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# CEO Succession Planning Workbook



**NEW SCHOOLS  
FOR NEW ORLEANS**

# Introduction

CEO departure is inevitable and presents significant risks and opportunities for charter school organizations. Engaging in long-term succession planning in a manner aligned with best practices not only enables thoughtful leadership transitions, but also bolsters organizations' ability to attract, develop, and retain top talent at all levels. Organizations almost invariably struggle if they wait to make succession plans until their leader's departure timeline becomes apparent. The practices outlined in this document will result in stronger, more stable leadership across schools and school networks.

The purpose of this workbook is to guide boards through the annual cycle of succession planning that should occur before the CEO or the board determines the CEO's departure date. The document first summarizes all necessary steps for boards in initial succession planning, including systems that are not formal components of succession planning, but are necessary to begin planning successfully. Next, the document provides the questions boards must answer to maintain comprehensive succession plans, relevant best practices, and space for boards to complete their own planning.

To make the best use of these resources, we recommend that, before completing this workbook, boards review the [CEO Succession Planning Guide](#), available on [www.newschoolsforneworleans.org](http://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org), in its entirety. The guide provides in-depth information on best practices for each of the steps included below. After reviewing the guide, boards should complete this workbook and update it on an annual basis to refresh information as staff, board members, and organizational needs evolve over time.

If you would like to request a Word document version of this workbook, please contact Holly Reid, NSNO Chief of Policy and Portfolio, at [holly@nsno.org](mailto:holly@nsno.org).

# Succession Planning Preparedness Board Self Assessment

This self assessment can help a board determine its readiness to successfully face a CEO succession. Only those boards that can answer “yes” to all nine items are fully prepared to respond to planned and unplanned leadership transitions.

CHARTER BOARD QUESTIONS	YES	NO
Has your board clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for the board, the Succession Planning Leader, the Succession Planning Committee, and optional third-party entities supporting CEO succession planning work?		
Does your board engage in perpetual, predictable planning through an annual, recurring meeting date or month scheduled to conduct CEO succession planning?		
<b>Within the past twelve months, has your board:</b>		
Adopted or updated an Emergency Succession Plan?		
Engaged in formal discussions or trainings focused on examining personal biases and diversity, equity, and inclusion?		
Conducted a comprehensive assessment and discussion of the organization’s strategic priorities, strengths, and weaknesses?		
Conducted an annual CEO Evaluation for your current CEO?		
Received an update from your CEO on shared leadership development priorities that provide a clear sense of the existing internal bench of potential future CEO candidates and how each of those individuals is being developed?		
Had an explicit discussion with your CEO about their plans for the length of their tenure?		
Adopted or updated a plan for a gradual CEO transition, even if the departure timeline for your current CEO is unknown?		
<b>TOTAL:</b>		

## STEP 1: BEGIN AN ANNUAL CEO SUCCESSION PLANNING PROCESS



**Articulate Roles and Responsibilities:** The Board, Succession Planning Committee, staff, and any third-party entities that the board engages must understand their collective succession planning responsibilities and individual roles in carrying out these responsibilities.



**Engage in Perpetual, Predictable Planning:** Begin succession planning at the start of a new leader's tenure. Define the steps that the Succession Planning Committee will take at least annually, calendar for meetings, and determine the materials needed at each one.

The table below outlines the actors that play a role in succession planning, as well as their respective responsibilities.

