

## WACC POLICY

# Emergency Leadership Planning

September, 2019

### General

An Emergency Leadership Plan is a sound risk management practice. It is critical to ensuring the viability of an organization in the event of a key manager's unplanned absence.

Best practice is for the Board, in partnership with the executive director (hereafter General Secretary), to see leadership planning as an essential governance responsibility related to the duty to provide for staff leadership.

### Readiness

With the following conditions in place, an organization can expect a smoother transition to new leadership whenever it might occur:

- \* A strategic plan with goals and objectives for the medium term (up to three years).
- \* The Board through its Officers evaluates the General Secretary annually on general performance and achievement of strategic goals.
- \* The Board, based on its annual self-evaluation, is satisfactorily performing its major governance tasks: financial oversight, executive support and oversight, policy development, strategic planning, and relationship and support to the staff.
- \* There is a Deputy General Secretary (DGS) or other recognized deputy in place, who is regularly and fully informed about the issues facing the organization.
- \* The management team:
  - o Has a culture in place in which it is regularly informed and support one another and can reach decisions as a group efficiently and harmoniously;
  - o Shares leadership by having significant input to major decisions;
  - o Can lead the organization in the temporary absence of the General Secretary;
  - o Has authority to make and carry out decisions within their respective areas of responsibility.
- \* A Deputy General Secretary as well as one of the Officers share important internal and external relationships (major donors, funders, community leaders) maintained by the General Secretary.
- \* Human resource procedures are up to date and shared with the Board including procedures for HR advice to the Board should this become necessary.
- \* A financial reserve is in place with a minimum of six months' operating capital.
- \* Financial systems meet industry standards. Financial reports are up to date and provide the data needed by the Board and the management team.
- \* Operational manuals exist for key administrative systems and are easily accessible and up to date.
- \* Program staff have documented their key activities and have identified other staff who can carry out their duties in an emergency.

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- \* A member of staff has been identified who can liaise with the Board, Officers and/or Personnel Committee on a confidential basis should there be any reason why it is inappropriate or impossible for this to be undertaken by the GS or DGS.
- \* Existence of procedures for contracting and evaluating staff members in office and also the policies and procedures related to expenditure of the GS or DGS on work travel when representing the institution.

In this respect, and as a general rule, staff skills should be nurtured with several ends in mind:

- \* Pursuing WACC's mission and service goals as effectively as possible;
- \* Ensuring stability by developing strengths in support of the management team;
- \* Creating the possibility for successors to the management team to emerge from a talent pool.

### **Key steps**

In planning emergency coverage for the General Secretary, the following steps are appropriate:

- \* Identify the critical leadership and management functions of the GS that the Deputy General Secretary (DGS) needs to assume.
- \* Agree terms for a DGS to act in lieu of the GS, the extent and/or limitations of authority, and appropriate compensation.
- \* Agree how the Board will support and supervise the DGS.
- \* Implement a training plan for the DGS that enables him or her to develop their abilities to carry out the GS's key functions.
- \* Draft a communications plan to be implemented in the event of an emergency succession (who is notified and how).
- \* Detail procedures to be followed in the event that an emergency absence becomes a permanent unplanned absence. These procedures according to whether the GS resigns with less than three months' notice and when the GS resigns with more than three months' notice.
  - o In the sudden or unexpected absence of the GS temporarily or permanently, and in consultation with the Personnel Committee, the DGS will assume the role of Acting General Secretary (AGS), subject to the approval of the Board and for an initial period of up to six months.
  - o The Board and its Personnel Committee shall be serviced on a confidential basis by a pre-designated member of staff with access to human resources support and advice as necessary.
  - o Under such circumstances, the AGS shall provide the Board and/or its Personnel Committee with details of major decisions that have significant consequences for the future.

### **Preparing the way**

A critical early step in this process is conducting a "sustainability audit". The audit is a survey of administrative operations and resource relationships. It identifies key points of organizational vulnerability that could seriously inhibit agency functioning with the departure of the incumbent GS.

Another high-risk area is financial oversight, which can often be highly dependent on information informally held by the GS. The GS may also be the lead fundraiser or sole person in the

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organisation who relates to some of its funders and donors. Standardizing systems and broadening relationships with grant-makers to include other staff are crucial strategies.

It might be helpful to identify an external human resources person familiar with non-governmental organisations working in the Canadian context who can advise on relevant issues and considerations.

Finally, the issue of how leadership can be shared throughout the organization to reduce dependency on the GS should be examined. In doing so, it will be necessary to designate clear levels of authority and responsibility.

### **Checklist for immediate action following the declared absence of the GS**

1. Personnel Committee to liaise in confidence with a pre-designated staff member to ascertain the status quo, especially in regard to legal or financial matters affecting the GS. In such matters, the Personnel Committee will act as the appropriate decision-making body.
2. Following review of the situation by the Personnel Committee, the President will contact the DGS with an invitation to fulfil the role of Acting General Secretary (AGS), including the extent and/or limitations of authority. The DGS's job description needs to include the eventuality of temporarily taking on the role of AGS.
3. AGS to review current situation and report to Personnel Committee on ongoing work and any deficits and with a work plan for the following three months.
4. AGS to advise Personnel Committee once a month of ongoing or new concerns as appropriate.