Succession Planning for Cultural Institutions

What's Next?

Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts Webinar

January 28th, 2026

Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

In a typical year:

- Preservation Services specialists complete over 50 survey projects.
- Approximately 60 CCAHA-sponsored workshops, conferences, webinars, and training sessions are presented.
- The Digital Imaging Services staff digitizes thousands of pages of fragile archival documents, books, and photographs.
- Conservators assess and treat more than 6,000 individual artifacts, from over 400 clients.
- Housing & Framing Services house approx. 75% of the artifacts treated (folder, sleeve, box, mat and frame, or sealed package).

Project Recap

- The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) and Lyrasis are serving the country's museums, historic sites, archives, libraries and arts organizations by creating a **suite of resources** focused on succession planning for collections care staff and arts administrators.

- CCAHA and Lyrasis have offered educational programs to present **"good practice" strategies** to prepare for inevitable staffing and volunteer transitions in the area of arts administration and collections care.

- Work completed includes **listening sessions** and a **project survey** to learn about the nuances of succession planning strategies that have—and have not—achieved positive results at arts and cultural institutions.

- A **National Advisory Panel** has supported the project team. **Reviewer volunteers** have tested the resources and reviewed the legacy binder.

Timeline

- February-October 2023: listening sessions
- September 2023: Survey distributed throughout the field to collect data on current succession planning practices
- November 2023: Survey and listening session analysis
- Fall 2023/Winter 2024: Resource development & testing
- Spring 2024: Website devoted to the project launched
- Summer 2024: Webinars, conference presentations to disseminate results/resources
- 2024: Continuing development of resources, along with webinars and conference presentations to disseminate results
- December 2025: Legacy Binder and White Paper are published

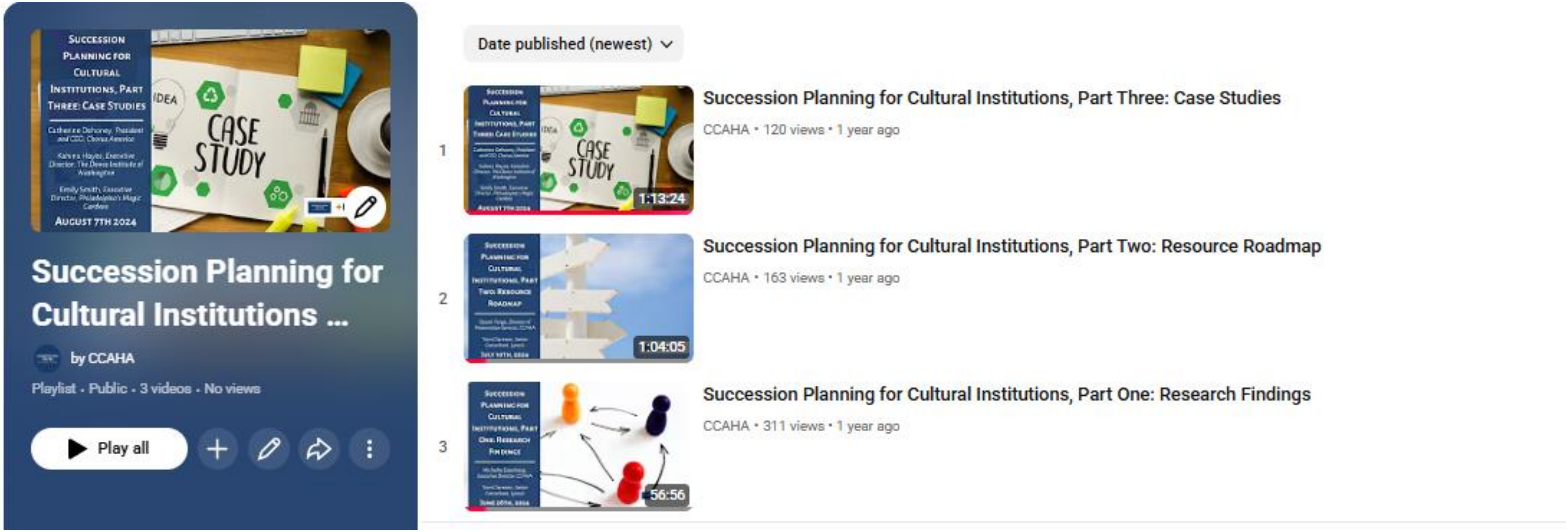
Key Findings from the Listening Sessions

