Planning a Leadership Transition

Bonner Curriculum

Overview: This training is designed to guide participants in organizing their transition out of a leadership position in a program. It aims to assist a student leader in determining the important information that should be passed on to the next leader. It also provides suggested methods to convey that information including the guidelines for developing a concrete transition binder that can serve as a reference for incoming leaders.

Category: Transitional leadership; project management; reflection skills

Level: Student Leaders who are either graduating or moving on to a different program; this can also be used within community organization by transitioning staff, with modifications.

Type: Structured activity suitable for workshop (e.g. retreat or training)

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- To assist student leaders or outgoing staff in the often-daunting task of transitions, making it easier for them to prepare a good transition package for the incoming leader/staff member.
- To allow for student leaders or staff to reflect on their experience as a leader and manager, and provide that experience with meaningful closure.
- To provide an opportunity for student leaders or staff to share their reflections with other outgoing and incoming members in a productive and useful manner, strengthening outcomes of leadership transitions for all involved.
- To provide structure to create the basics of the transition binder that will serve as a concise, readable, and well-organized reference for incoming leaders and beyond.

Materials:

- Pens
- Large flip chart pre-labeled with brainstorm headers and markers
- Copies of the warm-up sheet, the brainstorm worksheet and the binder checklist for all participants
- Binder materials for distribution to all participants; dividers and 2" binders.

How to Prepare:

This training will guide you through a brainstorming and sharing session that allows out-going leaders to self-reflect on their previous leadership experiences to better prepare their replacements for the upcoming transition. It will close with the preliminary creation of a transition binder for the students to flesh out afterwards, and review and provide to their incoming replacement.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

In this guide, you will find steps for taking a group of participants through brainstorming and sharing activity that allows them to self-reflect and discuss the leadership transition and what type of material they should share with their replacements.

The outline has the following parts:

1) Warm-up	suggested time 5-10 minutes
2) Introduction	suggested time 10-15 minutes
3) Brainstorm Challenge: Top Threes	suggested time 30 minutes
4) Debrief of Top Threes	suggested time 10 minutes
5) Creation of Binder	suggested time 45-50 minutes
6) Closing	suggested time 15 minutes

Part 1) Warm-up

Suggested time: 5-10 minutes

This warm-up is designed to get student leaders' creative, insightful and reflective juices flowing. It is a brief exercise that should provide participants with an understanding of the ultimate goal of the workshop, the keys to a productive and smooth leadership transition and well-informed incoming leaders. Distribute the warm-up sheets and make sure all participants have something to write with. You could distribute these sheets as participants arrive, or all at once. Ask the participants to take a moment to reflect on their transition into their current leadership position at either the start of the last term/year/etc. Explain that the warm-up consists of a series of statements to which they will respond yes or no. This should only take a few minutes.

The statements are:

- *I met with my predecessor and was able to ask questions of them prior to taking over their leadership position.*
- *I was provided with all the contact information organization members and other affiliates prior to my transition into my current leadership position.*
- *I was introduced to key members of the faculty, administration and community prior to my transition into my current leadership position.*
- *I was adequately informed of the key duties in my position prior to my transition into my current leadership position.*
- *I feel I was well prepared for my transition into my current leadership position.*

Part 2) Debriefing of Warm-up and Introduction to Transitional Leadership and Leadership Transitions

Suggested time: 10-15 minutes

It is good to engage the leaders in your training as much as possible to ensure that they don't get bored or distracted. There are simple ways to include them without distracting from your focus. For instance: ask all those who were able to answer yes to all of the statements to raise their hands, then ask those who had answered no to even just one statement to raise there hands. Then move on to the explanations and introduction.

Explain to the leaders that the warm-up was designed to remind them what it was like to be an incoming leader. They should think of this warm-up as a ruler by which to measure their own efforts in the upcoming months/weeks and tool to help design their own transition goals. Every "no" they answered should become a yes for their future successors, insuring that the upcoming transition is a well-informed and positive one for all involved. Even if they were able to respond affirmatively to all statements, there is always room for improvement, because these statements are generalized, and leadership transitions are not.

