

MANAGERS' VIEWPOINT

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Here at the coalition we've been thinking a lot about organizational transitions, and we've come to realize that we are not the only agency in the anti-sexual violence movement that experiences periodic bouts of reduction and expansion. Over the past 2 years, we've gained many new and dynamic staff members, said goodbye to many beloved staff members, and moved into a new building. WCSAP is evolving and expanding, and we've had the honor of watching and supporting you, our member programs, as you go through many similar transitions.

Although change is necessary, change can also shake the very foundation of your agency. By developing and implementing a succession plan, your agency will pro-actively chart the future, ensure longevity, and plan for unintended consequences. This edition of Managers' Viewpoint will provide you with the how-to's of succession planning, based upon the experiences of veteran leaders in our movement.

It is my hope that you will be inspired to plan for the future of your agency today!

-Kathleen Arledge



ACCREDITATION CAFÉ

Short enough to read over a cup of coffee, this edition of Accreditation Café will address standard **QA2**, agency evaluation and planning. This standard is critical to your strategic planning process, and will also inform the succession plan for your agency.

This edition will provide you with contextual information about the standard, and suggest some ways to provide evidence of compliance for accreditation.

Enjoy!



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Succession Planning: Preparing the Next Generation to Lead the Way!

By Pam Crume and Karen Andrews
Skagit Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services

Three long-time, key administrative staff will be retiring from Skagit Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services in 2009. Pamela Crume, executive director, will be retiring the early part of 2009, Karen Andrews, Associate Director, mid 2009 and Kathy Earnst, Finance Manager, somewhere in-between the two.

We are certain that you will share our happiness for Pam in her retirement after 19 years of service, Karen after 23 years of service and Kathy after 10 years of service. We are proud of the many accomplishments this trio has achieved and marvel at how strong and stable the agency has become under Pam's leadership. Highly regarded in both the private and public sectors, Pam, Karen and Kathy want Skagit DV&SA Services to not only "go on" but they also want the agency to continue to thrive and grow exponentially. They look forward to an exciting future for Skagit DV&SA Services with new leadership.

From our Roots

In 1979 SDV&SAS began with a small group of concerned citizens who knew that domestic violence and sexual assault victims in Skagit County needed specialized services, not only to deal with the trauma they had sustained, but also to negotiate the systems that historically interface with survivors. That small group of citizens knew that institutional victim-blaming and sexism led to

further victimization, and their goal was to create a safe space in Skagit County where victims would not experience those reactions.

Back then it was not popular in Skagit County to look at these issues through a feminist, anti-oppression lens, and early training and mission statements did not reflect that philosophy.

SDV&SAS has in recent years recognized the necessity of working to end oppression in all its forms as an underlying condition contributing to the pandemic incidence rate of domestic violence and sexual assault in American culture.

Those early years brought Pam to the agency as a Vista volunteer, and in the tradition of most grass roots agencies, she moved up through the ranks, went to college, served for a while as Child Welfare and Social Services director for a local Indian tribe, and then returned to Skagit DV&SA Services as Interim Director following a management crisis at the agency. The Board of Directors knew it had a good thing and hired her permanently in 1990. Step by step, the organization has since become a multi-faceted agency with 15 employees providing services to hundreds of families each year. Under Pam's leadership the agency budget has grown from \$120,000 in 1989 to over \$500,000 in 2007.

The years have also brought us back to the philosophical roots of the organization. Like those early leaders, SDV&SAS has in recent years recognized the necessity of working to end oppression in all its forms as an underlying condition



contributing to the pandemic incidence rate of domestic violence and sexual assault in American culture. The current Mission Statement reflects that goal, and an integral part of succession planning will be to ensure the continuance of that Mission. Granted, a new ED needs the freedom and flexibility to develop programs and a structure for operation that s/he believes will contribute to the continued growth of the agency, but some things are non-negotiable.

Thanks to Pam, our innovative staff, and our dedicated Board, SDV&SAS stands in a position of strength and security...ready for the challenges ahead. Consistent with Pam's legacy of organization and discipline, we are carefully planning for our transition. The Board is engaged in seeking an experienced leader who will bring dedication and broad perspective to the job. With input from our staff, funders, and stakeholders throughout the process, we anticipate naming our new Executive Director by July 1, 2008.

**Strategic planning:
Because you have to do it!**

Sooner or later it happens...even in a nonprofit agency, inevitably leadership leaves. Whether it is a dedicated board member, a founding director or a long-time fiscal director, the time will eventually arrive when people leave and new people must be hired to fill the positions. Unlike a larger business or for-profit corporation, nonprofit organizations are often unprepared for transition on a leadership level. Having depended on leaders to wear many hats and hold together a agency on a shoestring budget, trying to find qualified and satisfactory replacements may seem like an insurmountable challenge.