ACTOR	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
<b>Board of Directors</b>	The charter board is ultimately responsible for all CEO succession work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine which succession planning responsibilities should live with the full board, and which should be delegated to the Succession Planning Committee</li> <li>Identify the Succession Planning Leader</li> <li>Ensure alignment and buy-in on succession plans before they are implemented</li> <li>Take stock of necessary ongoing board practices (see Step 3)</li> <li>Final selection and engagement of the new CEO</li> </ul>
<b>Succession Planning Leader</b>	This is a board member designated to carry out all responsibilities related to succession planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serve as the board's representative when discussing succession matters with the incumbent CEO</li> <li>Oversee the appointment of board members to the Succession Planning Committee</li> <li>Lead the Succession Planning committee</li> <li>Facilitate annual succession planning</li> </ul>
<b>Succession Planning Committee</b>	The Succession Planning Committee is a charter board committee that executes CEO succession planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain open and honest conversation with the incumbent CEO about their plans for the duration of their tenure and steps needed to develop members of the staff as potential future CEO candidates</li> <li>Develop and maintain the emergency CEO succession plan</li> <li>Annually outline leadership development priorities (in collaboration with the incumbent CEO) to gradually fortify the internal candidate pipeline</li> </ul>
<b>Incumbent CEO</b>	The organization's current CEO must develop and prepare internal talent for emergency and gradual CEO successions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep the board apprised of the strategy for, and progress in, developing a strong pipeline of leaders</li> <li>Put leadership/professional development plans in place for multiple potential internal candidates</li> <li>In the event of a planned departure or retirement, the CEO will play an integral role in the transition process, with roles and responsibilities defined by the board or succession committee</li> <li>Set up the interim and/or new CEO for success</li> </ul>
<b>Interim CEO</b>	The Interim CEO leads the organization in the event of an unplanned or emergency transition (e.g. departure that occurs less than twelve months after the board is notified), or if the CEO is removed from office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain stability and performance within the organization</li> <li>Provide information, staff support, and other resources as necessary to support the board/succession committee in naming a new, permanent CEO</li> <li>Support the new, incoming CEO as they transition to lead the organization</li> </ul>

ACTOR	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
<p><b>Senior staff and other key staff members; external key organization stakeholders</b></p>		<p><i>Roles and responsibilities will vary depending on the organization, but staff and external key organization stakeholders should be well informed about what role they play and, importantly, do not play, in a CEO transition.</i></p>

**When will your board review and discuss succession planning?**

This should occur at least annually when the board has been able to gather all academic, operational, and financial data needed from the previous school year to assess leadership needs. In any event, the board should choose at least one month during which succession planning is a standing meeting agenda item. Boards may discuss succession planning in executive session, where they can discuss leadership development priorities and possible CEO candidates without making potentially sensitive discussions public.

**Which member of your board will act as the Succession Planning Leader?**

The CEO Succession Planning Leader should be a board member who has experience with leadership succession planning, human resources work, and appreciates the sensitivity and importance of these discussions. As a general rule, the designated Succession Planning Leader should not be the board chair/president. Given the natural perceptions of a board chair/president's authority, board members find it easier to conduct honest, collaborative planning processes if another member of the board is charged with leading this work.

**Which members of your board make up the Succession Planning Committee?****What is the CEO's role in this planning?**

A board should collaborate with the CEO in succession planning, as their personal planning for the duration of their tenure, as well as their insights into the strengths of members of the staff, are critical for productive succession planning discussions.

### When will your Succession Planning Committee meet?

Once formed, the Succession Planning Committee should determine as a group when they will regularly meet on at least an annual basis. These meetings will serve to prepare for the annual full board discussion of CEO succession planning.

### What are the items that the board (or committee members) must address in succession planning discussions?

At a minimum, the agenda for these discussions should include:

- Emergency succession planning (follow the planning prompts below)
- Review leadership development priorities
- Preparing for a gradual CEO transition (when a CEO has shared plans to leave the organization twelve or more months in advance of their departure)

**When the time comes to select a new CEO, will the Succession Planning Committee temporarily add members for the duration of that period? If so, list those individuals and their respective roles.**

When selecting a new CEO, it is a best practice for Succession Planning Committees to add staff members, such as school leaders, to the committee temporarily. These should be individuals who have no interest in being CEO candidates.

**What, if any, are the roles and responsibilities of senior/key staff members (other than the CEO) and external organization stakeholders in CEO succession planning?**

At a minimum, the board and incumbent CEO must regularly review at a high level each senior leader's set of responsibilities. In the event of any transition, responsibilities may shift among staff members, requiring a clear and current understanding of individual responsibilities.

In certain instances, boards have found it helpful to include key stakeholders (outside of the active board and staff) in the transition process. This could include emeritus board members, parents, or consultants. Regardless, this involvement should be limited and clearly defined in a predetermined framework.