Lead into presenting the key topic. For example: use a flip chart with this key question and definition:

> *NOW, what exactly is a leadership transition?*
>
> *A leadership transition refers to the process by which one leader in an organization is replaced by another, along with the breadth of knowledge and information necessary to be successful in that position.*

Leadership transitions take place whether or not a student leader is ready for it, either as their term comes to an end or as graduation draws near. Outgoing leaders may have the tendency to simply pack up and go, leaving a box of files and a confused new leader in their wake. These outgoing leaders fail to realize that their actions continue to reflect on their integrity and reputation, and that their personal impact on the organization stays long after they move on.

There are basically four major steps in a leadership transition:

1) Selection of the incoming leader.
2) The identification and organization of all the information a new leader may need about the organization and their position.
3) The transmission of that necessary information to the incoming leader in a concise and readable form.
4) The replacement of the outgoing leader with the incoming leader.

The process of selecting a leader could be the subject of an entire other training, and for some organizations be instilled in the organization procedure or for the coordinators to decide. Identifying and transmitting information to incoming leaders is the task of the outgoing leaders. This training is focused on those two middle steps.

It is important for students to remember that a smooth transition can serve as a way of passing on their own personal vision for the organization, in a sense leaving a legacy for those incoming leaders to continue to fulfill. A leadership transition is not simply the replacement of one able body with another, but more importantly, the transfer of the organizational mission and vision from leader to leader, and the assurance that the tools necessary for that mission and vision are transferred as well. The key to a smooth leadership transition is *transitional leadership*, which calls upon current leaders to focus on the preparation of their replacements by reflecting on their own tenure as organizational leaders. Second, they need to organize and explain their key information in a concise method, ideally through the development of an "Organization Binder" (can rename as needed).

Part 3) Brainstorm Challenge: Top Threes

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Prior to the beginning of the training, place labeled flip-chart papers around the room. The labels on these flip-charts should be:

- My Top Three Toughest Challenges as a Leader were:
- My Three Best Practices as a leader in this organization are:
- The Three Most Important Documents relating to my work in this organization are:
- The names and positions of Three Key People on Campus and what they get done are:
- The Three Best Ways to Recruit Volunteers are:
- The Three Key Yearly Activities in my organization (and my role in making each happen) are:
- The Three Key Press contacts for my organization are:
- Three Community Contacts that we have are:
- If I were to do this year over again, I would Do These Three Things Differently

Depending on the total number of participants, divide them up into nine even groups—one for every chart. Assign each group to a chart and explain to the participants that they will be rapidly brainstorming on these charts moving in a clockwise circle around the room until all participants have brainstormed on all nine charts. Instruct the participants that this is a reflective exercise, but in the spirit of timeliness, they will have only about three minutes per chart. This training is designed to get the ball rolling in leadership transitions. This brainstorming process is not the limit of all thought-process involved. It is designed to be a forum for thought and discussion without dragging on. If all participants manage to go through the chart in less time then have them move on to the next, and remind those individuals who finish their chart early should begin to think about the next chart. Challenge students to avoid writing the same idea as their peers, and to be as specific as possible. Simply writing "fliers" under the recruitment topic is too generic. Students should indicate what types of fliers with what type of material included.

Part 4) Debrief of Top Threes Brainstorming

Suggested time: 10-15 minutes

Following completion of the brainstorm, gather the participants into a circle. Explain that the purpose of this exercise was to generate input on these subjects, which may be useful in planning and preparing their material for transition. Hopefully the brainstorm jogged their memory as they read what other students had noted before them. Allow students to take a couple of minutes to look the charts over again just to refresh their knowledge of what both they and their peers indicated in response.