Another important reason to do succession planning is that it directly impacts the effectiveness of the next executive director, since it allows an organization to remain as healthy as possible during a transition and gives a new executive director a clear map of where the organization needs to go. Succession planning is really about ensuring continuity in an organization's functions over time.

Planning can prevent or greatly lessen the many problems that might arise when key personnel leave such as decreased contributions, program cuts, confusion over the direction of the organization, uncertainty, flagging employee morale, and other challenges.

We all know that no one lasts forever, and that no one knows when the time may come, by choice or otherwise, for a key person to leave the organization. In a crisis, who could take over the executive director's job in your organization if necessary? A lot of succession planning is about training staff to be eligible for another position. The ideal is to have a plan where several people would be qualified to step into the ED's position and the same is true with other key positions. It's vital to share the information, rather than have it be held and jealously guarded by one or two people.





The key to successful succession planning is to establish systems that make it possible for the organization to go on, as best as possible, when a key individual leaves.

And that goes for all key staff...the Executive Director, and any other critical positions. Some fundamental steps you can incorporate:

1. **Encourage** and provide opportunities for staff to attend conferences and seminars that emphasize leadership and management skills. Today's non-profit leaders need to develop a myriad of talents in order to fulfill their complex and dynamic positions. An executive director who encourages his or her management team to expand their skills is not only strengthening the organization, but is also sending a strong message to the staff of how valuable they are.
2. **Create** occasions for key staff to interact with the board. For example, department heads could be assigned to some board committees; or, some members of the senior leadership team might be asked to attend select board meetings.
3. **Assign** responsibilities to senior staff that will help them demonstrate their leadership skills. This permits staff to gain confidence and demonstrate their ability to handle complex administrative tasks. Make sure that these opportunities are creative, motivational and even inspirational.
4. **Mentor** staff. Some of the best executive directors have received ter-

rific mentoring from their board of directors, which can be "passed on" to senior staff. The executive director should make time for this responsibility.

The history of the anti-violence movement in Washington State has taught us that agencies like ours go through a potentially catastrophic crisis when a long-term ED leaves. Stable leadership is hard to come by in our movement, and people get very used to that stability and react strongly out of fear when that leadership goes away. Those left behind search for re-stabilization, often without the faintest idea of how to get it back

again. Left to their own devices, well intentioned staff often try to re-establish the agency's foundation based on their perception of how things ought to be. Power struggles ensue, more staff leave, and the agency slowly (or not so slowly!) disintegrates. Having seen that happen on more than one occasion, we

were determined that wouldn't happen here. This led us to embark on the course we have outlined—a plan that will allow us to search for an ED while key management is still in place *and* allow us to train and mentor the new ED through the crisis phase we have just described.

We watched with appreciation the process the retiring ED in Port Townsend implemented with her program, and to some degree have emulated her work. Peggy introduced Cheryl Bozarth to the coalitions, attended conferences with her, helped her through grant cycles and introduced her to the Port Townsend community. Peggy's reputation and credibility helped Cheryl gain entry into community collaborations and networks that might have been more difficult had

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she not had those introductions. It is our goal to replicate that process here in Skagit County. We've been able to build strong, deep relationships with leaders and advocates, while extending services and assistance to thousands of women, children and men. We can help build a bridge for the new ED with those individuals and systems, lending our credibility to the transition process.

As our organization moves through periods of transition, we have to keep in mind that change is good and vital. Even the loss of a director or key employees can create a fertile environment for positive evolution and growth. By keeping a clear sense of our mission and utilizing short-term and long-term planning, we'll be able to stay on track while embracing the energy new leaders will bring to the table.

We look forward to our future with the new perspective and talents that the next Executive Director will bring. As hard as it will be to stand back and not continue to direct the agency, we recognize that to make this work we have to be able to let go and allow those new ideas and perspective to emerge.

This will be possible if we embrace the idea that the transition will give us the opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments, honor our leadership and look ahead to our future - both for ourselves and Skagit DV&SA Services.



