

Public Library Succession Planning

Information Guide and Checklists



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Why is succession planning important?

- Having a plan in place for staff transitions helps the library provide continuity of service.
- A plan can help the board to align personnel decisions with the library's strategic priorities.
- By articulating the library's priorities, the board and staff can more easily identify professional development needs and opportunities that will help the library meet its goals.
- A good succession plan also helps individuals be more successful in their work by creating individual work plans and training goals that are connected to the organization's goals and mission.

Where to begin?

The library board and director should work together, with the board setting the high-level goals and budget for the library and for the library director identifying specific details and opportunities for other library staff positions.

1. Identify key positions in the library and how they help the library fulfill its mission. Remember that this is about the position, not the individual who is currently filling that position.
2. List the knowledge, talents, and skills needed to be successful in each key position.
3. If possible, develop current employees who show interest and potential with the appropriate training and mentoring they need to grow their skill sets.
4. Budget for an appropriate and competitive director salary and/or any staff promotions.
5. Review and update the succession plan at least annually to identify and determine necessary changes to the plan.

Succession Planning Checklist

If your current director is assisting with the succession planning process, great! They can help capture essential institutional knowledge and perspective on the position before handing the process over to the board.

Here is a checklist of items to review prior to the departure of your outgoing director. Make sure that your new director will know where to find all of these items.

Gather all that apply to your library

PERSONNEL

- ☐ Succession plan
- ☐ Organization chart
- ☐ Personnel policies
- ☐ Procedure manuals
- ☐ Staff list (department, contacts, positions, status, salary)
- ☐ Salary schedule
- ☐ Job descriptions
- ☐ Job duties
- ☐ I-9 files
- ☐ Medical files
- ☐ Personnel files (including previous evaluations)
- ☐ Health insurance
- ☐ Pension information
- ☐ Union contract

BOARD

- ☐ Contact information (name, term of office, committee assignments)
- ☐ Board bylaws and library policies
- ☐ Board minutes
- ☐ Records retention documents
- ☐ Annual timeline of tasks/events/deadlines
- ☐ Strategic plan
- ☐ Current projects list
- ☐ Policies (board bylaws, general library, personnel, collection development)
- ☐ Attorney info (when to use them, current/pending/past lawsuits)

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FINANCES

- ☐ Budgets (current, past, and supporting documentation on how data is gathered)
- ☐ Monthly financials
- ☐ Audits
- ☐ Bond information and bond disclosure documents
- ☐ Account login info for electronic access (include security question answers)
- ☐ Banking/credit card information (include documentation to change signatories)
- ☐ Internal controls procedures
- ☐ Outside account contact information and procedures

BUILDING

- ☐ Capital improvement plan
- ☐ Master building plan
- ☐ Emergency plan
- ☐ Blueprints (original, as-builts, renovations, print and digital copies)
- ☐ Vendor contacts
- ☐ Contracts database
- ☐ Liability insurance policy and contract/claims information
- ☐ Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment (FFE) documents and depreciation schedules

TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Technology replacement plan
- ☐ Contact information for IT support (if not in-house)
- ☐ Contact information for vendor support
- ☐ Inventory list
- ☐ Login/passwords list
- ☐ Website/social media login/passwords and procedures information

COMMUNITY

- ☐ Community leaders (include contact information for key administrators, legislators, and other community leaders)
- ☐ Local government personnel and how they interact with the library
- ☐ Local community group contact information (service clubs, chamber of commerce, places of worship, other organizations)
- ☐ List of annual community events
- ☐ Greater Montana library community information
- ☐ Montana State Library (MSL) contact information

Hiring a New Library Director: Planning

Review/update your library's strategic plan.

Identify key goals and tasks for the new director.

- What does the board hope to achieve with the new director?
- What are your library's core values? What values are non-negotiable in a director?
- What skills are you looking for? What does the director need to help the library meet its strategic goals? What are the top 3-5 duties of the director position that helps the library provide service and achieve its goals? What skills are needed to complete those duties?
 - Budgeting
 - Programs
 - Community outreach
 - Government relations
 - Board relations
 - Personnel management
- What about personality traits? What personality traits will help the director be successful? It might also be helpful to identify what traits would NOT work.
 - Example: We need a director who is outgoing, patient, organized, creative; We need a director who is NOT rigid, easily overwhelmed, and averse to public speaking.

Create a hiring plan.