Part 5) Initial binder formation using in-depth reflections

Suggested time: 60 minutes

Inform students that the heart of the transition lies in their thoughtful contribution of information to their replacement. Now you will have them look at a couple of the above brainstorm topic in a more in-depth manner. Binder materials should be distributed by this time.

Binders should contain the transition binder-indexing guide, four dividers, and triple-hole-punched copies of the "Toughest Challenges" worksheet, the "Key Personnel" worksheet, and the "Recruitment" worksheet. The key sections of the binder index are:

- People
- Documentation and Methodology
- Key Initiatives and Activities
- Personal Notes and Observations

Your primary objective for this final part of this workshop is to guide students through more thorough personal reflection and to help these students classify these reflections into the binder. This head start on production of the binder allows students to leave the training more willing to complete the somewhat daunting task of creating a transition binder by giving them the tools of knowledge and structure for its completion.

A) Toughest Challenges

Have the students pull out the "Toughest Challenges" worksheet. Introduce the next five to ten minutes as an opportunity for them to more completely reflect on this subject and to break it down into smaller ideas by having them classify the challenges as personal, group/organization based and campus based.
After students spend five minutes or so completing these sheets, point out the "What's Next?" category. Ask for a volunteer who might explain why they feel that their toughest personal challenge could be related to their own personal leadership style, and why having a conversation about leadership style might be important. Point out that the knowledge simply of the challenges past leaders have met will not necessarily help the incoming leaders to avoid these same challenges in the future. In addition to the information about these challenges, discussions about leadership style, group/organization expectations and campus infrastructure are also important so the incoming leader can understand fully all of the elements that relate to their position and their success in that position. Have the students file this sheet in the Personal Notes and Observations section of their binder and move on to the next sheet.

B) Key Campus Personnel

Have the students pull out the "Key Campus Personnel" worksheet. Have them spend another five or so minutes filling out the sheet. Charge them to complete the sheet as much as possible. Also, remind them that these persons needn't be administrators or faculty, but could also include staff, or even other students with titled positions.

Again after completion of the worksheet, have students note the "What's Next?" category. Point out the idea of both introducing the student and taking a walking tour of key campus offices as a good way of insuring that the student not only has a list of who to contact, but where to find that person.

C) Recruitment Tools and Techniques

Fliers are often the non-specific contribution to the incoming leader's knowledge of recruitment for the organization from the outgoing leader. Fliers are easily manufactured but don't often guarantee successful recruitment. In this worksheet, students will better detail their recruitment campaigns, which may have incorporated not just fliers on campus billboards, but also door-to-door flier distribution, tabling in cafeterias or student unions, newspaper ads, theatre demos, phone-calls, letters, etc.

Give the students about 10 minutes to fill out the methodology and documentation columns of the recruitment worksheet. Tell them to attempt to list completely the methods of recruitment used by the organization in the past year, or at least all those they headed. There is an "included?" category in the documentation category. Explain to students that they should check this column only after they have added that document to the binder.

After the ten minutes, challenge students to take a look at the "What next?" column. Unlike the previous pages there is nothing listed in this column. It is up to them to include the next steps. The "What Next?" steps should be different from previous ideas, and should not include providing the copies of fliers, ads, etc, as that is part of the documentation. One idea of the type of information that could be included is a personal note on the effectiveness of the recruitment method, and what may have improved it. Another idea of the type of information students should list here is the key personnel linked to this particular recruitment method.

For example:

> If tabling in the opportunities fair for new students in the first month of school is the recruitment method, and the documentation might include the materials like a general information flier for 100 persons, or notebook for student contact info, etc., the "What's Next?" column should include the person (administrative or staff probably, like the Dean of Freshmen's assistant) who is responsible for the overall opportunities fair.

Give students another five minutes or so to complete this "What's NEXT?" column. When all have completed the worksheet, have them file this under the Documentation Column.

