Preparing for the Inevitable:

**A Succession Readiness Checklist**

*When the following conditions are in place, an agency can expect a relatively smooth transition to new leadership whenever it might occur. An agency might determine which elements below are lacking in its current operations and then create a “succession plan” or “sustainability plan” that prescribes activities and timelines for filling the gaps. The agency is then ready for leadership transitions, foreseen or unforeseen.*

* A strategic plan is in place with goals and objectives for the near term (up to three years), including objectives for leadership talent development.
* The executive director has a current job description and is evaluated annually by the board on general performance and achievement of strategic goals.
* The board, based on its annual self-evaluation, is satisfactorily performing its major governance jobs—financial oversight, executive support and oversight, policy development and strategic planning.
* The board has adopted a “succession policy” that mandates attention to staff leadership development and outlines the process the board will follow in an executive transition.
* A viable business plan is in place that includes maintaining a financial reserve with a minimum of three months’ operating capital.
* The top management cohort, as a high performing team:
* Has a solid team culture in place in which members support one another and can reach decisions as a group efficiently and harmoniously;
* Shares leadership of the organization with the executive in having significant input to all major agency decisions;
* Can lead the organization in the absence of the executive; and
* Has authority to make and carry out decisions within their respective areas of responsibility.
* The executive’s direct reports, based on annual evaluations, are judged as solidly skilled for their positions.
* Another staff person or board member shares important external relationships (major donors, funders, community leaders) maintained by the executive.
* Financial systems meet industry standards. Financial reports are up to date and provide the data needed by the board and senior managers responsible for the agency’s financial strength and viability.
* Operational manuals exist for key administrative systems, are up to date, and easily accessible.