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Strategic Succession Planning Resource Guide

Identifying and Developing Talent for the Future

Ohio Department of
Administrative Services
State Human Resources Division
Office of Talent Management
30 E. Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

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Introduction

The State of Ohio's Strategic Succession Planning Guide is a resource to assist leaders and human resources professionals in creating dynamic, impactful plans for developing potential successors while strengthening the current bench. By planning, agencies will develop individuals who can effectively lead as well as achieve the mission and strategic priorities to maintain an effective work environment.

As the State of Ohio considers the increased number of eligible employees for retirement, it is essential that agencies have a plan in place to ensure mission critical or key positions have a talent pool of qualified individuals ready for the future. The succession plan should align and support the agency's overall strategy to achieve long-term success, despite turnover.

According to Gartner, strategic succession planning focuses on identifying and developing a pool of leaders and critical talent ready to fill key roles across all organizational levels, closely aligned with long-term organizational goals and objectives. This guide will help you understand how to apply this definition within the State's strategic succession planning framework.

Planning for succession in a strategic manner impacts the state and each agency in the following ways:

1. By identifying and gathering key information on critical positions, leadership understands each key role and its impact on the agency.
2. It helps uncover employees who may be ready to prepare for their next career move.
3. It helps shape the future of talent development within a work area, department, or for the agency.

How can managers and leaders benefit from this Guide?

Agency leaders, which includes all levels of leadership, can benefit from this guide in rethinking how they think about filling vacancies internally as well as how they consider the development paths of employees. By shifting from a reactive approach, strategic succession planning can help leaders look at internal talent differently and develop employees for their next steps while capturing critical institutional knowledge.

How can employees benefit from this Guide?

Employees can benefit from this guide by learning more about how the State utilizes strategic succession planning, preparing for potential conversations with their leaders. By having a sense of the strategic succession planning process, employees can be better equipped to be active participants and learners throughout each step of the process.

How can Human Resources professionals benefit from this Guide?

Human Resources professionals can benefit from this guide by understanding the process and related tools to assist in consulting with agency leaders and employees on their strategic succession planning needs. Because strategic succession planning is an ongoing planning activity, it will be important for human resources-based practitioners to understand and apply these tools appropriately.

Process Overview

Strategic Succession Planning is a component of the State of Ohio’s overall Talent Management practices and processes. The broader practice of Talent Management is aimed at optimizing human capital, which enables an organization to drive short- and long-term results by building culture, engagement, capability, and capacity through integrated talent acquisition, talent development, and talent deployment processes that align to business goals.

As illustrated in the table below, strategic succession and workforce planning usually work in tandem to inform human resources-related systems, process, and policies such as talent acquisition and performance management.



When done in a strategic manner, succession planning supports not only workforce planning and talent management efforts, but the agency’s overall strategic priorities and goals. Succession strategies should be utilized to effectively plan for internal talent needs in support of the agency’s vision, mission, and strategic priorities. The comprehensive succession plan should address current and future leadership needs of the agency.

Because Succession Planning is a significant part of the strategic planning process, it is essential to have an agency strategic plan or compelling reasons for moving forward with succession planning. The strategic plan provides the agency’s strategic direction (key priorities and goals). If your agency does not have a strategic plan, now is the time to consider developing plan with your leadership team.

The Importance of Succession Strategies

Succession planning, when performed in a strategic manner, can influence many aspects of an agency's talent management strategy. Therefore, it is essential to determine the role of succession planning during strategic planning meetings to ensure leadership buy-in and support, thus positioning the practice in a place of importance within the agency. If misaligned to the agency's overall strategy, succession planning may not have the desired impact, which may lead to reduced knowledge transfer along with a weakened talent bench. Additionally, strategic succession planning helps agencies ensure business continuity that supports all Ohioans.

The following are some key benefits of succession planning.

- Promotes seamless staff transitions
- Preserves long-term knowledge and experiences
- Reduces the risk of critical vulnerabilities in the workforce
- Builds talent pools capable of competing for critical positions
- Encourages employee engagement, collaboration, and coaching conversations

It is important to understand that strategic succession planning supports the broader talent management practice of strategic workforce planning, which should not be done in isolation from the broader agency workforce planning process. Specifically, a detailed review to determine workforce gaps helps to identify key positions and employees for development.

