

DISTRICT MANAGER TRANSITION PLANNING

SUMMARY AND CHECKLIST

Every district will experience a change in leadership. Being prepared for that change, be it suddenly or planned, will impact the short and long-term future of the district. This guide has been prepared to assist districts with planning for and implementing a process that will ultimately lead to a successful transition from one district manager to another. A more detailed process is provided after this summary and checklist.

IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE

If your district manager (Fire Chief, Executive Director, Port Manager, etc.) and/or board of directors provides minimum notice of the manager's departure, the board should be prepared to hire an interim manager either from within the organization or from outside the organization. Here are some recommended steps to take when a district experiences this type of transition.

- Complete a district readiness and assessment evaluation
 - Is the district supportive of taking an intentional approach to planning for change in leadership? If not, what is holding them back?
 - What is the status of critical policies and procedures?
 - What is the status of the district's strategic plan or similar type plans that guide the district's future?
 - What issues must the district address in the short-term and long-term?
- Develop the recruitment process and revise the job description of the district manager based on the input received
- Is the interim manager appointment from within or outside of the organization?
- How long is the appointment (one to three months; less than six months; six to 12 months)?
- If preference is for an internal candidate or candidates, consider the following:
 - Do the candidates meet minimum qualifications based on the job description?
 - Relevant experience and performance with the district
 - Relationship with staff, board, patrons, and community
 - Will the interim candidate be a candidate for the permanent position?
 - Will the internal interim candidate receive additional compensation?
- If preference is for an external candidate, consider the following:
 - Determine if the board has the capacity to recruit and hire for this position. If not, the district may want to contract with SDAO for this service.
 - Determine desirable knowledge, skills, and characteristics of potential candidates
 - Determine type of relevant experience needed – for example:
 - Same or similar type of district

- General government management (district, city, county)
- Non-profit or business management
- Determine role of interim manager in subsequent hiring of the permanent manager
- Determine the district's capacity to compensate the interim manager
- Recruitment of permanent manager – three options to be considered by the board:
 - Utilize current district procedures and practices
 - Contract with SDAO to facilitate and guide the process with the district board involved at their desired level
 - Contract with a full-service consulting firm that specializes in executive recruitment
- Develop and implement a communication plan to assure all those impacted by the recruitment and hiring of the interim or permanent manager are informed of the processes and timeline for such appointments

PLANNED DEPARTURE

When a district is adequately notified of the forthcoming departure of its manager, the district should have the time to take a very intentional and proactive approach to recruiting and hiring its next manager. Here are some recommended steps for the district to take under this scenario.

- Complete a district readiness and assessment evaluation
 - Is the district supportive of taking an intentional approach to planning for change in leadership? If not, what is holding them back?
 - What is the status of critical policies and procedures?
 - What is the status of the district's strategic plan or similar type plans that guide the district's future?
 - What issues must the district address in the short-term and long-term?
 - Develop the recruitment process and revise the job description of the district manager based on the input received
- Develop a timeframe and schedule for the recruitment process including the preferred starting date of the new manager
- Identify key attributes/characteristics/skills needed in the new manager
 - Consider the organizational assessment completed previously
 - Evaluate the current manager's strengths and weaknesses and how those qualities may impact the recruitment process and qualifications of the new manager
 - Survey management team, line staff, and community leaders regarding key attributes of the next manager
- Review and if necessary, revise the organizational chart
- Review, assess, and revise if necessary, the job description based on the above evaluation

- Review and revise compensation as necessary
 - Is the compensation package competitive with like positions in the community, state, and/or region?
- Determine if there are viable internal candidates for the position
 - Consider if the candidates meet minimum qualifications based on the job description
 - Consider relevant experience and performance with the district
 - Consider relationships with staff, board, patrons, and community
- If the board prefers to hire within without an external process, the board may want to also consider the following:
 - What is the process and timeframe for appointing an internal candidate to the position?
 - What training and support will the candidate need to be successful during the interim and after the current manager leaves the organization? Is the district willing to support such training?
 - What role does the current manager play with mentoring the candidate during the interim and after the manager leaves the organization?
 - What relationship does the candidate have with the board during the interim period?
- Develop recruitment plan and schedule – if the board proceeds with an external recruitment, the board has basically three options for completing this recruitment:
 - Utilize current district procedures and practices
 - Contract with SDAO to facilitate and guide the process with the district board involved at their desired level
 - Contract with a full-service consulting firm that specializes in executive recruitment
- Develop and implement a communication plan to assure all those impacted by the recruitment and hiring of the permanent manager are informed of the process and timeline for such appointment.

