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TAM Succession Plan

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Texas Association of Museums Succession Plan:

The TAM Council adopted a succession plan in June 2006. It is provided here as an example or template for TAM member museums wishing to create a succession plan for their institution. TAM's plan was adapted with permission from a plan created in 2004 by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services. Please contact them for permission to use any portion of this plan.

TAM Succession Plan

GOAL: To create a guide for the TAM Council to use in identifying / selecting an Executive Director for TAM. Following conversations with many museum leaders and Council members, it is proposed that we provide guidelines for future TAM Councils to use, or not, as they may determine. The following includes some points for discussion and an outline of a procedure prepared for use by non-profit organizations.

DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. **Appointing a Search Committee**, who sits on it? Is it limited to Council Members? Individuals in the Texas museum profession? Or do you include people from outside the organization?
2. **Recognize the opportunity to re-think the organization** / activities / role of the TAM Executive Director / office with a new Executive Director..... this should be done in light of the LRP goals and objectives. Make sure the LRP is up-to-date and Council is clear on goals. This is more important than having a written succession plan in place.
3. **Identify the strengths and weaknesses** of the organization. Look at the long range plan and job descriptions to determine what you are looking for.
4. **Identifying Candidates**

Due Diligence -

- a. Internal candidates, how do you assure impartiality when candidates are known to you?
- b. External candidates, how do you identify them?
- c. Go into the process with the understanding that process won't end until right candidate is found, i.e., be prepared to continue if 1st round of interviews doesn't yield the right person.

5. Notice / Transition Period

How much notice might be given?

Transition period?

What does it look like?

What to do if ED departure is sudden?

Should work pretty much the same as when there is notice.

With such a small staff, there may be the need to hire an interim director.

PROPOSED Guidelines for Hiring / Transitioning to a New Executive Director

February 2006

Background

We are celebrating a decade of outstanding leadership provided TAM by Executive Director Jack Nokes, with the invaluable assistance of Joy Barnett and Sandy Sage. While none have expressed an intent or desire to leave TAM at this time, one day they will and when that occurs an incredible amount of experience and organizational knowledge will be lost to TAM. These guidelines are offered to assist the TAM Council in their role of service to the TAM community.

I. Council Considerations: What to do when the Executive Director leaves

II. Procedural Considerations: A Guide for Managing the Hiring & Transition Process

- A. Current Executive Director's Notification to Council
- B. Confidentiality
- C. Council Preparation
- D. Administrative Preparation
- E. Interim Coordination between Council and Staff
- F. Hiring the New Chief Executive
- G. Orienting the New Chief Executive

III. Organizational Documents:

- 1. Job description - Will TAM be looking to fill the same job or has the job description changed? Is it a different job?
- 2. Organizational Chart
- 3. Current Long Range Plan (5-10 years)
- 4. Organizational By-laws

I. Council Considerations: What to do when the Executive Director Leaves

The departure of the organization's executive director and the search for a successor provides a tremendous opportunity for reflection, change and organizational growth.

- 1. Leadership. The Texas Association of Museum's executive transition process is properly led by the Council as the lead policy and planning body for TAM. Council ownership is essential, for instance, to the implementation of the fresh organization vision and updated mission that can result from taking stock before the employment of a new executive director.
- 2. A successful Executive Director (ED) recruitment and hiring effort is one of the most important functions carried by the Council. Finding the right executive director is critical to the ongoing success and development of TAM.
- 3. Policy and the operational reviews should be done in an executive transition. The input of key stakeholders such as staff, funders, members, and the museum community at large should be sought. These contacts are critical to fully outlining the challenges and opportunities facing an organization.
- 4. The executive transition process presents both dangers and growth opportunities.

DANGERS:

- Loss of organization's momentum and productivity
- Loss of key stakeholders--donors, funders, staff, volunteers
- Decline in staff morale
- A short, troubled tenure for the next ED

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES:

- Creation of fresh organization vision suited to current and future challenges
- Attention to updating infrastructure and operations
- Hiring of new staff leader best suited to organization's future

5. Successful change management entails the facilitation of three transition phases:

A GOOD ENDING for the departing executive director with full acknowledgment of his/her legacy

A TRANSITION PERIOD, led by the Council of directors, of taking stock of current strengths and weaknesses, creating a vision and goals for the future, and finding the right new executive

A GOOD BEGINNING for the new ED, in partnering with the Council, in setting clear short-term and long-term performance goals and in connecting with training and support resources

6. Employment of an Interim Executive Director (IED) might be necessary if the current ED must resign quickly. If this is the situation, TAM must take full advantage of the transition period and have sufficient time to select and get ready for its next ED. Besides providing day-to-day administrative leadership while the Council completes the executive search, the IED solves problems immediately critical to the organization. A strong advantage to hiring a veteran, outside executive for the interim role is the fresh and experienced perspective he or she brings to the organization's self-examination and goal setting. And in not being a candidate for the regular ED position, an interim leader has the greater objectivity required to lead this renewal process.