- Majority of participants/organizations had little experience with formal succession planning; lack of time seen as biggest barrier.
- Succession Planning is a low priority at many organizations, but a high priority personally for employees. Many also say Board is not concerned.
- Need to recognize differences between Standard and Emergency Succession Planning
- Documentation on Succession Planning needed, but many respondents said that basic collection and operating policies also necessary
- Utilizing a "knowledge transfer process" for employee work experiences is key; there are opportunities presented by new technology to do this

More Listening Session Key Findings

- Issues of reduction in workforces and volunteer groups due to early retirement and COVID have caused succession problems at organizations
- Part-time staff & volunteer retention a concern; strong communications needed
- Many cultural and arts organizations are focusing on DEIA issues, and an important aspect of these discussions is compensation and pay equity
- Emotional support for staff at organizations where succession has taken place should be provided
- Maintaining relations with partner organizations and the community important
- Shift succession planning from a finite task to a way of operating – many benefits seen

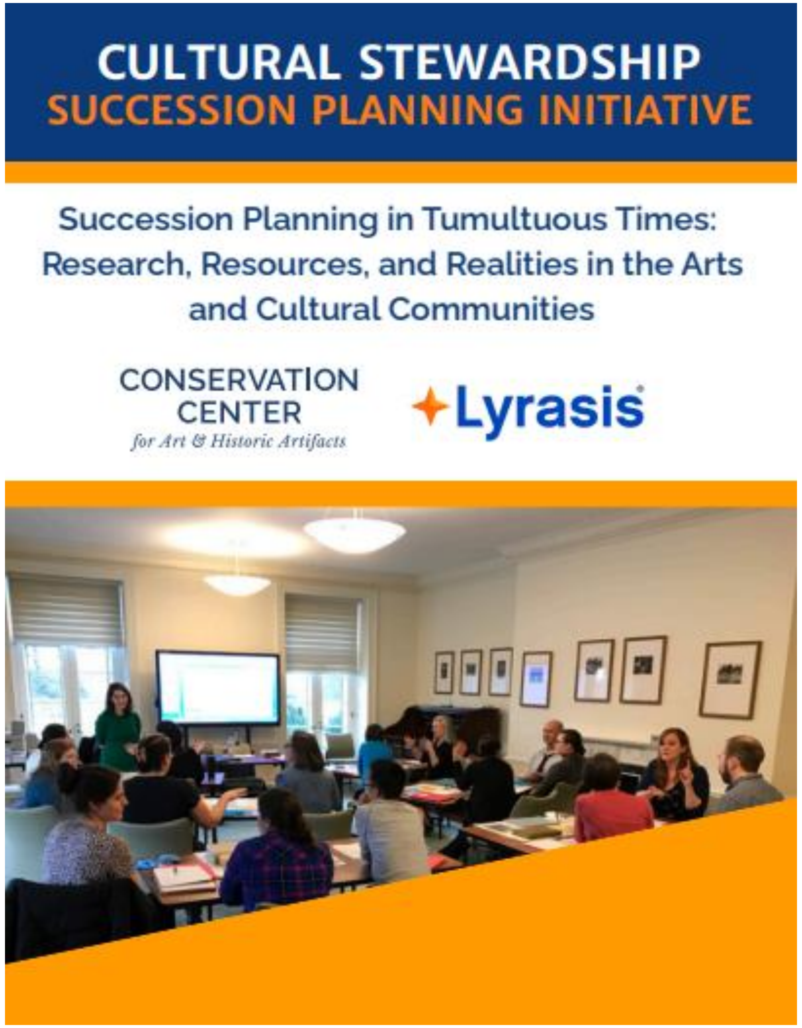
Previous Recordings



[Access previous recordings here]

CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING INITIATIVE

https://ccaha.org/succession



https://ccaha.org/resources/succession-planning-tumultuous-times-research-resources-and-realities-arts-and-cultural

RESOURCES AND TOOLS - CULTURAL STEWARDSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING INITIATIVE

Unsure of where to start in your succession planning journey? Look through this roadmap to decide what resource(s) to look at first.

Legacy Binder

5 Key Questions Board Members Should Ask About Staff Succession Planning

Top 10 Things You Can Do NOW To Support Succession Planning & Staff Transitions

Job Analysis for Succession Planning

Oral History Knowledge Transfer Guide

RACI Chart for Succession Planning

Succession Risk Advocacy Matrix

Calendar for 30-60-90 Days After Starting a New Job

File Naming Strategies to Aid in Succession Planning

Essential Written Plans, Policies, and Procedures for Collections-Holding Institutions

