



Succession becomes an exciting future

Nancy Kieling, President
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The literature on nonprofit CEO change is full of stories about boards exhausted by the search. They consider their work done when a new person is named to succeed a long-serving chief executive. "Here are the keys. Good luck!" they say, leaving the new hire to figure it out by themselves. Failure often follows.

The Community Foundation has worked hard this year on each step of transition aware of the pitfalls. I am glad to say that our board is now very engaged in this next phase. For the remainder of my time here they - and I - are working with Jeff Vega as he gets his feet wet before formally taking over in the New Year.

In June I shared our plans with you, when the process was just getting started. Now that the Board has hired Jeff Vega to take the reins on January 5, we are committed to an intensive hand-off from me to Jeff. Our focus is on sharing information and immersing him in our culture to assure a smooth transition.

Helping the New CEO

What does that look like, you might ask? We are mindful of creating a welcoming place for our new leader, and orienting him well. So we are inviting Jeff to join us at key meetings to introduce him to people. Jeff and I are spending time together to share information that is hard to transmit otherwise, like a sense of the history and culture of the organization. He is reading through a fat binder of governance documents, policies, grant guidelines, financials, research and evaluations.

Soon Jeff will meet with the staff to get to know them and to hear from them about their ideas for the future. And Jeff will work with our board leadership to build a partnership and articulate together plans for his early months that are clear and agreed upon by all concerned.

Engaging the Board

As the process has unfolded over the last ten months, led by the search and transition team, the organization has identified what the future might look like, engaged a first-rate search firm to provide assistance and discipline, sought out and reviewed a wide range of good candidates, narrowed the pool down to a few, intensively interviewed a small number, and made the final big decision.

But rather than being a time for the board to go home and rest – which they richly deserve after a year of very hard work – they are stepping up to ensure that the new CEO has all the supports and help he needs to move into his new role successfully.

Role of the Retiring CEO

Through the months I have remained aware of but outside the search process, which has allowed me to keep focused on my work and to not exert influence on a future of which I will not be a part.

I will finish up on December 31, so when Jeff comes to work on January 5th he will have an unencumbered path forward. I will be available to consult with Jeff if he asks me. My final act of transition will be to make sure that I don't cast a shadow. It is as important for me to let go as it is for Jeff, the staff, and the board to take hold in new ways. My departure and Jeff's arrival are inextricably linked, and done well they will help both of us and the Community Foundation to move into a bright 2015.

As I have said often, I hope the community that has built this organization will rally around Jeff Vega with the same passion, support, friendship and trust that you have given me. He and the Community Foundation need and deserve your best.

Transition Resources

If transition is in your future, or the future of an organization you hold dear, here are some excellent resources from which we have learned over the past year:

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation series on executive transition, free on the Foundation's web site: search for "Executive Transition Monograph Series" at www.aecf.org
- Transition Guides at <http://www.transitionguides.com/publications> which includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation monographs and other helpful publications
- CompassPoint Nonprofit Services at <http://www.compasspoint.org/et> with helpful templates for succession planning
- Support Center/Partnership in Philanthropy at <http://supportcenteronline.org/executive-search/succession-planning> Planning, interim leadership, and search
- The Bridgespan Group: <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Management-Tools-Trends/Succession-Planning.aspx#.VGzTgWfp8qI> Leadership development and succession planning resources
- Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City has a terrific free guide on its web site at <http://www.kc.frb.org/publicat/community/Nonprofit-Executive-Succession-Planning-Toolkit.pdf>

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Nancy Kieling will retire December 31, 2014 after 20 years at the helm of the Princeton Area Community Foundation. Under her leadership the Community Foundation has grown from \$300,000 to over \$105 million in assets and granted over \$59 million. She has guided the Community Foundation's grantmaking, scholarship, and philanthropic education initiatives and partnered with many private and corporate foundations. The Community Foundation works to strengthen the ability of the region's nonprofits to do their best work, and to educate and encourage its generous residents.