ONBOARDING

After the appointment and in collaboration with district management staff, develop an onboarding process. Key items to consider:

- Complete employee contract negotiations and approval
- Complete new hire employee documents
- Review district policies and procedures
- Update administrative documents and agreements
- Introduce the new manager to community leaders
- Establish short-term goals for the manager
- Offer mentoring assistance



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DISTRICT MANAGER TRANSITION PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Over time, every district will experience a change in leadership. How a district responds and prepares for this change will have a significant impact on the district's ability to fulfill its mission, address staff uncertainty, meet community expectations, and provide a great opportunity for the new leader to excel. The purpose of this short planning tool or guide is to assist district boards and leaders with creating a smooth transition when district managers and other key executive level managers leave the district. By following this process and adjusting the process to meet the dynamics of your district, your district should be able to bring new leadership on board with minimal disruption to the district and patrons of the district.

The transition planning process developed within this document may be considered the first step in a district's effort to develop a more comprehensive succession plan for the organization. This planning process is mostly focused on a district's effort to appoint a new district manager. For purposes of this guide, the term district manager refers to any executive position that reports directly to the board of directors (e.g. General Manager, Fire Chief, Executive Director, Port Manager, etc.).

A district may want to evaluate the impact of losing other critical staff and how to plan for that issue as well. In that case, we recommend that district leadership take a more comprehensive long-term, intentional approach to succession planning which will involve additional interaction with staff, board, and the community, possibly outside expert assistance, and quite frankly additional resources.

For purposes of this planning tool, transition planning is a forward-thinking proactive process the district will complete in preparation for the planned and unplanned departure of the district manager. It is not the intent of this tool to be used for disciplining or evaluating the district manager.

There are two types of transition plans defined by this process:

- Immediate Departure – A manager may not be able to manage the district due to unplanned circumstances such as accepting a new position, health issues, family commitments, and/or military deployment. Notice of such departure may be immediate or the manager may be able to give 30-60 days of notice. In any case, the district should be prepared for the change in leadership.
- Planned Departure – By working with the board, the manager defines a specific time for his/her departure due to retirement and/or other foreseen circumstances. Notice of such departure provides ample time for the district to assess the needs of the district and the qualifications and characteristics of the next manager. It is anticipated the current manager will continue to lead the district until the new manager has been appointed.

A process for planning for both types of departures is outlined below.

DISTRICT READINESS/ASSESSMENT

Prior to beginning either process, the board and district leadership should take the time to complete an assessment of district operations and its readiness for the recruitment and appointment of a new district manager. The following questions may be useful in assessing the organization:

- Are the board and district leadership supportive of taking a methodical approach to planning for change in leadership? If not, what is holding them back?
- What is the status of critical operational policies and procedures?
 - Personnel Manual
 - Safety
 - Financial Management
 - Purchasing
 - Public Meetings
 - Public Records
 - Other
- Is there a strategic plan, district goals, and/or board priorities in place? If so, what is the status of those plans?

- What are the most significant issues the district must address now and in the near future?
- Based on the answers from these types of assessment questions, will the district need to make changes in the recruitment process and/or preferred qualifications and characteristics of the next manager?

IMMEDIATE/UNEXPECTED DEPARTURE

There are times when a district will experience a sudden unexpected departure of its manager. When this occurs, the district board will have options for filling the leadership gap within the organization or they may decide to hire outside the organization. The board may want to make a temporary appointment (less than six months) and/or proceed directly to a recruitment process for a permanent appointment. Below are some questions for the board to consider as they discuss and define the district's next steps forward.

- Is there an internal candidate or candidates within the organization that could fulfill the district manager duties on a short-term, interim basis? When considering this option, the board may want to ask the following questions:
 - Do the internal candidate and/or candidates meet the minimum qualifications for the position?
 - What is their tenure with the district and how relevant is their experience to the position?
 - What is their relationship with the staff, community, patrons, and the board?
 - Will the candidate apply for the district manager position when its posted or are they only interested in the position on an interim basis?
 - What additional compensation will be offered to the candidate while fulfilling the district manager role?
- Will the district recruit from outside the organization to fill the interim district manager position? When considering this option, the board may want to consider the following:
 - Determine the knowledge, skills, and characteristics that are needed to fulfill the position on an interim basis.
 - Determine the type of relevant experience the external candidate may need to possess. For instance, does the candidate need to have experience in the specified field or generally in special district/city/county management?
 - Determine if the board has the experience, knowledge, and desire to recruit for this position or if contracting with SDAO or another outside source would be beneficial to the organization.

- Determine what role the interim manager will play in the recruitment and mentoring the new manager.
- Consider and evaluate the district's ability to compensate the interim manager and the amount of compensation offered to the candidate.

Recruitment of Permanent Manager – Because the district has experienced a sudden departure of its manager, the district may want to proceed as quickly as possible with recruiting and appointing a new permanent manager. The board may want to advance directly in one of the following ways:

- Follow the district's current recruitment process as specified in district policy and procedures. The board may want to consider many aspects of the planned departure process defined in the planned departure section of this planning tool.
- The district may want to enlist the assistance of SDAO with facilitating and guiding the district's recruitment process. SDAO routinely provides this service to districts at a very nominal fee. The district remains in control with assistance from an experienced consultant from SDAO that can provide the district with the guidance needed to assure a pool of strong candidates for the position.
- The district has the option to contract with a consulting firm that specializes in executive placement. This option usually provides the district with a full-service recruitment process with minimal impact on district operations during the initial recruitment process (advertising, screening) and once a preferred candidate is selected, the background and reference checking that is required.

