

## WHAT BOARDS AND EXECUTIVES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SUCCESSION PLANNING

*Updated as of June 2023*

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Board members and staff of philanthropic institutions regularly reach out to CMF to learn more about succession planning. The Ask CMF team has curated the following resources for organizations considering how to plan for a hypothetical or forthcoming transition for executive positions.

### Recommended Resources

#### **BoardSource (Nancy R. Axelrod) – “Chief Executive Succession Planning: Essential Guidance for Boards and CEOs, Second Edition”**

2009, 69-page PDF – Available for purchase (\$45)

<https://boardsource.org/product/chief-executive-succession-planning-essential-guidance/>

*Summary:* This resource frames succession planning within the broader framework of the nonprofit organization’s work, as a proactive part of the institutional strategy and evaluation process. As noted, while an executive search may be included within succession planning, it comprises only one step in the succession planning process. Axelrod outlines how evaluating the chief executive’s position and the organization as a whole serves a key function to ensure that a new executive can succeed within the evolving institution. This resource includes sample plans and documents referenced in the succession planning process.

#### **National Council of Nonprofits – “Succession Planning for Nonprofits: Managing Leadership Transitions”**

Online Resource

<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/running-nonprofit/governance-leadership/succession-planning-nonprofits-managing-leadership>

*Summary:* This resource guide from the National Council of Nonprofits offers tips for nonprofits managing leadership transitions and designing succession plans. This webpage includes an extensive list of online resources from industry partners on succession planning and leadership transitions.

### **BoardSource (The 360 Group) – “A Guide to Succession Planning for Foundation Boards”**

2021, Online Blog/Resource

<https://boardsource.org/resources/foundation-succession-planning/>

*Summary:* This short resource from Vincent Robinson (The 360 Group) outlines key strategies that he recommends to foundations engaging in a succession plan process and/or executive transition. Robinson advises that by asking key questions and planning for the possibility of an upcoming executive transition, foundations can better position themselves for a smooth transition and successful hiring process of an organization’s executive.

### **Council on Foundations – “Planning for CEO Succession”**

Online Resource – Requires COF member log-in

<https://www.cof.org/content/planning-ceo-succession>

*Summary:* This quick guide to CEO transitions addresses frequently asked questions on the topic, including what to do with an unexpected leadership change (emergency succession plans), how the current CEO can prepare for a planned transition, using a transition committee, and transition periods and process.

### **Exponent Philanthropy – “Leadership Succession Planning: What’s Success Have to Do With It?”**

Online Resource – Requires Exponent Philanthropy member log-in

<https://www.exponentphilanthropy.org/resource/leadership-succession-planning-whats-success-have-to-do-with-it/>

*Summary:* This brief resource defines leadership succession planning as it applies to board leadership, generational foundation leaders and executive/staff positions. It also presents suggestions from foundations that have experienced transitions and developed succession plans, especially regarding how to get started with discussing and framing a succession plan within small-staffed organizations.

## **About Ask CMF**

This document was authored by Brittany Kienker, Ph.D., Knowledge Insights Expert in Residence for the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). CMF members can find answers to their most pressing questions through CMF’s Knowledge Insights division, including Ask CMF, the Knowledge Center and the Sample Documents Hub. Ask CMF is a free service to CMF members, available through the “Ask CMF” link on the CMF homepage or by visiting <https://www.michiganfoundations.org/practice/ask-cmf>.

*The “What Boards and Executives Need to Know” series of resources is designed to address questions of interest to board members and senior leaders of grantmaking organizations. These resources may be particularly useful for orientations, board trainings and general professional development and provide better understanding of key concepts that are necessary for the success of the governance and management of foundations in the field.*

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