Additional Resources

Cultural Succession Planning Bibliography

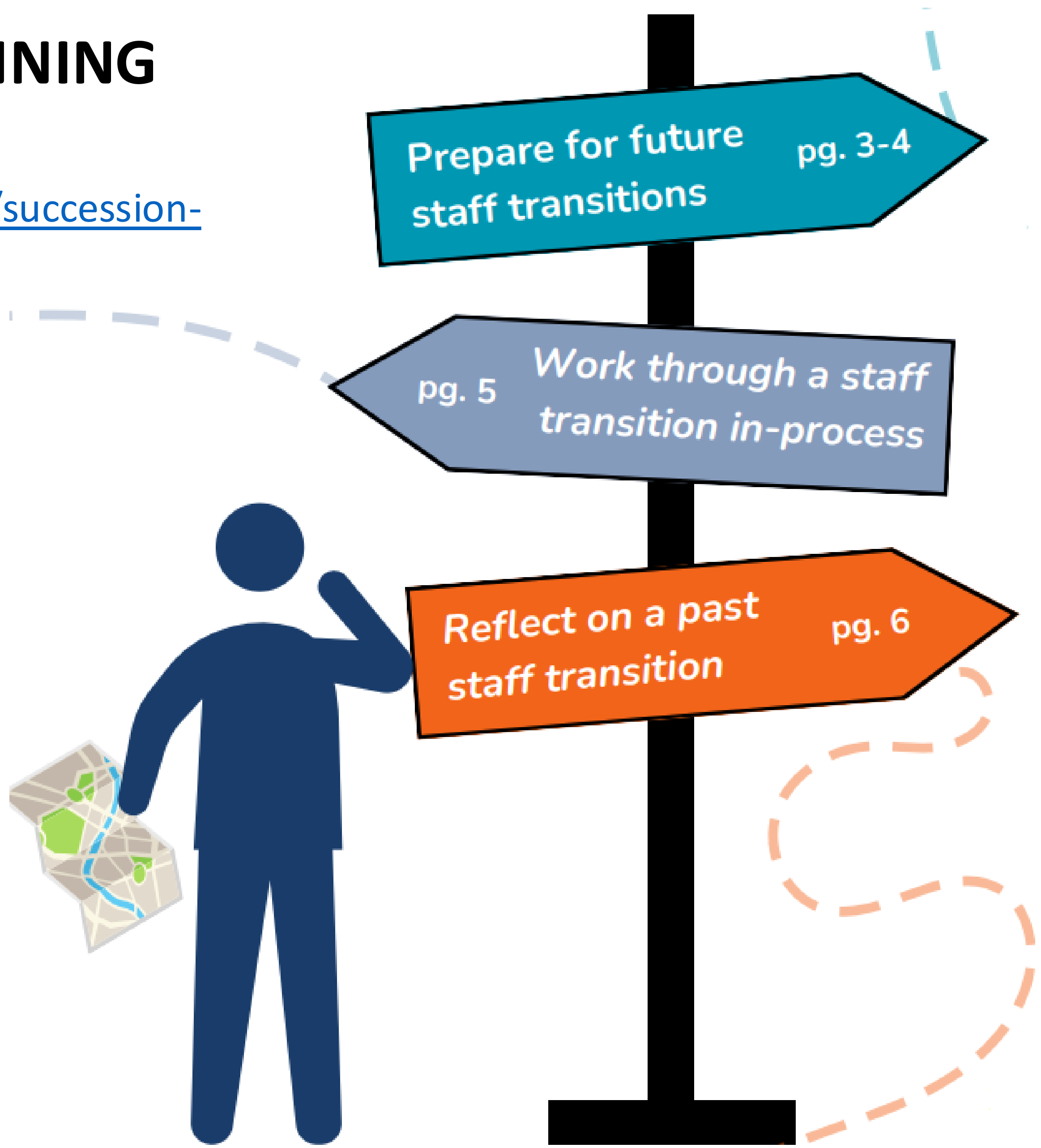
A collection of publications and media on Succession Planning-related topics from outside CCAHA.

Collections Management Policy Toolkit

A digital tool developed by CCAHA that guides collecting institutions step-by-step through the process of creating a Collections Management Policy.

SUCCESSION PLANNING ROADMAP

https://ccaha.org/resources/succession-planning-roadmap



BEFORE

Steps for your organization to consider before the next staff transition occurs

MANAGE YOUR COLLECTIONS

It is important to have policies related to the long-term preservation of mission-based collections as well as the organization's own business records. See the ***Essential Written Plans, Policies, and Procedures*** for Collections-Holding Institutions document to learn about a variety of planning documents which can provide continuity and order to your collections.