Key steps in the transition process:

- Inform the board; succession planning should be a joint effort between key agency leadership and the Board of Directors
- Time-line development; we enlisted the help of our consultant in this step
- Inform staff: Annual Board/Staff Retreat—we presented the timeline, and after discussion retiring staff left the meeting to allow remaining staff time to begin to process feelings about the transition freely and openly.
- Develop a timeline for transitions



Skagit DV/SA Services
Current proposed (flexible) time line:

March '07 ----- Official notification to board regarding Pam, Karen and Kathy retirement

July '07 ----- Staff and Board Retreat

August '07 ----- Bring info to the Board, re: ideas for hiring; plan for succession

September '07 ----- Implement ideas, complete plan and distribute to staff

Dec. '07 ----- Begin hiring process

Jan. – June, '08 Job posting closes, check references, interview, etc. Staff updated on succession plan.

July '08 ----- Hire ED in training, Staff and Board Retreat

Dec. '08 – April '09 Pam may retire as early as 12/31/08; or may continue to work part-time until May '09

May '09 ----- Latest Kathy will retire. May 31, 2009 is the latest Pam will retire

July, '09 ----- New ED in place, introductory period completed; latest Karen will retire, Staff/Board Retreat

The timeline is flexible and is adjusted as necessary. We hope the transition plan will go smoothly but realize we need to develop a back-up plan, which we are in the process of doing, in the event that our timeline objectives are not met. We meet with our staff on a monthly basis to keep them up to date on our progress and to get feedback from them while also letting them share their ideas and/or concerns.





Succession Planning For Coalitions

Christi Hurt, RSP Publications Specialist

Reprinted with permission from the Resource Sharing Project. This article was originally written for sexual assault coalitions, and has been modified for community sexual assault programs. All edits have been approved by the Resource Sharing Project.

The Issue

Planning for and managing executive leadership transitions are challenging tasks for any organization. The tenure of Executive Directors varies widely across the country, both in terms of length and tone of their leadership, but the challenges of moving from one ED to another are more similar than different.

Community sexual assault programs have been very lucky in the movement to end sexual violence. In many communities across the country, sexual assault programs have enjoyed the long tenure of powerful women in leadership positions who have shepherded our programs and our movement as we've grown. In other communities, there have been programs who have not enjoyed this kind of stable leadership. Instead, those organizations grapple with the challenges that changes in leadership bring. In either case, as well as those in between, every sexual assault program will at some point be faced with the need to manage a successful transition from one Executive Director to the next.

This article is intended to give program boards and staff ideas of how to plan for and engineer a successful transition, both in the face of an imminent departure or well in advance of any potential change.

The Challenge

Two things are happening when an organization manages a significant change in leadership. First, the inner workings of the organization need to be continued in a way that sustains the organization in the interim (stability). Second, there needs to be a concerted effort to replace the outgoing leader (the search). Having both goals, stability and the search, in the forefront of the organization is an important balance to strike. Because planning for an executive search is a critical and time consuming task, it serves an organization well to plan for how to maintain stability before a search is necessary. Succession planning is an ongoing process that must be discussed at all levels of the organization on a continuous basis. In fact, the very idea that change will happen and the organization will be ready for it can become an important piece of the sexual assault program's culture.





Emergency succession planning (last minute planning) can certainly be done, but the program will benefit from having conversations about planning and priorities without having a leadership crisis imminently hanging overhead. Advance succession planning can help ensure that there are many potential leaders inside the organization who can help craft or maintain stability during a time of change.

For Community Sexual Assault Programs

Sexual assault programs have distinct challenges in addressing executive transitions. In the anti-sexual violence field broadly, we talk about the crisis nature of our work being a profound barrier to organizational planning. In many ways, this is quite true: rape crisis centers and coalitions are often understaffed, which overburdens existing staff and creates an environment in which they spend most of their time and energy fielding the day-to-day crises of survivor calls, systems demands, and funding fluxes. However, in this setting, it is even more important that we make time to plan strategically for both the development of the organization and inevitable leadership changes, as we have fewer resources at our fingertips on a day-to-day basis and will not necessarily be able to marshal our resources in a true emergency to make a workable plan.

Because sexual assault programs are responsible for both systems advocacy work and local community support (plus potentially numerous other activities) there are many necessary angles of succession planning. It's imperative that the board of directors and executive leadership plan for change on many levels

and grow an organization that's flexible and nimble along the way.

Some of the challenges that face sexual assault programs include (but are certainly not limited to):

- supporting complicated systems work (including relationship building and public policy efforts);
- managing a board of directors, often who represent local stakeholders;
- supporting the various needs of the community; and
- managing a staff with a high turnover rate (potentially).

Another issue that, though not unique to sexual assault programs, should be given some attention is the amount of emotion either discussion or management of a transition can generate. For many staff, board members, and community members, the personal relationships that develop during the course of one's work in the anti-sexual violence field are incredibly important. Discussing or planning transitions may bring up issues of grief and loss for individuals, and those emotions can be overwhelming. There are many resources that can be helpful to organizations in this arena, not the least of which are Employee Assistance Programs who can usually provide some level of group or individual processing/counseling sessions.

What we can do now:

Preparing for your transition

It's very easy to avoid talking about eventual staff transitions, for fear of rocking the boat or starting conversations about one's own departure.



However, the easiest time to talk about staff transitions is when they are not currently happening. Therefore, it serves an organization well to create an atmosphere that supports ongoing conversations about these inevitable, eventual changes.

There are many opportunities to discuss succession planning with the organization's board of directors and staff, including:

- * in annual personnel evaluation processes,
- * through annual work planning conversations,
- * in board strategic planning or visioning discussions,
- * at regular board meetings, and
- * at regular staff meetings.

The board of directors is responsible for setting the overall vision and goals of the agency. As the board works to fulfill this role, it can help prepare the organization for changes by clearly identifying its priorities. If the organization's leadership is clear about where it wants to be in the future, then those goals (if shared throughout the organization) will help in identifying the skills that would be needed in any future leader.

The board is also responsible for making sure that the organization is in compliance with relevant laws, accounting procedures, and other accountability measures. In completing this part of its job, a member of the board (likely the secretary

or chairperson) should know where the organization's key records are (501(c)3 letter, articles of incorporation, relevant filings with Secretary of State's office, etc) and should have copies of such documents in safe-keeping somewhere off-site.

At regular board meetings, board members should make a habit of asking key questions about how staff are creating systems to support their work in the future, how redundancies are being developed so that current information is not lost, and how staff is being cross-trained and supported so that no one person has information that others don't. The goal is to ensure that the organization develops processes and systems so that work can continue without much interruption if any key staff person leaves. The board of directors can make it known that one of their governance priorities is to build a strong organization that can prepare and plan for change, and therefore set expectations that staff will create their systems accordingly.

Annual evaluation and planning systems are important to have in place for all staff positions. Though it's important to give feedback consistently throughout the year, the annual evaluation and work planning processes can be useful opportunities to take a step back and complete a broader assessment of the past year's successes and challenges, as well as a time to take stock of where each position is heading for the next year or more.



Through the annual evaluation process, staff should discuss:

- how they're documenting their processes for posterity (so future staff don't have to recreate the wheel);
- with whom they have key relationships;
- where the growth areas in the position are (and what qualifications they or their successor will need to accomplish new goals);
- what their annual workflow calendar is and where it is documented;
- how they are developing redundancies in their work systems so if they are suddenly unavailable work can continue;
- how the job description reflects the job, and how to make changes to the job description when appropriate.

In addition to making sure these key areas are addressed, staff can also attend to details that can help ensure that any unplanned transitions are smooth. These details include:

- who has copies of keys to agency files and where are they kept?
- who maintains a master list of passwords or other systems to ensure that computer files can be accessed?
- who has the authority to sign checks and approve expenses if the ED is unavailable?
- is there a general agency operations manual? Is one needed?

All of these conversations take time, and it will be time well spent in advance of a leadership crisis. In fact, organizations can ease into talk of succession planning by discussing what they would do in case of emergency and develop a mini-succession plan based on a hypothetical leadership crisis (the journal *Advancing Philanthropy* suggests the scenario of an Executive Director who wins the lottery and runs away to Tahiti, as opposed to a morbid hypothetical). After developing a short "in case of emergency" plan, the board and staff may feel more prepared to dig deeper and develop a multi-layered and broader succession plan.

In case of emergency

Though advance planning for transitions is most useful, organizations don't always have that opportunity. Entering a transition period without a previously developed plan doesn't mean that the organization has to forego any benefit planning could have provided. In fact, sometimes under the pressure of an urgent transition, organizations can craft thoughtful triage plans.

When a board of directors is faced with a sudden transition, they have a number of issues to tend to and questions to answer. The list of questions and issues can become overwhelming quickly, so it may be helpful to identify the absolute priority areas before moving forward.

- Who will approve expenses and sign checks?
- Who will ensure compliance with contracts and grants?
- Who will ensure the organization is in good financial health? (ensure checks and balances are maintained, oversee audit, etc)



- Who will supervise personnel?
- Is there anything about this transition that will threaten the organization's funding or future work? How can we address that?
- Who will communicate with our membership and key constituents about this transition? What are our talking points?
- Who is responsible for media contacts or public appearances during the transition?
- Who from the board will supervise the staff leadership during the transition?