Although this guide focuses on succession planning, it is also important to understand the difference between succession planning and workforce planning. Workforce planning is an essential planning process by which the state can achieve the intended philosophy of controlling the size and cost of government. Strategic workforce planning addresses the broad-based issues that evolve over time and can influence all areas of the agency. The following are some examples of those broad-based issues.

- Looking ahead at the future needs of the workforce
- Brainstorming scenarios under which needed workforce resources might change
- Anticipating budget impacts or constraints
- Establishing or developing a framework for anticipating vacancies (via strategic succession planning)

Without a strategic succession plan in place, workforce planning becomes a reactive process versus proactive process. For more information about the State's strategic workforce planning guidance, visit the Ohio Department of Administrative Services' Strategic Workforce and Succession Planning page, located at <https://das.ohio.gov/workforcesuccession>.

The State's Strategic Succession Planning Framework

Illustrated below is the State's Strategic Succession Planning Framework. Each step will be described in detail, which defines the process, tools, and activities associated with each of the four steps.



Step 1: Identify Mission Critical or Key Positions

The first step involves the agency's strategic leadership team (including the Human Resources Director) assembling and collaborating to identify which positions are mission critical. This requires evaluating the impact each position has in achieving strategic goals. In other words, would an unfilled position pose a critical risk to the agency? One way of defining risk may be preventing a service from being delivered. Also, it is important to identify the critical tasks and competencies required for success in the role. All identified positions should be prioritized for succession planning.

Process Detail

- Determine which positions, if they become and remain vacant, would pose a critical risk to the agency. This may involve a position that has significant impact on a key process, function, or public service.
- Identify positions that require very specialized knowledge or experience. This may be a highly sought-after information technology skill, such as a coding language, or a very specific condition or population supported by a direct care position.
- Identify the critical tasks and key competencies for success in the role. Competencies are the observable and measurable behaviors of a person that include the demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities that contribute to successful performance.

Tools and Activities

- **Critical Position Assessment:** helps to identify factors that may have an impact on talent requirements within the agency along with identifying the mission critical positions that should receive priority in the succession planning process.
- **Position Success Profile:** captures the core duties, education, experiences, competencies, and skills needed to be successful in each identified critical position.

- **Knowledge Transfer Plan (KTP):** in Step 1, now that the critical tasks and related knowledge, skills, and abilities that are key to each critical position are identified, the next step within Step 1 is to transfer those critical tasks, knowledge, skills and abilities to the KTP. This allows you to capture the information as well as indicate how important each task is, if someone else is available to assist or fill in, and determine the resources that exist to assist someone in performing the task.

Step 2: Identify Talent Pool and Assess Bench Strength

Once the leadership team has identified and prioritized the mission critical or key positions, the next step is to assess the current workforce's bench strength to establish an individual's readiness for a critical role. The talent pool consists of existing employees who may be identified as a potential successor to pursue development toward the identified critical positions referenced in Step 1. It is important to determine the talent pool members' bench strength or current readiness to move into a critical role. For example, when a key person is eligible to retire, agencies need a talent pool of qualified individuals with developed bench strength who are ready to compete for the upcoming vacancy.

Process Detail

- Assess the current talent pool along with its bench strength. The talent pool consists of existing employees who could be called on to pursue development toward the identified critical positions referenced in Step 1.
- Determine the talent pool members' current readiness to move into a critical role.

Note: The talent pool can be expanded to non-managerial positions as well. Having a good understanding regarding the depth of talent within the agency helps leaders focus on strategy during critical times.