UPDATE JOB DESCRIPTIONS, POLICIES, AND LOGISTICS

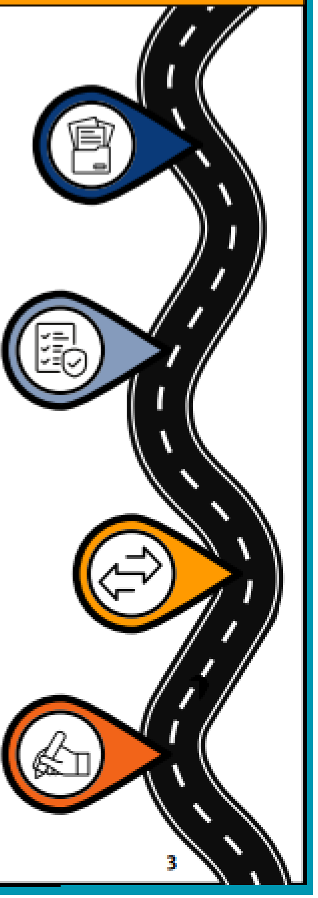
Tools for hiring including a ***Job Analysis Template Exercise*** and ***Responsibilities Assignment Matrix*** can help you as you develop these important hiring practices.

DEVELOP A KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESS

Institutionalize practices by which senior and departing staff can share work information and "corporate history" with those continuing at your organization. See the ***Cultural Succession Planning Bibliography***, particularly the ***"Arts Organizations at a Crossroads Toolkit: Managing Transitions and Preserving Assets,"*** for more information.

DOCUMENT YOUR PROCESSES

Start taking notes now to document how decisions are made at your organization. This can help those who follow in your footsteps learn about the choices your organization has made.



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DURING

Considerations for activity during a time period where staff transition and succession is taking place

COMMUNICATE ABOUT PROCESS

Talk with Staff, Board Members, Stakeholders, Partner Organizations, and your Community about the changes that are taking place at your organization. Transparency about leadership changes can garner goodwill from the community, and in many cases has helped organizations gain more information on potential future leaders.

KEEP COMMUNICATIONS OPEN

The departure of a leader, particularly in smaller organizations, can often be traumatic for the staff that remain. Keeping staff informed about changes, timelines for change, and other succession planning activities is important in continuing organizational trust.

PLAN CHECK-INS WITH STAFF THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

Another realization from the listening session and survey responses is that staff transitions and succession are much more successful if departing staff and leaders are open to taking questions from and communicating with those replacing them in a position after they leave the organization. One organization talked about a policy where the outgoing staff member would leave a personal letter for the incoming staffer.

5

AFTER

What you learn from your most recent staff transition can help you smooth the process in the future

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING SMART

New staff can consider initial activities dealing with people, policies, and priorities at your organization. See the ***30-60-90 Days chart*** on the project website.

REACH OUT TO PARTNERS

Listening session participants emphasized the importance of reaching out to partner organizations to set up introductory meetings as soon as possible after a new staff member begins in a position. Partnerships are built "at the speed of trust," and continuing the trust through open communication is very important.

PLUG IN

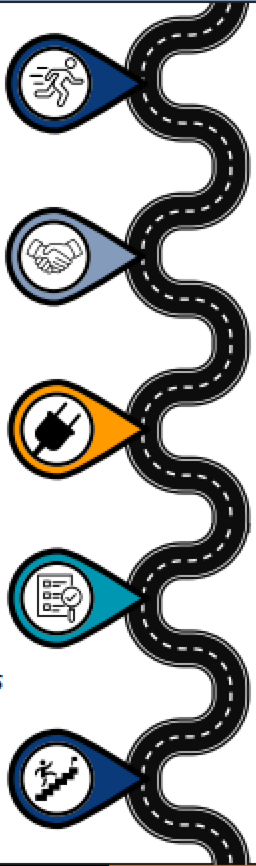
Consider how new technology can assist your organization in future staff transitions and succession planning. Are there ways you can develop databases, spreadsheets, and tools to assist in these activities?

REVIEW YOUR WORK

If you utilize some of these project tools, and document your procedures in succession planning, be sure to review documentation after each new hire and succession process.

SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS

One of the most oft-repeated pieces of advice that we heard during the research phase of this project was to make Succession Planning and Knowledge Transfer not just a one-time event, but a way of operating for your organization, to ensure smooth transitions and continued success.