A word about the money!

No organization wants to face the mystery of where the organization's money is kept, how many accounts it has, or any question of who has signing authority on those accounts. It is imperative for every organization to identify at the board and executive staff level where every bank account is, what the account numbers are, and who is authorized to access these funds. Similarly, both board and staff leadership should know where the organization's lines of credit are, how much they are for, and who is authorized to change or access them.

An annual review and assessment of finances is a critical function of the finance committee or other designated board representative. Great care should be taken to ensure that only current employees and board members have access to funds and credit and it should never be a mystery as to where the organization's money is held.

After these critical areas are addressed, the board and staff of the organization can work together to maintain (or achieve stability) during an abrupt transition and then move forward to discussing how to complete a search process.

Conclusion

Regardless of the sexual assault program's size, each organization can immediately begin to address the gaps that inevitably will arise during a time of transition. Cross training, complete information reporting, and solid documentation processes can all help alleviate the pain of these times of change. Issues ranging from simple internal office issues (where is the extra set of keys? How do I contact the landlord?) to major policy issues (how did we come up with our position statement on sex offender management?) can render an organization temporarily ineffective if the right information isn't shared across multiple levels.

All organizations and businesses need to plan for changes in leadership. Sexual assault programs face additional challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that advocacy efforts can continue in times of significant personnel changes. The board of directors and staff can prepare for these changes well in advance and should prioritize having conversations about inevitable changes (even if those changes are years away).





Checklist for executive transition planning (Advance Planning)

Complete?	What?	Who?
	Identify core values, vision, and goals	Board
	Update & maintain job description for ED	Board
	Support development of sustainable internal systems & processes	Board
	Provide support and governance to ensure organizational mission and values are upheld.	Board
	Develop organizational calendar of key activities	ED/Staff
	Cross-staff core organizational functions	Staff
	Share information regarding key files/ documents	ED/Board & Staff
	Develop leadership of staff and membership	ED/Staff
	Develop constituent relationships across the organization (not based on individual personalities)	Board & Staff
	Create flexible succession plan (for Executive Director, key staff positions, and key board positions) and share it with staff and board	Board & Staff
	Update & maintain job descriptions for staff	ED/Staff
	Create redundant systems to support key staff work	ED/Staff
	Document internal agency processes/create operations manual(s)	ED/Staff



Checklist for Succession Planning (Triage)

Critical Questions	Answers & Notes
Where is our organization's money? Do we have lines of credit? Who is authorized on all of these accounts?	
Who will approve expenses and sign checks?	
Who will ensure compliance with contracts and grants?	
Who will ensure the organization is in good financial health? (ensure checks and balances are maintained, oversee audit, etc)	
Who will supervise personnel?	
Is there anything about this transition that will threaten the organization's funding or future work? How can we address that?	
Who will communicate with our membership and key constituents about this transition? What are our talking points?	
Who is responsible for media contacts or public appearances during the transition?	
Who from the board will supervise the staff leadership during the transition?	
If staff have taken on additional responsibilities, how are they being compensated?	



ACCREDITATION CAFÉ

QA2

The agency/program uses its principles, values, and mission in its evaluation, in planning, and in formulating strategies that address both immediate and long-term issues that face the agency/program. Findings are shared at all levels of the organization.

This accreditation standard requires the program to provide the following evidence of compliance:

- 1. A copy of written reports, meeting minutes, or notes that resulted from the most recent planning process.**
- 2. A description of the agency's use of the results of its planning and evaluation processes throughout the organization (such as minutes from retreats, board meetings, regularly scheduled staff meetings).**

To meet this standard, CSAPs must complete a periodic strategic planning process. Accreditation does not state how frequently this process must occur, but many sources recommend that an agency engage in some long-range planning every three years.

CSAPs must provide evidence of a strategic planning process. Such evidence could include:

- written reports of the planning process
- minutes
- notes developed in the process

Programs need to describe (in writing) how they use the results of this planning and evaluation process throughout the organization.

Questions to ask include:



- What has been implemented throughout the organization?
- Was everyone informed of the process and its results?

Accreditation questions?

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WCSAP is a membership agency comprised of individuals and organizations dedicated to ending sexual assault in their communities. WCSAP's mission is to unite agencies engaged in the elimination of sexual violence through education, advocacy, victim services, and social change.

The Mangers' Viewpoint is a publication of the Organizational Services Department, which exists to provide non-profit management and organizational development technical assistance to WCSAP member programs, other allied organizations, and statewide sexual assault coalitions across the nation.