Tools and Activities

- **Data Reports:** examples of reports include an agency or department roster (referred to as the Open/Filled Report), or retirement eligibility data report. This information will help inform you and others in your area who may be a potential successor. The retirement projection data may offer insight on who could be exiting the agency and when. Also, it may be valuable to review performance evaluation data from the group. Your Human Resources Office can assist you with obtaining this information, if needed.
- **Leadership Development Pipeline:** outlines the steps an employee might take in their career development, outlining various leadership opportunities as employees ascend within the agency.
- **Competency Assessment Results:** determines how employees may currently demonstrate the competencies associated with each critical position identified in Step 1. Competency assessment is a key component of identifying and assessing the talent pool's current bench strength.
- **Knowledge Transfer Plan:** in Step 2, the data evaluated can help inform the Knowledge Transfer and Development Areas section of the KTP.

Step 3: Assess Skill Gaps

This step will help determine how the skills of the identified talent pool members align with the established needs of each mission critical or key position.

Process Detail

- Assessing skill gaps involves determining how the skills of the identified talent pool members align with the needs of each mission critical position.

Tools and Activities

- **Critical Position Gap Assessment:** helps to determine the gap between the critical position's ideal state and the current skills of each potential successor.
- **Knowledge Transfer Development Plan:** starts to identify the necessary development opportunities and related steps for each potential successor begin to take shape.

Step 4: Define, Implement, and Monitor Development Plans

The succession plan process culminates with this Step 4. Step 4 involves translating identified skill gaps into individualized development plans tailored to each member of the identified talent pool. Once the individualized development plans are in place, adjustments should be made according to each member's developmental needs and the needs of the critical role. The progress of each pool member should be monitored and assessed.

Process Detail

- Translate identified skill gaps into individualized development plans unique to each talent pool member.
- Discuss how potential successors will develop critical competencies.
- Monitor progress and development of each talent pool member to ensure the individual achieves the action items in the development plan, and adjust the plans, as needed, according to each members' developmental needs.

Tools and Activities

- **Knowledge Transfer Development Plan:** establishes target completion dates for each development area. The development opportunities and related steps for each potential successor are then finalized, which includes all target completion dates and transfer measurements for each development area.
- **Leadership Development Worksheet:** gives potential successors the opportunity to discuss critical competencies, examine opportunities to leverage strengths, and explore opportunities to develop their weaker competencies.
- **Monitor Development Strategies:** involves holding regular discussions to evaluate and monitor the progress of each successor's development, which is an important activity in Step 4. Remember, the annual performance evaluation document and discussion provides an opportunity to explore career development. However, managers need to have a separate discussion that focuses on future development opportunities and assessment of actual experience and observable competencies.

Note: The Knowledge Transfer Plan should be applied in each of the four steps. Successful knowledge transfer planning, which in turn is used to construct the Knowledge Transfer Development Plan, **is the most important tool in this process**. Obtaining, documenting, and distributing the knowledge held by critical position incumbents is critical in developing the talent pool.

Preparing a Succession Action Plan

Although there are many tools available to facilitate the succession planning process, not every tool may fit your agency's needs initially, especially if you are new to strategic succession planning.

Once you have completed the tools, it is time to craft your narrative strategic succession plan. This not only helps put the completed tools into actionable practice, but it helps demonstrate your plans for leadership review and approval. Finally, the narrative plan provides an opportunity to link your succession efforts to your department's, division's, or agency's strategic goals and priorities.

The sample action planning tool below is designed to help in this effort by outlining key actions to be taken before, during, and after your journey through the State's strategic succession planning framework.

Additionally, a sample strategic succession plan is available for your review by visiting the Ohio Department of Administrative Services' Strategic Workforce and Succession Planning page, located at <https://das.ohio.gov/workforcesuccession>.

