/MANAGEMENT	PASSWORD #
Outsourced services		

203