Employing an IED also allows the organization an "adjustment period" for disconnecting from the previous CEO and preparing to connect with the next executive director. An instance in which this could be especially important is in the transition from a founding director to his or her successor.

Promoting a current staff member to be Acting Executive Director can save money but has serious disadvantages as well. The internal candidate cannot bring the arms-length objectivity and fresh perspective of the externally hired IED and may not have all the skills necessary to address immediate administrative issues. And a manager selected to temporarily supervise his or her administrative peers may be handicapped in taking on tough organization issues by fear of alienating staff who will be peers again soon.

7. Third party funding will be necessary to cover transition expenses. TAM Council needs to ask for special grants from their longstanding funders to pay for a large portion of the transition costs, including the ET contracts, interim management fees, and special recruitment expenses. The funders are generally pleased that their grantees are planning and managing a critical success function like an executive transition.

8. The transition process must be led by the TAM Council. Staff, funders, members and other key stakeholders expect the Council to be unusually active and visible in managing the change process. At the earliest possible point, the Council should establish a transition committee to plan and execute the transition. To minimize transition concerns, the committee should communicate fully and frequently with all stakeholder groups.

The committee should be eager to have staff input, especially in identifying organizational challenges, in deciding on the skills candidates must possess, and in making a final choice. Depending on the governance culture of the organization, some key staff may actually sit on the transition committee. Staff involvement on the committee can increase staff enthusiasm for the person finally hired. However, in deciding who is best suited for the ED position, staff must be oriented to integrate the perspectives they have from their particular niches in the organization with the perspectives of the broader community, the organization's full audience, and funders.

9. The Job of the Council's Executive Transition Committee (ETC). The departure of an organization's executive demands intensive leadership and activity by the Council. The obvious task is the search for a new ED. But regardless of the circumstances under which the ED is departing, a healthy transition usually entails many more tasks as well

:

a. Arranging a proper send-off for the departing executive, and establishing a consistent message about the departure and transition;

- b. Determining what work the organization needs to do to prepare for the hire (perhaps time to work through a sense of loss, mid-level planning, major board and structural changes,);
- c. The selection, if needed, of an interim executive, who can act in roles ranging from “Caretaker” to “Change Agent;”
- d. Deciding how to conduct the search and screening;
- e. An organizational audit to determine the key challenges for the next ED; and
- f. Planning a structured entry for the newly hired executive that sets him or her up for success – welcoming rituals, community introduction, performance goals, and an evaluation protocol.

To coordinate all these facets of an executive turnover, TAM Council should create an ad hoc Transition Committee. This committee should include one or two key Council officers, or the officers as a group may choose to serve as the Transition Committee. An important member and resource to the committee is a staff administrator, who will be a crucial communications link with the entire staff group and provide logistical support (and who is not a candidate for the job)

Reassurance to key stakeholders is a major benefit of a visible and energized Transition Committee. Staff are usually destabilized by the departure of a good (or even a bad) leader. Funders and members can also feel lost. A board swiftly and decisively swinging into action as a solid bridge between EDs gives confidence to all organization constituents about the future.

Money is also an incentive to early convening of a Transition Committee. Foundations that already have made significant programmatic investments in an organization know the value of a well-managed ED transition to an organization’s vitality, and they may be willing to provide some transition funds. As part of its grant application, the committee will be asked to develop a work plan and timeline.

As members of Council, you’ll want to be sure you find the right executive for the job and that the organization is ready for that individual’s leadership. A conscientious Transition Committee can make the difference.

10. An Organizational Audit. The profile of the ideal candidate for executive director should be informed by the results of an efficient and diligent organizational audit. The assessment, which includes both a review of key organization documents (personnel policies, recent financial audits) and interviews with staff, Council, funders, members and peer agencies, will identify for the search committee the key challenges and opportunities faced by the organization. The next ED must have the skills necessary to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities.

An often overlooked piece of the audit is an identification of the issues that caused the previous ED to leave the organization; without this knowledge, previous mistakes may be repeated with the successor. Rather than merely finding someone to fill an empty position, ETC guides the organization in recruiting, employing and retaining a staff leader who will move the organization forward.

