

Sample Workforce and Succession Planning Frequently Asked Questions

What is workforce planning?

Workforce planning is having the right number of people, with the right skills, experience, and competencies in the right job at the right time. It is a strategy and set of processes by management make human resource decision based on the agencies mission, strategic plan, budgetary resources, and the required knowledge, skills, and experience to get the job done.

What is succession planning?

Succession planning, a component of workforce planning, is the process of identifying and developing talent to meet the critical needs of the organization now and in the future. It includes strategies for knowledge transfer, workforce planning, performance management, leadership development, and talent acquisition and retention.

Succession planning, effectively done, is critical to mission success and creates an effective process for recognizing, developing, and retaining leadership talent to meet future organizational challenges. One test of a succession management system is the extent to which an organization can fill important positions with internal candidates.

What is the difference between workforce planning and succession planning?

Workforce planning and succession planning are closely related. Workforce planning focuses on changing the size, distribution, and composition of the workforce to meet future needs in an orderly, controlled, and efficient manner. It focuses on the workforce as a whole. Succession planning focuses on people, including the replacement of individuals or groups of people in the workforce. Attrition occurs naturally in an organization. Succession planning attempts to respond to attrition by ensuring that there are well-qualified people ready to assume critical positions in the shortest possible time when vacancies occur.

Why should you be interested in workforce and succession planning?

- Many organizations are experiencing the effects of an aging workforce
- Cost-cutting measures have reduced the internal bench strength
- Searches for the best talent extend to all levels
- Need for speed in delivery of services
- Increased movement among workers (job hopping)
- Enables alignment of future organizational needs with the availability of appropriate personnel resources within the organization
- Workforce planning ensures that recruitment resources are more efficiently and effectively used and helps to maintain and improve agency diversity profiles
- Effective planning links expenditures to that agency's long-term goals and objectives, and ensure recruitment, employee development, training, deployment, and retention decisions are aligned with those goals.
- The result can be an ongoing supply of well trained, broadly experienced, motivated leaders who are ready and able to step into key positions as needed.

Is succession planning a form of pre-selection?

Succession planning is not pre-selection. Having a succession plan means that employees have access to the resources needed to develop and be considered for promotion, thereby giving them a competitive edge but not guaranteeing them a promotion.

What are the benefits of succession planning?

- Less time and expense to find talent to fill vacancies
- The organization is prepared to deal with sudden losses of key people
- Less staff turnover
- More appeal to prospective employees
- Better defined career paths help the organization recruit and retain better employees
- It builds a leadership culture that can boost retention, stimulate innovation, build common language of leaders, and enhance organization effectiveness

How is succession planning linked to strategic planning?

Succession planning should be a part of every organization's strategic plan – your vision of where you see the organization and how your workforce fits into that vision. By projecting future changes in the organization, along with anticipating loss of key personnel, the succession planning also becomes interchangeably linked with the human resources planning and management development processes and thus enables the organization to manage all of its resources, including human capital, more effectively.

What are the most common problems with getting started?

- Defining succession planning as an HR problem
- Understaffing the effort
- Thinking it is only for senior management levels
- Establishing overly ambitious goals

What are some of the best practices for successful succession planning?

- Identify high-potential candidates in the organization through an integrated talent management system
- Evaluate individual candidate's strengths and weaknesses compared to the organization's needs
- Ensure hands-on involvement by the organization's leadership team
- Determine the competencies needed to achieve your organization's strategic objectives
- Give internal candidates the same scrutiny as external candidates
- Develop descriptions of values and ethical standards
- Assess people relative to the values and standards
- Build a culture such that high-potential talent is a shared resource
- Extend succession planning to all levels within the organization
- Integration of succession planning into strategic and budgetary planning
- Ensure formal mentoring program is in place
- Cross-divisional sharing of people and information
- Career paths that move not just up a specialized ladder but also across the organization
- Frequent opportunities for employees to accept new challenges

How does an agency get started in the planning process?

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Agencies should decide how big the scope of their plan will be. For example, will a regional office be a pilot initiative or will the plan be launched division-wide? All available resources should be used in gathering data, providing input and feedback. Check your state's workforce planning office, if available, to see if they have forms, guides, and models to assist in your plan development.

Can technology help?

There are many tools available to assist in your succession planning efforts from excel spreadsheets and access databases to talent management systems that integrate knowledge transfer, workforce planning, performance management, leadership development, and talent acquisition and retention. It is critical to choose the tools that best suit your organization and your resources.

Is assistance available?

Check other parts of this toolkit for other tools that may be of assistance.