Strategic Succession Action Plan			
Action Steps	Key Activities	Due Date	Lead Assigned
Determine Strategic Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate a business case (retirement projections, hard to fill). Hold meeting with leadership to identify leadership vision and obtain commitment. Establish committee and frequency of meetings (monthly, quarterly). 	July 1	Ray
Identify Successors and Analyze Talent Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential successors. Assess bench strength and competencies for identified positions. Assess competencies for identified positions. Complete the Knowledge Transfer Plan. Identify talent pool candidates for critical positions. 	March 31	Terri and Agency Leader(s)
Develop Strategic Succession Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop implementation plan. Develop budget requirements to implement strategies. Determine how to measure and evaluate selected strategies. 	June 1	Julia and Strategic Leadership Planning Committee
Implement Succession Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete proposed actions (establish date and leads to be assigned). Develop communication plan and timeline. Re-confirm executive leadership strategic direction (vision) and commitment. 	July 15	Terri and Implementation Team
Evaluate Succession Planning Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct regular succession or talent planning meetings. Measure the closure of competency or technical skill gaps. Analyze leadership development from selected successors. Track placement of leadership successors. Assess improvements or enhancements to succession planning process. Update business (based on current retirement projections). Re-confirm executive leadership strategic direction (vision) and commitment. 	Ongoing (via monthly meetings once plan implemented)	Ray and Agency Leader(s)

Contact

For assistance or to discuss your unique needs in more detail, consider contacting your agency's Human Resources Office.

Additionally, the Department of Administrative Services, Human Resources Division's Office of Talent Management offers consultative strategic succession planning support. Email das.hrdwfp@das.ohio.gov for assistance.

Related Resources

Related resources, such as competency development assistance, may be found by visiting the below webpages.

- [Performance Management and Development](#)
- [Competencies](#)
- [Learning and Talent Development](#)
- Strategic Succession Planning Definition: <https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/glossary/succession-planning-and-management>
- Talent Management Definition: <https://www.td.org/insights/how-do-you-define-talent-management>
- How to Reduce Bias in Talent Review Meetings: <https://www.chieflearningofficer.com/2021/05/25/how-to-reduce-bias-in-talent-review-meetings/>

Glossary

Abilities: aptitude or competence in skills needed to perform a job task.

Bench: a group of employees who are in the process of developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities for another position.

Bench Strength: the measurable knowledge, skills, and abilities currently possessed by bench members.

Career Ladder: promotional career progression that involves staying within the same job classification series (e.g., Designer 1, Designer 2, Designer 3).

Career Planning: an employee-centered practice of identifying interests or areas for professional development to assist the person with expanding his or her talents and interests.

Demotion: a reassignment to a position with a lower pay range, skill requirement or level of responsibility than the employee's current position. As defined by [Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 123:1-47-01 \(46\)](#), a demotion "means the movement of an employee at the request of the appointing authority or the employee, from one position to a vacant position which is assigned to a different classification and a lower pay range, or lower salary where pay ranges do not exist. For the purposes of this definition, a lower pay range is determined by comparing the step one rates of the relevant pay ranges."

Critical Position: a position that, if left vacant, creates a significant impact within the team, the agency, or the public.

Development: the practice of equipping or preparing an employee (or group) for future roles and responsibilities.

Incumbent: an employee that is currently in the critical position and will help develop potential successors to perform their job prior to the incumbent's exit.

Knowledge: acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study, investigation, or performance of a job task.

Lateral Move: career movement that does not necessarily involve a monetary incentive. As defined by [Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 123:1-47-01 \(46\)](#), a lateral classification change "means the movement of an employee, with the employee's consent, from one classification to another classification that is assigned to the same pay range or to a pay range in which the step one rate is the same as the step one rate as the classification from which the employee moves."

Pre-placement: the act of successors being next in line to fill the incumbent's position when it becomes vacant.

Promotional Move: career movement that involves increased complexity and responsibility and usually comes with a monetary incentive. Ohio's classified civil service promotions may be made "on the basis of merit and conduct and capacity in office" (see [Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 123:1-23](#)).

Replacement Planning: a short-term practice of identifying replacements for individuals in key operating functions or positions.

Skills: the ability to perform a mental or motor activity that contributes to the effective performance of a job task.

Skills Gap: indicates a misalignment or gap between the skills an employer possess and skills required to perform the job well.

Succession Planning: focuses on identifying and developing a pool of leaders and critical talent ready to fill key roles across all organizational levels, closely aligned with long-term organizational goals and objectives.

Training: identified resources for preparing an employee to perform the task required for his or her current role.

Talent Pool: a group of employees who are interested in filling a critical position, but whose knowledge, skills, and abilities need developed prior to moving into the critical position.

References

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