Part 6) Closing

Suggested time: 10-15 minutes

Before closing, have the students look over the binder index and the transition checklist. Both the index and checklist can serve as guides for the type of information the students should continue to add to the binder and a check system for each time a document is added. Charge students to continue to work on the binder after they leave, perhaps to add even the contact lists and fliers as soon as they return to their organization's office. It is also recommended that you provide students with a deadline for the binder's completion whereby you can look it over and students can discuss any difficulties or questions they might have (this is more applicable to trainers who are also supervisors of the students).

In closing, reiterate the importance of a smooth leadership transition and the outgoing leader's critical roll in the process. Remind the students that the outcome of the transition is entirely up to them, but that this training was designed to give them the tools and ideas to generate all the necessary information and how to organize it in the most concise and effective manner. Ask students if they feel this training was helpful and what they suggest should be added in the future. Evaluation is critical, as trainings are more effective if they are catered to their participants.

Warm Up

I met with my predecessor and was able to ask questions of them prior to taking over their leadership position.

__Yes __No

I was provided with all the contact information organization members and other affiliates prior to my transition into my current leadership position.

__Yes __No

I was introduced to key members of the faculty, administration and community prior to my transition into my current leadership position.

__Yes __No

I was adequately informed of the key duties in my position prior to my transition into my current leadership position.

__Yes __No

I feel I was well prepared for my transition into my current leadership position.

__Yes __No

NOTES:

Transition Binder
Sample Contents

People

- Organization Membership List (with contact info)
- Campus Contacts
  - Other organizations
  - Administrative
- Community Liaisons
- Funders
- Press

Documentation and Methodology

- Organization constitution
- Recruitment fliers and methods
- Training materials
- Advertisements and previous press
- Grants and other funding
- Miscellaneous forms

Key Activities and Initiatives

Personal Notes and Observations

- What worked
- What didn't work
- Challenges

TOUGHEST CHALLENGES

My Top Three Toughest Challenges as a Leader were:

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	What's NEXT?
PERSONAL		• Make sure you have a conversation with your incoming leader about leadership style
GROUP/ ORGANIZATION		• Make sure you have a conversation with your incoming leader about organizational expectations
CAMPUS-BASED		• Make sure you have a conversation with your incoming leader about campus infrastructure

KEY CAMPUS PERSONNEL

The names and positions of Five Key People on Campus and what they get done are:

NAME, POSITION	CONTACT INFO	WHAT THEY DO	WHAT'S NEXT?
			• Make sure you introduce this person to your replacement. • take a walk with your replacement around campus be sure to identify the locations of key administrative and staff offices. • fill in contact information for these persons later if you don't know it already.

RECRUITMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

METHODOLOGY		DOCUMENTATION		What's NEXT?
Recruitment method	Description	Paperwork/ fliers	Included?	Key contacts for success

Checklist for Transitioning Leaders

Utilize this checklist as a guideline for developing the transition binder. Mark off information only after it is gathered and organized. Keep the checklist following the index at the opening of the binder.

	Names and contact information for community contacts/partners/agency representatives
	Name and contact information of service participants (For example, students' names and mailboxes/emails and volunteer status. If you use a listserve, in addition to the suggest contact information, be sure to provide an explanation of how to use the list serve)
	Names and contact information of key campus personnel including deans, provosts, administrative assistants, housing and rooming authority, etc. with personal notes of interest. Example: "The Dean of Students Assistant, Jane Do-gooder is responsible for all space requests so be sure to introduce yourself and be especially nice to her!"
	Original copies of any forms, schedule sheets or training materials/handouts you may use with your volunteers (list below) ____ ____ ____ ________________________________
	Original copies of any flyers, advertisements, handbills, or other recruitment tools (list below) ____ ____ ____ ________________________________
	Notes on past history of your program—including any press you may have received from campus or local newspapers
	Personal notes and observations from the past year indicating what worked well and what was problematic throughout the course of the year