



Quick Reference Handout 8.6: PC/PB Succession Planning

Importance of Succession Planning

Succession planning is the process of identifying the critical positions within your organization and creating a talent pipeline and action plans for individuals to assume those positions as others retire or move on.¹ For a Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) Part A planning council or planning body (PC/PB), succession planning involves identifying and preparing individuals to become members, serve as PC/PB and committee officers, and fill other leadership roles.

The Health Resources and Services Administration's HIV/AIDS Bureau (HRSA HAB) expects PC/PBs to "establish term limits and membership rotations"² that help ensure that the PC/PBs are reflective of the demographics of the local epidemic, and make room for new members and new perspectives.

Succession planning is necessary to maintain a PC/PB that has few vacancies and includes members with diverse skills, experience, and viewpoints. A PC/PB needs plans and practices that address changes in both membership and leadership. Transitions can be expected or unexpected. Both members and officers "term out," and the timing of these transitions is known well ahead. In addition, members (including officers) may leave sooner for many reasons: they may become employed or take new jobs that make regular meeting attendance or a leadership role difficult, move to other locations, have health issues, or change their interests or priorities. Some will decline renomination, while others will leave during their terms. It takes time to replace a veteran member or someone representing a key population, and to prepare a new member for a leadership position. Your PC/PB may find it challenging to fill some legislatively required seats, particularly those that require someone from a specific agency (such as Medicaid agency, RWHAP Part B recipient) or type of organization (such as health planning agency).

Need for Succession Planning: An Example

Your PC/PB allows members to serve up to three consecutive 2-year terms. You have had stable leadership for a long time, with the Chair usually serving two 1-year terms and the Vice Chair serving at least one term and then being elected Chair. Membership retention has generally been good. However, an increasing number of members have termed out or declined renomination recently – including several who were viewed as future officers. You have just elected both a Chair and Vice Chair with no prior experience as officers. The Vice Chair has served only one year on the PC/PB. Committees used to have only a Chair, but Bylaws now require Co-Chairs – and the committees just elected six new committee Co-Chairs, most with little or no prior experience in such roles.

The PC/PB has asked your Membership and Governance Committee to draft succession plans that address both recruitment of members and preparation of members for leadership positions. They want the plans to include recruitment strategies for people with HIV who receive Part A services, help avoid vacancies in seats that have often been hard to fill (like Medicaid agency and health planning agency), plus plans to encourage and prepare members to serve as committee Co-Chairs and PC/PB Chair and Vice Chair.

Member Retention and Training

Leadership succession requires retention of current members. PC/PBs can take many actions that support the active engagement and participation of current members so they are willing to serve more than one term and can become future leaders. Your PC/PB can make itself “member friendly” for all members, including those with little or no prior community health planning experience, through strategies such as the following:

- **Materials:** Send out meeting agendas and materials well ahead to allow members to prepare.
- **Preparation sessions:** Provide quick pre-meeting preparation sessions for new members who want them.
- **Scheduling:** Hold committee and PC/PB meetings at times and in locations that reflect member needs and schedules.
- **Mentoring:** Mentor new members through pairing them with veteran members in ways that work for both – for example, seating them next to each other at meetings and pairing individuals who are members of the same committee.
- **Terminology:** Discourage the use of abbreviations, acronyms, and jargon during meetings – and explain terms that are used.
- **Interactive meetings:** Make meetings more interactive by having the Chair encourage new members to speak, and sometimes go around the room asking each member to comment on an issue that is being discussed.
- **Environment:** Commit to a friendly and “safe” meeting environment, with PC/PB Co-Chairs taking the lead and a Code of Conduct enforced.

- **Expense reimbursement:** Adopt -- and be sure that unaligned consumer members receive help in benefiting from – policies and procedures that provide reimbursement for the direct costs of participation such as transportation.
- **Remote connections:** Where open meeting laws permit, allow members to connect electronically to meetings under certain conditions – based on geographic distance, weather, or other factors.

Training members for active participation and leadership roles is an essential succession planning task – the more training provided to members, the larger the pool of potential officers. Such preparation includes providing orientation and training opportunities, including a thorough initial orientation for all new members (ideally before their first meeting), committee-specific orientations, at least one annual training event for all members (as required by HRSA HAB), and mini-training activities during PC/PB meetings. Ongoing learning opportunities help prepare members – especially those without prior health planning or community board experience – for committee or PC/PB leadership roles. Sound practices include an annual assessment of training needs, usually by PC/PB support staff, and a regular schedule of training sessions. Some PC/PBs provide training monthly or every-other-month at Consumer Committee or Caucus meetings. A few have formal leadership training courses for potential members or current members, focusing on people with HIV.

Training and Support for PC/PB Officers

Training and support for PC/PB Officers, especially new officers, contributes to their success and to PC/PB productivity and effectiveness. This training and support should include both group sessions and individual assistance, including:

- **New officer orientation:** All officers should receive orientation immediately after their election or appointment – and any officer chosen to fill a vacated seat should receive immediate orientation. New officers or officers who are also relatively new PC/PB members should be offered additional orientation.
- **Ongoing training:** All officers should receive additional training during their terms – as a group, based on roles, or as individuals.
- **Use of Executive Committee:** Executive Committee meetings can be used to provide an opportunity for brief updates and/or quick training events, especially if all officers serve on that committee.
- **Mentoring:** Former PC/PB officers or appropriate staff can serve as mentors or advisors to new officers, formally or informally.
- **Staff support:** The PC/PB should ensure continuing support to committee and PC/PB officers, with access to needed information and materials, logistical and administrative assistance, and advice for meeting planning and follow-up, and for successful completion of other tasks.

Planned roles for PC/PB or Committee Vice-Chairs or junior Co-Chairs can support smooth transitions. To prepare new or “junior” officers to move into senior positions, the PC/PB can arrange for them to chair the PC/PB or committee, or carry out other tasks when the Chair is unavailable, and become Chair or Acting Chair if a Chair leaves the PC/PB before completing their term. To get ready to become the Chair when the current Chair “terms out” the junior officer can gradually assume additional responsibilities towards the end of the senior officer’s term. The PC/PB can also arrange for them to carry out assignments on behalf of the Chair, for example:

- **For a PC/PB Vice Chair or “junior” Co-Chair:** Divide responsibility for oversight of PC/PB committees between the two officers and have the junior officer attend meetings of assigned committees, or ask the junior officer to represent the PC/PB externally at certain meetings or events.
- **For a Committee Vice Chair or “junior” Co-Chair:** Ask the junior officer to lead a subcommittee or work group, or represent the committee externally at certain community events.

Techniques for Succession Planning

Sound practices include the following:

1. *Assign committee responsibility* for succession planning – usually to the Membership Committee.
2. *Adopt policies and procedures* that support an orderly leadership succession:
 - Consider choosing a Vice Chair or Chair-Elect up to one year before the Chair’s term ends, with the Bylaws stating that this person will become the Chair automatically or with a vote to confirm.
 - Elect Co-Chairs using staggered terms, so their terms do not end the same year – which increases the likelihood that the more recently elected Co-Chair will be available to become Chair.
 - If your committees currently have only Chairs, add Vice-Chairs or Co-Chairs for training and continuity.
 - Ask members to indicate interest in leadership positions well before current leaders “term out” – so there is time to provide appropriate training.
3. *Develop a pipeline* for new members. