

*Note: Executive Leadership Services considers it a best practice for nonprofit agencies to have in place an emergency succession plan to cover the sudden and unexpected absences of their executive directors. Provided here is a sample plan modeled on one actually adopted by a San Francisco agency. In this model, special emphasis is given to identifying the key leadership functions carried by the executive, identifying the agency managers best qualified to step into the executive role in an emergency, and prescribing the cross-training necessary to prepare the back-up managers to cover the leadership functions. One major side benefit to implementing this plan is a management team with enhanced leadership skills.*

*CompassPoint Executive Leadership Services works with many clients to implement short and long term succession plans ensuring the ongoing success of our clients. If your organization would like help preparing for an executive departure please contact us at [els@compasspoint.org](mailto:els@compasspoint.org) or call (415) 541-9000 x352.*

## **EMERGENCY SUCCESSION PLAN**

**(Agency Name)**

### **Procedure for the Appointment of an Acting Executive Director in the Event of an Unplanned Absence of the Executive Director**

#### **1. Rationale**

In order to ensure the continuous coverage of executive duties critical to the ongoing operations of **(Agency Name)** and its services to clients, the Board of Directors is adopting policies and procedures for the temporary appointment of an Acting Executive Director in the event of an *unplanned and extended absence* of the Executive Director.

While the Board acknowledges that such an absence is highly improbable and certainly undesirable, it also believes that due diligence in exercising its governance functions requires that it have an emergency executive succession plan in place. It is expected that this plan will ensure continuity in external relationships and in staff functioning.

#### **2. Priority functions of the Executive Director position at **(Agency Name)****

The full Executive Director position description is attached.

Among the duties listed in the position description, the following are the key functions of the Executive Director to be covered by an acting director:

- a. Serve as the organization's principal leader, representative, and spokesperson to the greater community

- b. Support the Board of Directors
  - ensure integrity and strength of Board leadership and address issues around clarity of role, governance, bylaws/policies, corporate structure, and membership
  - assist with recruitment and orientation of new Board members
  - prepare Executive reports to Board of Directors and Executive Committee and attend various Committee meetings
- c. Convene and lead the Management Team
- d. Participate in recruitment, interview, selection and evaluation process for directly supervised staff and other key executive level positions
- e. Strategize organizations' short-range and long-range program and project goals, particularly in Organizing and Planning:
  - identify overall resource development goals and fund raising plan
  - establish , maintain and cultivate relations with donors, foundations and other resources to support organizational programs and activities
  - maintain accountability for current year operating budget and for financial performance of portfolio

### 3. Succession plan in event of a **temporary, unplanned absence -- SHORT-TERM**

- a. Definitions
  - A temporary absence is one in which it is expected that the Executive Director will return to his position once the events precipitating the absence are resolved.
  - An unplanned absence is one that arises unexpectedly, in contrast to a planned leave, such as a vacation or a sabbatical.
  - A short-term absence is 3 months or less.
- b. Who may appoint the Acting Executive Director
  - The Board of Directors authorizes the Executive Committee to implement the terms of this emergency plan in the event of the unplanned absence of the Executive Director.
  - In the event of an unplanned absence of the Executive Director, the Deputy Director shall immediately inform the Chair of the Executive Committee of the absence.
  - As soon as is feasible, the Chair shall convene a meeting of the Executive Committee to affirm the procedures prescribed in this plan or to make modifications the Committee deems appropriate.

#### c. Standing appointee to the position of Acting Executive Director

The position description of the Deputy Director specifies that she shall serve as Acting Executive Director in the absence of the Executive Director.

#### d. First and second back-ups for the position of Acting Executive Director

Should the Deputy Director be unable to as Acting Executive Director, the first back-up appointee will be the Program Director. The second back-up appointee will be Chief Financial Officer.

In the event the standing appointee, the Deputy Director, is new to the deputy position and fairly inexperienced with (*Agency Name*), the Executive Committee

may decide to appoint one of the back-up appointees to the acting executive position. The Executive Committee may also consider the option of splitting executive duties among the designated appointees.

e. Cross-training plan for appointees

The Executive Director, with assistance from the Deputy Director, shall develop a plan for training the three potential appointees in each the priority functions of the Executive Director which are listed above (section 2). The training plan will be attached to this document when the plan is completed. The director of human resources shall have the responsibility of handling the logistics of the plan's implementation.

f. Authority and restrictions of the appointee

The person appointed as Acting Executive Director shall have the full authority for decision making and independent action as the regular Executive Director .

g. Compensation

The Acting Executive Director shall receive a temporary salary increase to the entry level salary of the executive director position or to 5% above his/her current salary, whichever is greater.

h. Board committee responsible for oversight and support to the Acting Executive Director

As with an Executive Director, the Executive Committee of the Board will have responsibility for monitoring the work of the Acting Executive Director. The Executive Committee will also be alert to the special support needs that of the executive in this temporary leadership role.

i. Communications plan

As soon as possible after the Acting Executive Director has begun covering an unplanned absence, Board members and the Acting ED shall communicate the temporary leadership structure to the following key supporters external to (*Agency Name*):

- Government contract officers
- Foundation program officers
- Civic leaders
- Major donors

4. Succession plan in event of a **temporary, unplanned absence -- LONG-TERM.**

a. Definition

- A long term absence is one that is expected to last more than 3 months

b. Procedures

- The procedures and conditions to be followed shall be the same as for a short-term absence with one addition:

> The Executive Committee will give immediate consideration, in consultation with the Acting Executive Director, to temporarily back-filling the management position left vacant by the Acting Executive Director. This is in recognition of the fact that, for a term of more than 3 months, it may not be reasonable to expect the Acting Executive Director to carry the duties of both positions. The position description of a temporary manager would focus on covering the priority areas in which the Acting Executive Director needs assistance.

5. Succession plan in event of a **PERMANENT unplanned absence**.

a. Definition

- A permanent absence is one in which it is firmly determined that the Executive Director will not be returning to the position.

b. Procedures

- The procedures and conditions shall be the same as for a long-term temporary absence with one addition:  
>The Board of Directors shall appoint a Transition and Search Committee to plan and carry out a transition to a new permanent executive director.

6. Approvals and maintenance of record

a. Succession plan approval

- This succession plan will be approved by the Executive Committee and forwarded to the full Board of Directors for its vote and approval.

b. Signatories

- This plan shall be signed by the Board President, the Executive Director, the human resources administrator, and the appointees designated in this plan.

c. Maintenance of record

- Copies of this plan shall be maintained by the Board President, the Executive Director, the Deputy Director, the two back-up appointees, the human resources department, and the (*Agency Name*) corporate attorney.

*Revised by (Agency Name) Executive Committee  
date*

*Proposed by Tim Wolfred  
CompassPoint Nonprofit Services  
date*