Boards should keep track of their activity related to succession planning to ensure that they have updated their plans and corresponding documents within the last twelve months, as well as to understand how their plans have evolved over time.

PLANNING HISTORY			
Version	Approved by	Revision Date	Description of Change

CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS	
Documents/Materials <i>(updated by board in last 12 months)</i>	Notes
Overview of organization's strategic priorities, strengths, and weaknesses	
CEO Evaluation	
CEO Job Description	
Leadership Development Priorities	
Current Organizational Chart	
Board Calendar	
Existing succession plans/ materials (if applicable)	

**STEP 2: ADOPT AN EMERGENCY SUCCESSION PLAN**

Determine who, in the event of a departure with either short notice or in an emergency situation, will step in as the temporary or permanent leader. Boards can take this step immediately and revisit this plan annually.

**Under what circumstances will the board implement the emergency or temporary succession plan?**

Any instance in which the board has fewer than twelve months to facilitate a leadership transition constitutes an emergency succession. These may include:

- Permanent, unplanned departure – instances in which the CEO is permanently departing the organization due to illness, death, or sudden, unforeseen resignation/termination
- Temporary, short-term absence – a period during which the CEO is on leave from the organization for any reason for fewer than three months
- Temporary, long-term absence – a period during which the CEO is on leave from the organization for any reason for more than three months

**Who has your organization pre-approved as an Interim CEO to assume top executive responsibilities in the event of a temporary or emergency departure?**

The board should identify a member of the senior staff who shows promise as a possible CEO candidate. This should be someone who reports directly to the CEO and has an understanding of the CEO's roles and responsibilities. The board must seek this person's approval before including them in the emergency succession plan.

If the board is unable to identify a member of the staff who shows promise as a CEO candidate, this has implications for talent development priorities. In such an instance, the board may consider seeking an outside hire for a senior staff/CEO direct-report role to supplement the internal pipeline of candidates.

**Which CEO responsibilities would this person inherit?**

**Are there any CEO responsibilities they would not inherit? If so, name those responsibilities and the individuals who would take them on instead.**

Boards should utilize the CEO's job description as a starting point for listing the responsibilities that an Interim CEO would inherit. Responsibilities which, at that point, they would not be prepared to execute should be delegated to another member of the senior staff.

**How will the staff redistribute the former responsibilities of the individual who takes on the Interim CEO role?**

Boards should have a sufficient understanding of the responsibilities of members of the senior leadership staff to be able to reallocate responsibilities, as needed, during the interim period.

**What are the board's responsibilities in supporting an Interim CEO as they assume a role of greater responsibility within the organization with little to no transition time?**

As with the current CEO, the board will have responsibility for monitoring the work of the Interim CEO. It is critical that the board does not engage in any direct management of staff, even during this interim period. Instead, the board is responsible for ensuring that the Interim CEO has the support needed to carry out their new responsibilities.

**Following board enactment of the Emergency Succession Plan, what is the plan to communicate changes to the organization’s staff and the community?**

**Who on the board is responsible for implementing this plan?**

First, the board must designate an individual responsible for facilitating communication in the event of an emergency succession. This should either be the Board President or the individual responsible for facilitating succession planning. Second, the board should itemize a list of individuals who should receive immediate phone calls directly from the board (the designated Acting/ Interim CEO, members of senior staff, and the rest of the board). To the extent possible, it is best for staff members to learn that an emergency succession is taking place in person or via phone, whether from the board or a member of senior staff, rather than in writing. Similarly, some key partners may require a phone call or in-person conversation rather than written notice. Finally, school families, the general public, and potentially even the media should receive written notification followed, ideally, by an opportunity to attend a board-facilitated Q&A session or other meeting.

COMMUNICATION PLAN		
Audience	Messenger	Timeline & Method of Communication
Board Members		
Senior Staff		
All Staff		
Families		
Students		
General Public		
Media		
KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND/OR OTHER AUDIENCES (LIST BELOW)		
Audience	Messenger	Timeline & Method of Communication

## How will the Interim CEO be compensated?

For an Acting/Interim CEO, some boards institute a policy stating that they will receive either the outgoing CEO's current salary or a 5% increase in their own salary, whichever is greater. EdFuel provides an overview of methods boards may use to help determine compensation [here](#).