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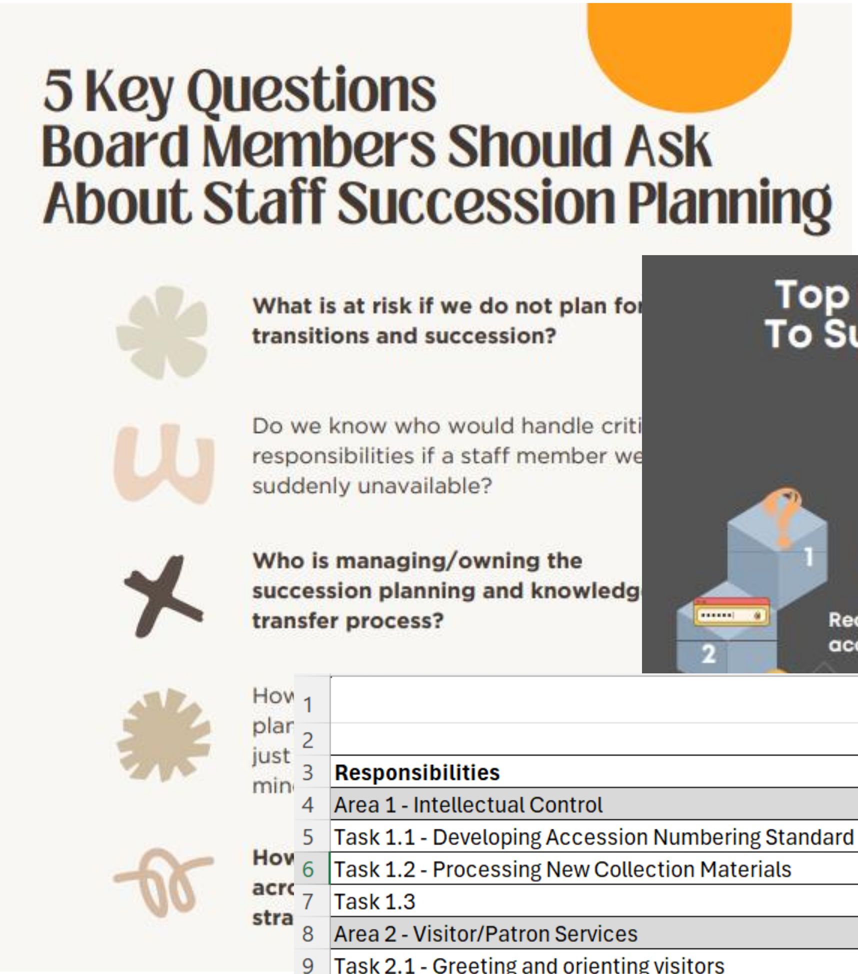
Resources

Tools and Templates

- RACI Chart for Succession Planning
- Job Analysis for Succession Planning
- Succession Risk Advocacy Matrix

Guides and Written Resources

- 5 Key Questions Board Members Should Ask About Staff Succession Planning
- Top 10 Things You Can Do NOW To Support Succession Planning & Staff Transitions
- Oral History Knowledge Transfer Guide
- Calendar for 30-60-90 Days After Starting a New Job
- File Naming Strategies to Aid in Succession Planning
- Essential Written Plans, Policies, and Procedures for Collections-Holding Institutions



5 Key Questions Board Members Should Ask About Staff Succession Planning

What is at risk if we do not plan fo[r] transitions and succession?

Do we know who would handle criti[cal] responsibilities if a staff member we[re] suddenly unavailable?

Who is managing/owning the succession planning and knowledg[e] transfer process?