11. An energetic candidate search is necessary in order to generate an adequate pool of qualified candidates. Recruitment must go beyond print and electronic ad placements to networking by Council, staff members and recruiters to identify and attract potential leaders.

12. The transition process ends with a good beginning for the newly hired Executive Director. The Council negotiates a compensation and benefits package. After an adequate orientation period, the ED and Council together set 6-month performance objectives and agree on an evaluation process. The Council should be proactive and forthright in working with the ED in identifying his/her skill development and support needs and in finding the resources to meet them. This is especially important in light of surveys which indicate that for the medium to small-sized organization, the new staff leader is likely not to have been an ED previously.

GUIDE FOR MANAGING THE HIRING & TRANSITION

Description

This procedure can be used to guide an organization through the hiring or transition to a new executive director. The procedure addresses most of the major considerations during the transition, but there will certainly be unique items that will come. The procedure should be carefully reviewed by the relevant Council members and current executive director (if one exists) to ensure it is complete for their needs. (Note that this list is very useful as a risk management mechanism, e.g., for contingency planning, for review by an organization even if the executive director is not leaving.) If the current executive director is being fired, this procedure should be modified accordingly.

A. Current Chief Executive's Notification to Council (if the current ED is leaving)

1. Typically, the executive director will notify the Council chair or other Council member. The chair should immediately notify the rest of the Council members in the next Council meeting.
2. Attempt to negotiate a twelve-week-notice period from the executive director. It's not unlikely that there will be a period without a new executive director. This procedure will help guide through that period.

B. Confidentiality

1. The Council members should be apprised as soon as possible. Each Council member is legally responsible for the leadership of the organization, and deserves to know about all matters when they occur.
2. Discuss how to handle public relations. The community will soon hear the executive director is leaving. Agree on how this message will be conveyed to the community. If the transition is expected to take over two months (they often do), consider sending a letter to the major stakeholders (funders, members, advisors, suppliers, "peer" organizations, etc.) notifying them of the transition and assuring them that transition planning is being carried out thoroughly. Ask them to contact the Council chair if they have any concerns or questions.
3. Note that applicants to the executive director role deserve complete confidentiality. Make every effort not to expose applicants' names to the public or staff. If certain staff are selected to interview the candidates, they should be coached to not reveal candidate names to the rest of staff. This confidentiality is a matter of protecting candidates who may not want their names out in public as looking for a new job. Of course, this matter of confidentiality is ultimately up to the Council, but if confidentiality is not assured, it is very likely that the number of candidates will be quite limited.

C. Council Preparation

1. Appoint an ad hoc Transition Council Committee to focus on this transition - This committee will manage the transition and make recommendations to the entire Council regarding any matters with the transition. This committee role could be assumed by the current Executive Committee or a Personnel Committee. Committee members should commit to availability over the next eight to twelve weeks.
2. This transition planning procedure should promptly be reviewed and updated to constitute the transition planning document.
3. As soon the transition plan is complete, the staff should promptly be notified of the transition. A Council member should attend the staff meeting where notification is given and the staff should be assured that the transition is being planned and carried out. The plan might be reviewed in the staff meeting. A copy of the transition plan should be shared with all staff members.
4. Identify funding for the transition. For example, are any funds needed for a national search, to move the new candidate, or for training the new candidate?
5. Update the executive director job description. The description will be referenced to write the ad for the position, during interviewing and for ongoing guidance to new

executive director, and ensuring adequate compensation. When updating the job description, consider: current overall responsibilities, strategic planning goals for the year and the nature of current major issues that need to be addressed. Identify the most important criteria for selecting the new person and then rank the criteria (this ranking comes in handy when comparing candidates). The Council should update the job description among themselves. The current executive director should update the description at the same time, but independently. The Council and executive director should share their comments to the job description and discuss differences to come to consensus. Write a final version of the job description.

6. Get ads out as soon as possible. The Council should decide if they are going to do a local and/or national search.

D. Administrative Preparation

1. Update the administrative calendar for the organization. Ask the executive director to make a schedule of all major recurring activities during the year (e.g., performance reviews, special events, staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, lease/contract expiration dates, when paychecks come out, etc.)

2. Get a list of key stakeholders. Have the executive director make a list of all community key stakeholders whom the new executive director should know about, e.g., funders (nonprofit only, advisors (legal, accounting, real estate), "peer" organizations, etc.

3. Review executive director's office facilities. Ask the executive director to document the status of his/her office, e.g., ensure there are labels on all documents and drawers. Appropriate staff and at least two Council members should meet with the executive director to review where he/she keeps their files and major documents. Staff should retain a key to the office and appropriate Council members should retain keys to the desk drawers and file cabinets.