Communication Plan – The district will need to develop a communication plan to be shared with staff, patrons, and community leaders regarding the departure of the current manager and the process for fulfilling the manager's role on an interim and permanent basis. The communication plan is essential for assuring that everyone involved in the situation has a clear understanding of the steps the board is taking to fill the position. The communication plan will minimize gossip within and outside the organization, assist with maintaining staff morale, and providing assurance to the community that the district is in good hands during this uncertain time.

PLANNED DEPARTURE

Planning for the departure of a well-known, highly regarded and skilled district manager is never an easy task. However, with foresight and a clear process, the district can be very successful in filling the most important position within the organization. The significant difference of a

planned departure versus an immediate/unexpected departure of the district manager is the planning time available for the district. The district board and leadership staff have an opportunity to determine not only the district's immediate need but the long-term needs of the district and the preferred qualifications and characteristics of its next manager.

The following steps have been developed to assist a district with developing a process for filling their district manager position when the departure of the manager is planned with at least a six-month notice. Districts are strongly encouraged to complete an organization assessment described above as part of this process.

PLANNING STEPS

- Identify the timeframe for the manager leaving the district and develop an assessment and recruitment schedule to meet that timeframe.
- Identify key attributes/characteristics/skills needed in the new manager
 - Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the current manager as they pertain to district goals, priorities, and needs.
 - Consider your assessment of critical operations, policies, procedures and priorities (goals) of the district.
 - Survey staff and direct reports regarding key functions and attributes of the next manager. Personal and confidential discussions are encouraged.
 - Survey other community leaders regarding key attributes of the next manager.
- Review organizational chart
 - Are there any significant changes expected in the district (services) over next 1-3 years?
 - Does the existing organizational chart support the priorities of the district and/or expected changes?
 - Is the span of control realistic for the manager and others within the district?
- Review, assess, and revise job description
 - Update based on assessment above
- Review and revise compensation as necessary
 - Salary range/schedule
 - Benefits
 - Health, life, disability insurance
 - Allowances for cell phone and car
 - Paid time off – vacation, sick leave
 - Training
 - Is the compensation competitive with similar positions in the community/state/region? Need to consider cost of living, size of organization, size of community, and other factors which influence the ability to attract quality candidates.

- Assess internal candidates for the position (if any) and determine if the district should hire within and/or recruit externally for the position
 - Do they meet minimum qualifications for the position?
 - What is their tenure with the district and how relevant is their experience with the posted position?
 - What is their relationship with the staff, community, patrons, and board?
 - What training and support will they need to be successful? Is the district willing to support any candidate training needs?
- If the board prefers to hire within without an external process, the board may want to also consider the following:
 - What is the process and timeframe for appointing an internal candidate to the position?
 - What training and support the candidate will need to be successful during the interim and after the current manager leaves the organization. Is the district willing to support such training?
 - What role does the current manager play with mentoring the candidate during the interim and after the manager leaves the organization?
 - What relationship does the candidate have with the board during the interim period?
- Develop a recruitment plan and schedule – if an external recruitment process is implemented, the board may want to proceed directly in one of the following ways:
 - Follow the district's current recruitment process as specified in district policy and procedures.
 - The district may want to enlist the assistance of SDAO with facilitating and guiding the district's recruitment process. SDAO routinely provides this service to districts at a very nominal fee. The district remains in control with assistance from an experienced consultant from SDAO that can provide the district with the guidance needed to assure a pool of strong candidates for the position.
 - The district has the option to contract with a consulting firm that specializes in executive placement. This option usually provides the district with a full-service recruitment process with minimal impact on district operations during the initial recruitment process (advertising, screening) and once a preferred candidate is selected, the background and reference checking that is required.
- The district should develop a communication plan to be shared with staff, patrons, and community leaders regarding the departure of the current manager and the process for fulfilling the manager's role on an interim and permanent basis. The communication plan is essential for assuring that everyone involved in the situation has a clear understanding of the

steps the board is taking to fill the position. The communication plan will minimize gossip within and outside the organization, assist with maintaining staff morale, and provide assurance to the community that the district is in good hands during this uncertain time.

ONBOARDING

After the appointment – in collaboration with district management staff, the board should develop an onboarding process for the new manager. Some of the critical steps in the process are as follows:

- Complete contract negotiations including signing of the employment contract – Board, Manager, and District Legal Counsel
- Complete new employee documents – HR and Manager
- Review district processes and procedures – Manager and key staff
- Update administrative documents and agreements (e.g. signature on bank accounts, retirement programs, and insurance contracts; appoint as budget officer, etc.)
- Introduce to community leaders – Board Chair/President and Manager
- Establish short term goals – Board and Manager
- Consider mentoring time with former manager – Board, Manager, and Former Manager