- Create a timeline which includes all activities of your hiring process and the time involved for each activity.
 - Allow ample time to advertise the job (at least 3-4 weeks, depending on the size of your community).
 - When thinking of a start date for the new director, allow for the new hire to be able to give at least 2 weeks' notice at their current job if they are currently employed. If they need to relocate to take the position they will need more time.
- Create/update and approve job description, considering the skills and traits previously identified.
- Establish a salary range

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- See the [MSL Compensation Dashboard](#) and [Handbook](#) for data on competitive wages for library directors and other similar positions in your area and/or for your library size.
- Determine hiring requirements
 - Work with your local Human Resources (HR) director to follow local government hiring procedures. This helps minimize the risk to the library board as well as to the city or county.
- Appropriate funds for the candidate search or job advertisements if necessary

Establish a hiring committee.

- The committee may include some or all of the library board. Consider including someone from your community outside the library, as well. Committee members should be available and involved throughout the entire process from application screening to the job offer. If this is not possible, consider having a screening committee and an interview committee, instead.

The Hiring Process

A good recruitment process...

- **Considers the library's needs.**

The first step in seeking a new library director is for the board to identify the top skills and qualities that they want the new director to have. Perhaps the job description needs to be updated before the recruitment process begins. Work with your local HR office to make sure that the job description matches your needs for the position. Also consider whether you need to make a salary adjustment to keep up with the cost of living in your area.

- **Is representative.**

The board will need to establish the hiring committee, which should include at least a couple of trustees and perhaps a library staff member or other stakeholders. Committee members should be knowledgeable about the library and its role in the community. They should be willing to objectively evaluate candidates and commit to the entire recruitment process.

- **Is legal.**

Again, consult with your local HR office and, if necessary, legal counsel to ensure that you are following all local, state, and federal employment laws.

- **Is advertised.**

Advertise the position in your local media as well as further afield. Ask your Montana State Library consultant about how to share the job posting through state and regional professional networks.

- **Is consistent and fair.**

Work with HR to write your interview questions before interviews are scheduled and stick to those questions for each interview. Follow-up questions are fine but give each candidate the opportunity to talk about the same subject areas. [Chapter Three](#) of the [Montana Municipal Officials Handbook](#) offers guidance on what is and is not acceptable to ask in an interview. Be sure to document your process and share your documentation with your HR office.

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Hiring Committee Tasks:

- ☐ Plan and place job advertisements based on your identified needs for the position.
- ☐ Work with HR to create screening criteria and interview questions.
- ☐ Review applications, select and schedule interviews.
- ☐ Conduct interviews.
- ☐ Conduct reference checks.
- ☐ Keep documentation and notes throughout the hiring process.
- ☐ Hiring committee makes recommendation to the board at a publicly noticed board meeting.

Board/HR tasks:

- ☐ Working with HR, negotiate a starting wage with the leading candidate.
- ☐ Send an offer letter to candidate including position title, salary, start date, job description, benefits summary.
- ☐ Publicly announce the new director to staff and then to community.
- ☐ Provide orientation to the new director.
- ☐ Inform the interview candidates who were not selected.

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New Director Orientation

The Board Chair should plan on meeting with the new director and preparing a training and orientation schedule or checklist for them to complete in their first days. Setting some clear goals and expectations is important so that the board can evaluate the new director's progress in the coming year.

Training Checklist and Topics to Discuss/Review with the Incoming Director

The director may not need to cover all of these points, depending on the size of your library and your staff. Smaller libraries' directors may have a greater need to be generalists who understand circulation tasks, etc. Your director's job description should help you to prioritize this checklist.

GENERAL

- ☐ Training schedule
- ☐ New director overview letter – explain where to access key info
- ☐ Montana State Library – consultant contact information
- ☐ Annual calendar of deadlines and events for director

LIBRARY

Circulation

- ☐ How to use the library catalog software for checkouts, account maintenance, etc.
- ☐ How to issue a library card
- ☐ How items are retrieved from book drops, checked back in, and shelved

Collection Development

- ☐ Collection development and reconsideration policies and procedure documents
- ☐ Where and how to purchase materials for the library
- ☐ How to retrieve statistics
- ☐ Where and how to request interlibrary loans
- ☐ If the library is part of a sharing group, where to find sharing group policies/procedures and contact information

Electronic Resources / library technology

- ☐ Vendor contact information
- ☐ Subscription or contract information
- ☐ How to use the resources
- ☐ How to troubleshoot, or who to contact, in the event of problems with hardware
- ☐ How to retrieve statistics

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Programs

- ☐ Program calendar
- ☐ Where to find and log program statistics
- ☐ Partnerships and contact information, if applicable

Technical Services

- ☐ Vendor contact information
- ☐ Subscription or contact information
- ☐ How to use the resources
- ☐ How to copy catalog an item, if applicable
- ☐ How to catalog or seek cataloging assistance for original cataloging items
- ☐ Repair procedures, if applicable