4. Coming up to speed on executive director's current activities in the organization. Have the current executive director ask all staff members to update a "to do" list of their current major activities over the past month, planned activities over the coming two months and any major issues they're having now. These to do lists will serve to coordinate work details during the transition and help update the new executive director come up to speed.

5. A Council member should meet with the current executive director once a week before he/she goes. Review status of work activities, any current issues, etc.

6. Review personnel status. Two or more Council members should meet with the executive director to review personnel files, e.g., are there any current personnel issues or pending major actions? If so, it may be best to wait until the transition to the new executive director if this is expected to occur during the next month or so.

7. The current executive director should complete performance reviews on all personnel before he/she leaves. This ensures that the executive director's important feedback to personnel is collected before he/she goes, gives personnel a fair opportunity to reflect their past performance to the new executive director, and gives the new executive director the input he/she deserves about each employee to ensure effective supervision.

E. Interim Coordination between Council and Staff when the ED departs quickly and an Interim Executive Director is required.

1. Emergency contacts for the staff. Staff should be given names and phone numbers of at least two Council members whom can be contacted if needed. These two members should brief the entire Council on the nature of any emergency calls from staff, if calls were made.

2. Council and staff meetings. Have weekly meetings of full staff during the transition until a new executive director is hired. Have a Council member attend the meetings. Have a staff member (acting executive director) attend portions of the Council meetings.

3. Authorization lists. Decide who will issue paychecks and sign off on them during

the transition. Often, the Council treasurer and/or secretary will conduct this sign-off role.

F. Hiring the New Chief Executive

1. Advertise the position – Post the full job description (see sec. C. 5 on page 8, above) on the TAM Website. Prepare ads that include the job title, general responsibilities, minimum skills and/or education required, benefits, salary range (or minimum), whom they should send a resume to if they are interested and by when, and a link to the job description on the TAM Website. Broadcast the position to TAM members. Post ads on the TAM Website Job Bank, AAM's AVISO jobs Website, and other museum association Websites (suggestions: AASLH, all six AAM regions, and some of the larger state museum associations – Virginia, Florida, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, Ohio.) Because a large part of this position involves association management, consider advertising in Austin since most Texas associations are located there. Consider placing an ad with the Texas Society of Association Executives. Where appropriate, send cover letters and job descriptions to targeted professional organizations.

2. Note that current employees should be able to apply for the job. Considerations in hiring them for the new role will have to include the impact on the organization if the employee leaves behind a critical and unfilled role in the organization.

3. Screen resumes - Often, a Council committee will screen the first round of candidates, including review of resumes and conduct the first round interviews. When screening resumes, note the candidate's career objective -- or the lack of it. If not specified, the candidate may not have considered what they want to do in the future, which may impact their commitment to your new role. Note if they stayed at jobs long or did they leave quickly. Are there holes in their work history? Note their education and training. Is it appropriate for the new role? Consider what capabilities and skills are evidenced in their past and current work activities. Interview all candidates that meet the minimum qualifications. (At this point, be sure that you're not excluding candidates because of unfair biases.)

4. Interview candidates - Send the job description to candidates before they come to the interview meeting. While interviewing candidates, always apply the same questions to all candidates to ensure fairness. All questions should be in regard to performing duties of the job. Attempt to ask open-ended questions, i.e., avoid questions that can be answered with "yes-no." Talk only 25% of the time -- the rest of the time, listen. Don't rely on your memory -- ask permission from the interviewee to take notes. Consider having multiple people at the interview; although this can be intimidating to the interviewee, this practice can ensure them a much more objective and fair presentation. (If staff participate in the interviews, ensure they realize they are advisory in capacity. Council members have the legal responsibility to select the new executive director.) Have the same people as interviewers in all of the interviews. Consider asking some challenging, open-ended questions, such as Why do you want the job? What skills do you bring to this job? What concerns do you have about filling this role? What was your biggest challenge in a past job and how did you meet it? Do you have a preliminary vision for TAM? Describe your ideal Council, fundraising, budgeting, personnel management, program management process. Ask about their compensation needs and expected or needed benefits. Find out when they can start if offered the job. Don't ask questions about race, nationality, age, gender, disabilities (current or previous), marital status, spouses, children and their care, criminal records or credit records. Have all interviewers share/record their impressions of the candidate right after the interview meeting. Explain to the candidate that you'll be getting back to them soon and always do this. Be sure to tell candidates of any relevant personnel policies terms, such as probationary periods. (The best way to deal with a poor performer is not to hire him or her in the first place. It is often wise to have a probationary period of, e.g., six months, wherein if the employee does not meet the responsibilities of the position, you can terminate the employee.) Conduct a background check to ascertain if they have a criminal record.