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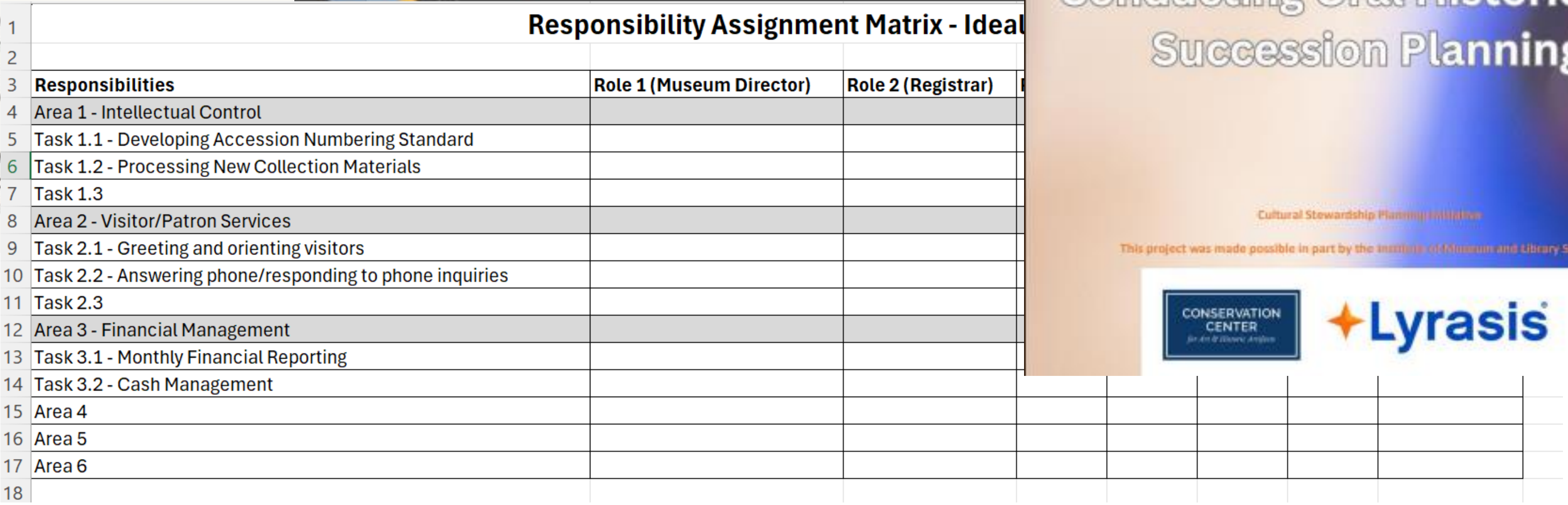
Top 10 Things You Can Do NOW To Support Succession Planning & Staff Transitions

These activities will ensure that your organization has the most critical information in the event of a succession emergency, but they will also help you build a framework for longer-term succession planning and knowledge transfer:

1 **Ask Yourself "What Would Happen If" (and write down the answers as a map for what you need to address)**

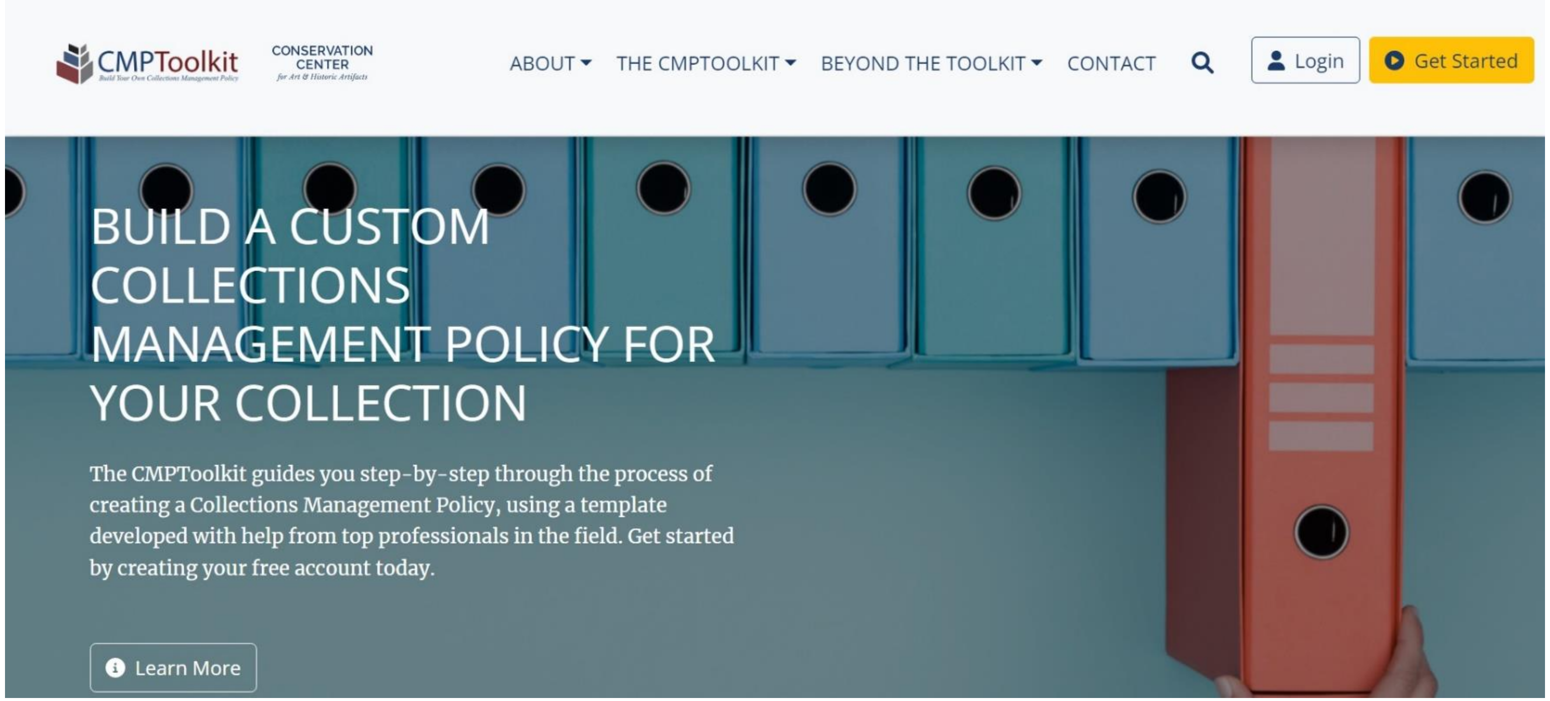
2 **Record Important Passwords (in a secure manner according to your IT policies)**