MEETINGS

- ☐ Meet with each staff member (and union stewards if applicable)
- ☐ Meet with HR (if applicable) to review duties and key responsibilities of director vs. HR
- ☐ Meet with each board member individually and then as a group
- ☐ Meet with key community people (school superintendents, police, fire, mayor/local officials)
- ☐ Meet with library's attorney (review any current/pending/past lawsuits)
- ☐ Meet with major building vendors (mechanical, plumbing, fire protection, HVAC)
- ☐ Meet with other vendors (insurance, collections, IT, attorney, accountant/auditor)
- ☐ Meet with other local directors
- ☐ Meet with local, state, and federal legislators

PERSONNEL

- ☐ Where are evaluations/disciplinary documents
- ☐ Review current staff issues including personnel improvement plans
- ☐ Location of electronic staff files
- ☐ Current staff projects
- ☐ Union contract

FINANCIALS

- ☐ Review all bank account/credit cards and set up transition of signatories
- ☐ Review invoice payment process from receipt to board approval to mailing payment
- ☐ Go over any grants that have been applied for/been received/recently closed
- ☐ Discuss the budget and tax levy process and timeline
- ☐ Go over the monthly financials
- ☐ Review the annual audit and introduce new director to auditor, if applicable
- ☐ Provide bond information and bond disclosure documents

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BOARD/LEGAL

- ☐ Overview of board members
- ☐ Board packet timeline and preparation
- ☐ Current projects and pending projects
- ☐ Strategic plan review
- ☐ Past, pending, current lawsuits
- ☐ Review major board decisions
- ☐ Review how minutes are taken and where all legal documents are kept

BUILDING

- ☐ Walk-through of building and grounds (review where all key shutoffs are and how services come into the building)
- ☐ Blueprints/as-builts
- ☐ Capital improvement and master plan review
- ☐ Emergency plan review
- ☐ Emergency procedures walk-through
- ☐ Furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) and depreciation schedule

TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Walk-through of server room, if applicable
- ☐ Equipment inventory list
- ☐ Login/passwords
- ☐ Website/social media login information
- ☐ Technology plan review

COMMUNITY

- ☐ Local contact information
- ☐ Annual events and library participation
- ☐ Library networking groups

Refer to the [New Staff Member Onboarding Guide](#) for more resources.

Director Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation is a way to check in with your director, assess their progress in meeting their goals, and identify anything that needs to change in order for them to be successful in their position. This evaluation also serves as documentation on the director's work, which should be placed in their personnel file.

A good evaluation process...

- **Is ongoing.**

The board may schedule a formal evaluation with the director on an annual basis, but the conversation about performance expectations and feedback should be ongoing throughout the year. Nothing in the formal evaluation should come as a surprise if the board and director have been reviewing progress towards library and work plan goals on a regular basis.

- **Is legal.**

Any discussions about the director's job evaluation should be held in public meetings. The director reserves the right to request whether the evaluation be held in an executive session (that is, a portion of a public meeting which is not available to the public) or in an open meeting. See Montana Code Annotated 2-3-203.

- **Is based on known objectives.**

The director and board should agree upon a list of goals at the beginning of the year which will be used for evaluation at the end of the year. These goals should support the overall strategic plan for the library.

- **Is realistic.**

Sometimes a director may not be able to fulfill all of their goals due to circumstances beyond their control. This should be documented and taken into account during the evaluation.

- **Is specific.**

Provide constructive criticism and praise that is specific and helps the director understand what steps to take to improve or maintain their performance.

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Simple Annual Evaluation Form for Director

- What went well last year?
- What did not go well? Why?
- What should the Director work on next year? This should include specific tasks as well as professional development like leadership development or classes that would assist the Director.
- For the Director – what do you need from the Board to support you in your work?
- For the board member – what do you need from the Director to support you in your work as a board member?

Emergency Succession Planning

What if your director leaves with little to no notice? In addition to the considerations listed above, the board will need to determine:

- Who will be acting director?
- Does that person's compensation need to be adjusted in the interim?
- Does the job description need to be updated?
- How soon can the position be posted?
- Who should be the point person for collecting all the items on the succession planning checklist for the next director?

Work with your local HR department to address these questions.

Conclusion

Proactively creating a succession plan for your library can save you time and reduce stress and confusion in the long run. It can also help set up your current employees for success by helping them grow in a meaningful way that supports the organization.

Your [Montana State Library Consultant](#) is available to help you and your board work through these questions. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you would like assistance.