5. Check references. Talking with references is an essential part of the process, and a candidate should not be hired before this happens. Ask for the candidate for references then check all of them. Ideally you should talk to the candidate's current (or most recent) supervisor or employer. Make sure in the interview that the list of references includes employers and not just personal references. When talking to references, let them know the requirements of the position and your impressions of the candidate. Ask if they think the candidate is qualified for the job, as described. Ask if the candidate is reliable, competent, trustworthy, and works well with others. Ask if the candidate has had problems or shortcomings in the past, and how and if they were addressed. Ask if they would hire the person again in a similar circumstance. If a reference does not have direct experience with the candidate or cannot give a complete picture of the candidate's past performance, ask for the name and number of someone who can. Once all references have been checked to your satisfaction, share reference comments with the interviewers.

6. Select the candidate - Usually, a Council transition committee recommends the top two or three candidates to the entire Council for discussion and selection. This may require another round of interviews, this time including more/other Council members. Usually, this is not as easy as one would like because two or three candidates come in close. Have a highly focused meeting with all interviewers. (Again, note that staff members can provide input to the selection of the new executive director, but should not be involved in voting.) Have each interviewer suggest their favorite candidate. If there is disagreement, focus discussion to identify the one or two areas in which interviewers disagree about the candidates. Then have each interviewer explain their impressions. At this point, interviewers usually come to consensus and agree on one candidate.

7. If there does not seem to be a most suitable candidate - Consider if the job requirements are too stringent or are an odd mix. Or, consider hiring the candidate who came in closest and plan for dedicated training to bring their skills to the needed levels. Or, re-advertise the position. Consider getting advice from a human resources professional (at this point, your need for them is quite specific, so they might provide services on a pro bono basis).

8. If everyone turns down the job - The best strategy is to ask the candidates why they turned the job down. Usually, you'll hear the same concerns, e.g., the pay is too low or the benefits incomplete, the organization seems confused about what it wants from the role, the interview process seemed hostile or contentious, etc. Reconvene the interviewers and consider what you heard from the candidates. Recognize what went wrong and correct the problem. Call back your favorite candidates, admit the mistake and what you did, and why you'd like to make an offer to them again.

9. Offer letter - If they accept an offer, always follow-up with an offer letter, specifying the compensation, benefits, and starting date and reference an attached job description. Ask them to sign a copy of the offer letter and return it to you.

10. Start a personnel file - Include in the file, the signed offer letter, tax withholding forms, the job description and any benefits forms.

G. Orienting the New Chief Executive

Develop an orientation procedure and consider the following activities for inclusion on the list. The following activities should be conducted by the Council, if possible.

1. Before the new executive director begins employment, send them a letter welcoming them to the organization, verifying their starting date and providing them a copy of the employee policies and procedures manual. (This can be included in the offer letter.)

2. At this point, the Council may send a letter to stakeholders. The letter would announce the new person, when they are starting, something about their background, etc., and asking them to call the Council chair if they have any questions or concerns.

3. Meet with the executive director to brief them on strategic information. Review the organization chart, last year's annual report, the strategic plan, this year's budget,

and the employee's policies and procedure manual if they did not get one already. In the same meeting, explain the performance review procedure and provide them a copy of the performance review document.

4. When the new executive director begins employment (or before if possible), introduce them in a meeting dedicated to introducing the new executive director. Have all staff attend and introduce themselves.

5. Ensure the new executive director receives necessary materials and is familiar with the facilities. Ensure an assistant gives them keys, gets them to sign any needed benefit and tax forms. Review the layout of offices, bathrooms, storage areas, kitchen use, copy and fax systems, computer configuration and procedures, telephone usage and any special billing procedures for use of office systems.

6. Schedule any needed training, e.g., computer training, including use of passwords, overview of software and documentation, location and use of peripherals, and where to go to get questions answered.

7. Review any policies and/or procedures about use of facilities.

8. Assign a Council member to them as their "buddy" who remains available to answer any questions over the next four weeks.

9. Have someone take them to lunch on their first day of work and invite other staff members along.

10. During the first six weeks, have one-on-one meetings (face-to-face or over the telephone) with the new executive director, to discuss the new employee's transition into the organization, hear any pending issues or needs, and establish a working relationship with the new executive director.

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