

# Considerations for Presidential Succession Planning

## A Blueprint for Navigating Higher Education's Leadership Transitions

**Context:** Over 20% of higher ed executives stepped down between 2022-2024, often without a succession plan in place. Such planning must be an ongoing practice, not a last-minute scramble.



### 1. Name the Reality & Normalize the Conversation

The board should view presidential departures as planned **relays**, not as ruptures. It should encourage the president and VPs to discuss succession openly. This frames succession planning as a sign of **institutional continuity**, not an impending personal exit.



### 2. Build Strong Benches, Not Single Successors

Succession is about building **systems** and cultivating leaders at every level. Cross-train, mentor, and delegate meaningful work to emerging "institutional thinkers." Construct systems that preserve and make available **collective wisdom**.



### 3. Routinize & Reimagine Board Planning

Boards must make succession planning a **frequently addressed topic**, not an agenda item on an emergency meeting. A board should look **beyond the provost/CFO** and consider external leaders (nonprofit executives, partner institutions) for both interim and permanent roles.



### 4. Plan for an Interim Transition

Chart two complementary plans: a long-term **succession plan** and an **interim plan** for abrupt changes. The interim plan must clarify short-term authority, decision-making, and communication steps to ensure stability.



### 5. Model Presidential Responsibility

The sitting president must model transition foresight by **planning for their own succession**. The incumbent facilitates such planning by **sharing information as broadly as feasible**, delegating meaningful tasks to others, and empowering the cabinet to help set institutional priorities.



### 6. Move Forward Amid Change

Transitions test an institution's ability to maintain discipline (to document, delegate, and plan). Embedding succession into everyday practice ensures the institution maintains **momentum, memory, and morale** during change.