1	**Responsibility Assignment Matrix - Ideal**			
2				
3	**Responsibilities**	**Role 1 (Museum Director)**	**Role 2 (Registrar)**	**I**
4	Area 1 - Intellectual Control			
5	Task 1.1 - Developing Accession Numbering Standard			
6	Task 1.2 - Processing New Collection Materials			
7	Task 1.3			
8	Area 2 - Visitor/Patron Services			
9	Task 2.1 - Greeting and orienting visitors			
10	Task 2.2 - Answering phone/responding to phone inquiries			
11	Task 2.3			
12	Area 3 - Financial Management			
13	Task 3.1 - Monthly Financial Reporting			
14	Task 3.2 - Cash Management			
15	Area 4			
16	Area 5			
17	Area 6			
18				

Additional resources

- [Cultural Succession Planning Bibliography]
- [Collections Management Policy Toolkit]



HOW TO USE THE LEGACY BINDER

This document contains a series of templates & worksheets meant to capture critical information to support Succession Planning and knowledge transfer efforts at cultural organizations.

The binder is separated into three sections that each address a different aspect of Succession Planning. The first two sections mainly deal with Succession Planning on an individual level and focus on documenting the processes, responsibilities, and knowledge needed to execute your specific job duties. The third section looks at more broadly at Succession Planning as an organizational practice and may require or benefit from executive/board input.

While some of the templates can be completed in advance of expected transition, there are several that will be most useful when information is recorded on an ongoing basis. They do not need to be completed in order of their place in the binder; rather, feel free to prioritize based on the needs of your position/organization.

This document may be printed and assemble as part of a physical "legacy binder" or you may wish to complete and save the templates digitally (each formatted as a fillable PDF) within a central folder. Either way, you will want to make sure that those who can benefit from this information are aware of its location and have easy access.

Feel free to adapt any of these templates to a different form or format to fit your needs and add to your binder or folder along with any other supplemental information you think would be helpful.

Legacy Binder

- Facilitate knowledge transfer of both objective data and subjective insights
  - Contextualizes and assembles earlier tools/templates
  - Starts with documentation of goals, rationale, plans for implementation/maintenance
- Individual, job-specific documentation of processes, responsibilities, etc.
- Succession Planning as an organizational practice
  - Collaborative input
  - Illuminates opportunities for change, additional needs
- Recommend regular updating – allows version tracking
- Prioritize as fits your needs
- Make sure colleagues know where information can be accessed!

Legacy Binder Templates

SECTION ONE: PREPARING FOR A TRANSITION

This templates in this section are meant to capture information about the current functions and duties of your role and serve as a reference guide for someone stepping into the role in the case of both a planned or unplanned transition.

Current Projects & Priorities

Schedule of Priorities

Contacts & Relationships

Job Analysis Template - Cover Sheet

Job Analysis Template

Responsibility Assignment Matrix

In Case of Emergency

Advice/Lessons Learned

Incoming Checklist

Outgoing Checklist

- Supports easy coverage in the event of unexpected absence/departure
- Prioritization insights and reflections
- Daily/weekly/monthly priorities of the role
- Reviewing actual job tasks against written job description – process can spur change
  - Emergency notes may also encourage adjustments, cross training etc.
- Onboarding and Departure Needs
  - Accounts, permissions, etc.

Legacy Binder Templates

SECTION TWO: KNOWLEDGE SHARING & TRANSFER

This templates in this section are intended to capture a range of critical information needed to execute the job duties and functions describes in section one.

Glossary

Software List

Passwords & Access

Important, Frequent, & Complex Procedures

Resources & References

Essential Policies & Procedures

- Insider terminology, acronyms, etc.
- Process of documenting can lead to better contingency planning, organization, etc.