### STEP 3: TAKE STOCK OF NECESSARY ONGOING BOARD PRACTICES

The practices below improve a board's ability to deliver on all of their governance responsibilities. Boards must take stock of whether they engage in these practices and, if not, establish systems to do so before gradual succession planning.



**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training/Reflect Upon Personal Biases:** The ability to note personal biases and the limitations of one's perspective is foundational in succession planning, as unspoken criteria springing from personal biases can lead to dysfunction and confusion in selecting a new leader.



**Understanding the Organization's Strategic Priorities, Strengths, and Weaknesses:** The board should have a clear understanding of the organization's strategic priorities, strategic plan, strengths, and weaknesses, as each of these inform the competencies and characteristics needed in a CEO.



**CEO Evaluations:** Boards should conduct a quality CEO evaluation process that is aligned with the organization's strategic priorities and seeks feedback from staff and other key stakeholders. This evaluation will serve as the foundation for defining the competencies/characteristics the board will seek in a new CEO.



**Leadership Development Priorities:** The board is responsible for holding the CEO accountable for progress towards staff leadership development goals that work to build the existing internal bench of potential future CEO candidates.

NSNO's [CEO Succession Planning Toolkit](#) includes a number of resources here that may be useful to boards in implementing and improving the practices below. In addition, the [CEO Succession Planning Guide](#) includes detailed information on best practices in each of these areas.

**Describe how the board is intentionally reflecting upon personal biases and/or participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings.**

**When did this last occur?**

**When will it next occur and again throughout the upcoming year?**

**Describe the board’s annual CEO evaluation process.**  
**When did this last occur?**  
**When will it next occur and again throughout the upcoming year?**

**Who are the individuals in your organization who show promise as a CEO candidate in the short, medium, and long term?**

The board should have sufficient exposure to senior staff members to form independent opinions regarding individuals who show promise in the short, medium, and long term. Still, the board should collaborate with the CEO on generating these lists and, where needed, seek input from other members of the staff.

<b>Short-term (0–3 years)</b>	
<b>Medium-term (4–6 years)</b>	
<b>Long-term (7+ years)</b>	

**Describe the talent development needs and corresponding development plans for each of these individuals.**

The board and CEO should review each individual’s strengths and current responsibilities alongside the current CEO job description. With recommendations from the CEO, the board should then agree upon the talent development needs for each individual according to the gaps between their current strengths/responsibilities and those required of an effective CEO.

In general, professional development should include a combination of “stretch projects,” outside training, and coaching/mentoring from a more senior member of the organization’s staff. Each of these components of an individual’s professional development plan should directly align with the talent development needs that the CEO has proposed to the board.

Name	Talent Development Needs & Development Plan

**Describe the opportunities the board will take/make over the next twelve months to interact intentionally with each of these candidates and other members of the leadership team to better understand their potential as future CEO candidates.**

Examples may include:

- Asking members of senior staff to lead and facilitate board committees or subcommittees related to their respective leadership domains
- Asking members of senior staff to present updates to the entire board on their respective areas of responsibility
- Asking members of senior staff to collaborate with board members on board-led initiatives, such as fundraisers or event planning
- Seeking input from staff members when assessing organizational strengths and weaknesses, as well as conducting strategic planning
- Inviting senior staff to board meetings and other board-related functions

**STEP 4: PREPARE FOR A GRADUAL CEO SUCCESSION**

Boards and CEOs should have regular, honest conversations about the duration of the CEO's tenure. Even if the board and CEO have no plans to make a change in CEO leadership for many years, the board should develop a timeline and process for how they will address the CEO's eventual departure.

**What is the minimum amount of time your CEO has agreed to allow between notifying the board of their plans to depart and their actual departure?**

Ideally, this is at least 24 months, but should at a minimum be no less than twelve months.

