



MANY Discussion Guides for
Museum Staffs, Directors and Boards of Trustees



Around the Water Cooler: How Can Our Institution Anticipate and Address Future Leadership Transitions?

Dear Readers:

Too often museums and their staffs find themselves mired in the day-to-day necessities of making their organizations run. Often there is too little time for talk about how museums can anticipate and meet future challenges, but it is especially true when thinking about staff and board leadership transitions. Our hope is that reading “Who’s Next?” will prompt healthy discussions in your workplace and among your peers that can lead to shared understandings of transition and its impact.

“Who’s Next?” asks basic questions about the anticipated change in leadership when the baby boomer generation retires. In the broadest terms, it focuses on how New York’s museums will weather a changing of the guard. But this statewide shift will be made up of a multitude of individual transitions, bringing change to staffs and staff leadership, as well as boards of trustees.



This discussion guide suggests some ways to talk about transition either within your organization or with a sister organization. We’ve concentrated on the question of personnel transitions, but these questions can be modified to help discuss many types of institutional change.

HOLDING A CONVERSATION FOR A STAFF OF AN INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATION

Moderator: Executive director, department head, team leader or outside facilitator.

Format: A staff or department meeting or a retreat.

Read: “Who’s Next?” and any additional articles from the white paper’s bibliography.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

- **In the last five years, what types of transitions has your organization encountered?**
- **Of them, which would you describe as successful transitions? What factors made them successful?**
- **Of them, which were transitions that did not go well? What factors led to the outcome?**
- **What strengths does your organization possess that can help with transitions?**
- **What weaknesses does your organization possess that impede healthy transitions?**
- **How can you use your organizational strengths and minimize your organizational weaknesses to create or replicate positive leadership change? What needs to be in place to anticipate and respond to changes in leadership?**
- **What preparation does your department/division need in order to go through a proposed transition?**
- **How can you gauge future leadership needs of your organization?**
- **How do you communicate staff leadership needs to your board of trustees?**

FOR BOARDS OF TRUSTEES:

Possible moderator: Board president or any board member interested in this topic and able to facilitate an open discussion, or an outside facilitator.

Format: Part of a regularly scheduled meeting (we recommend at least a one hour minimum) or a retreat.

Read: “Who’s Next?” and any additional articles from the attached bibliography.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

- **How has your organization weathered transitions in the past?**
- **What issues or concerns do you have about these previous outcomes?**
- **How can you replicate the positive factors institutionwide to be able to anticipate and respond to leadership change?**
- **What is unique about your organization?**
- **How will those unique characteristics help or hinder a transition?**
- **What impact will the current board/director relationship have on the organization’s future?**
- **What preparation does the board need to lead the organization through transition?**
- **How can you gauge future leadership needs of your organization?**
- **How do you involve the staff in discussing future leadership needs of your organization?**
- **What is the role of the CEO/director in transition planning?**
- **How would you rate your organization’s interest in paying for transition services?**

TIPS FOR A DISCUSSION FACILITATOR/MODERATOR

The following tips were taken from *The Nonprofit Quarterly* (Winter 2002)

- 1. Introduce yourselves.** It's helpful to begin the discussion by making sure that everyone in the group has been introduced.
- 2. Provide an opening question.** As part of the introductions (even among people who know each other), use one opening question so everyone gets a chance to talk—before getting into the topic of the discussion.

Some sample opening questions are:

- What is one hope that you have for this discussion?**
- What inspires your work with this organization?**
- What is something you would like us to know about you?**
- What new or good thing has happened in your work or your organization since we last met?**

- 3. After posing a question, give people time to reflect.** Some people are ready to jump right into any discussion—on any topic. Others prefer time to think about their responses before entering a conversation. After posing a question, tell the group that you are going to pause first to give everyone a chance to think. This also gives participants a chance to collect their own thoughts on the topic, rather than just responding to the person who spoke before them.
- 4. Give a time frame for responses.** Particularly if you want to hear a variety of responses or experiences, you might choose to give each participant a time limit. This also avoids the tendency for a few people to dominate the discussion.
- 5. Provide a structure that allows participants to focus on speaking and listening.** You may want to have people go around the circle to speak in turn. This minimizes anxiety about when to speak. If you use this structure, allow everyone the option to pass. Or you may decide people should enter the conversation when they want to contribute a thought or respond to the question. Participants should discuss and agree on a preferred structure.
- 6. Take time to reflect upon your response to the questions.** Reserve time toward the end of your discussion to ask:
 - What have you learned from this discussion? or
 - What new insights do you have as a result of this discussion?
- 7. Take time to determine some implications for practice.** After you have reflected on what you have learned, you might want to ask:
 - What are some implications for your practice as a board, executive director, department head, staff member, etc.?
 - What will you do differently as a result of this conversation?

FEEDBACK

Please let us know how you used this discussion guide. You may fax or send it to us. Addresses and numbers are listed below.

NAME: _____

TITLE: _____

ORGANIZATION: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

Are you a MANY member? Yes ___ No ___

Tell us how you used the discussion guide. Who used it?

Did participants read anything beforehand? If so, what?

Was the guide helpful?

What would you change?

Will you use it again? Will you recommend it to others?

Use additional pages as needed.

RETURN TO:

Museum Association of New York, 265 River Street, Troy, NY 12180

Fax: 518.273.3416