Legacy Binder Templates

SECTION THREE: ADVOCACY & ORGANIZATION–WIDE PLANNING

The templates in this section are meant to provide a wholistic framework for succession planning and knowledge transfer within an organization, focusing in particular on advocacy and preemptive planning through staff investment and professional development.

Organizational History

Succession Plan - Unplanned, Temporary

Succession Plan - Unplanned, Long-Term

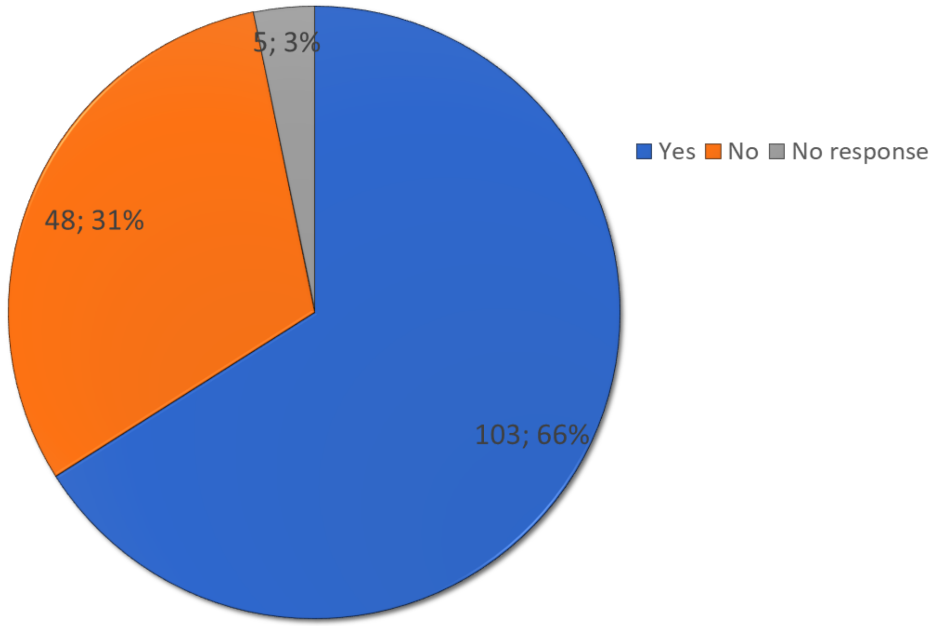
Succession Plan - Planned, Temporary

Succession Plan - Planned, Long-Term

Succession Risk Advocacy Matrix

- History prompts (organization, department, role) can be useful for oral history exercise
- Plan Templates guide stakeholders through key questions about who will fill in, how to prepare, how to communicate
- Risk Matrix can help prioritize succession tasks/investment

HAVE YOU WORKED AT AN ORGANIZATION OR IN A DEPARTMENT THAT EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS ARISING FROM A LACK OF SUCCESSION PLANNING?



How can small institutions adapt succession planning when facing sudden staff departures due to funding loss?

- What do these departures look like at your institution?
  - If there's time, are you able to have departing staff write down essential information?
  - Are there any current processes in place to support succession planning already?
- When you have time, begin to prepare materials that will assist in the case of your own departure.
  - Can spend small increments of time working on these materials, such as doing a page at a time of the legacy binder.

How can small institutions maintain collections care and management continuity during sudden leadership gaps caused by federal funding loss?

- Determine essential processes and figure out a schedule that can be divided up by staff
  - Are there any processes that have come to a halt because of leadership gaps? Are there processes that cannot currently be carried out because of a lack of knowledge transfer? (ie. missing passwords, contacts, additional information)?
  - Has anyone in your department or organization been trained on specific processes or roles in case of emergency?
  - Are you able to bring in board members to help with additional labor and leadership?
- Are there collections care and/or management projects that have come to a halt with departures or funding losses?
  - Make a list of these projects, establish priorities and who will be responsible

In environments where there is no national strategy for educating and retaining new professionals in conservation and collections care, while experienced staff continue to leave, can succession planning be used as an advocacy tool? Specifically, can it help institutions argue for investment in education, training programs, and policy reform, rather than remaining an internal managerial exercise?

- Several tools from this project can be helpful in advocating to succession planning at your organization – whether it is advocacy to managers/executives or board members.
  - Succession Risk Advocacy Matrix – This matrix prompts thinking about the impact of departures on key measures of concern: organizational mission, organizational revenue and expenses, and the time and effort of staff.
  - Job Analysis Template - This template supports succession planning by examining key job tasks, functions, connections, and expertise. You can fill out this template for your job role to show the key tasks that would be lost in the case of your departure. Additionally, this tool can help advocate for the additional training of staff in key tasks, such as emergency duties.

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