**How will the board identify key competencies or skills of an ideal CEO in the event of a gradual or planned CEO departure/succession?**

As part of the CEO evaluation process, the board should update the CEO job description to reflect the current and comprehensive list of the CEO's responsibilities and affiliated competencies. By maintaining this as a practice, the board will have a set of key competencies already prepared when the time for a leadership transition arrives. If the board is engaging in this process for the first time or wishes to refine their existing materials, please review Bellwether Education Partner's research on key CEO competencies [here](#).

**Who are the board member(s) responsible for leading the organization through a gradual/planned CEO departure/succession?**

**Will the board engage third party individuals or entities to support succession planning?**

The Succession Planning Leader should be the person responsible for leading this planning. However, boards often benefit by engaging a third party to support this person in facilitating the committee's search for a new CEO. Even if the organization has a strong pipeline of internal candidates, the board may choose to conduct a formal search for a new CEO. In this instance, a third party can facilitate and project manage the associated communications and operations.

**What is the role of an outgoing CEO in a formal search for their successor?**

The most important responsibilities of an outgoing CEO in a succession are completed before they announce their departure. Prior to that time, it is critical that the CEO is actively engaged in developing an internal talent pipeline and coaching/mentoring direct reports. When the CEO shares the date of their planned departure, the board becomes solely accountable for identifying a replacement and executing the transition process. Still, the CEO should be available to support the board through the search for their replacement as needed, and provide feedback and advice as requested.

**What is the process used by the board to vet candidates and name a successor in the event of a gradual/planned CEO departure/succession?**

Even if an organization has a strong internal pipeline of candidates, many organizations choose to conduct a formal search process that includes consideration of external hires. In these cases, the board utilizes the key competencies and skills that they should have already identified to conduct multiple rounds of screening, interviewing, performance tasks, and, in some instances, presentations.

While all of these steps are critical in gathering information on candidates, they are also vehicles for engaging all critical stakeholders in the outcome of the search process. These stakeholders include all board members, senior leadership staff, charter school organization and school staff, school families, and students.

Sample Date*	Step	Relevant Stake Holders

*\*These sample dates are intended to provide an ideal time period that should lapse between each of these steps. They are not intended to serve as the actual dates on which boards will take these steps.*



**What are the responsibilities of the board during the transition to the new CEO?**

The board should be responsible for providing oversight of any new CEO, meeting their professional development needs, ensuring they have sufficient staff support to be able to carry out their new responsibilities, and providing clear and specific communication to stakeholders about the transition. Board members should not carry out any managerial functions, but should continue to carry out their regular governance responsibilities.

**Describe the high-level plan for the outgoing CEO to transition their responsibilities to an incoming CEO. Include all of the responsibilities of the outgoing CEO during the transition process.**

This plan will necessarily require revision depending upon the individual the board selects as the new CEO. However, the board and incumbent CEO should outline the CEO's key functions and steps that would be necessary to effectively transition them.

**Over what time period should the outgoing CEO plan to continue working with the organization following the board's selection of a new CEO and the date when the new CEO actually begins?**

This will depend entirely on whether the board has selected an internal or an external CEO candidate. Ideally, the new CEO was an internal candidate, minimizing transition time. If the new CEO was an external candidate, however, the outgoing CEO should allocate at least three to six months during which they are available to the board and new CEO to support the new CEO's onboarding.

**What will be the responsibilities of other senior staff/key staff members in supporting the onboarding/transition for the new CEO?**

For a gradual/planned departure/succession, the outgoing CEO should plan and propose to the board the transition responsibilities of other members of senior staff. By actively engaging senior staff members, the board and outgoing CEO share ownership of the incoming CEO's success with direct reports.

**TRANSITION PLAN**

Role	Responsibilities
Head of Operations (or equivalent role)	
Head of Academics (or equivalent role)	
Head of Finance (or equivalent role)	

**KEY LEADERSHIP ROLES (LIST BELOW)**

Role	Responsibilities

## How will your board determine compensation for a new CEO?

Prior to seeking a replacement CEO, the board should annually review the current CEO's compensation relative to market rates (both local and national) to ensure that the board has a clear perspective on appropriate CEO compensation. EdFuel provides an overview of methods boards may use to help determine compensation [here](#).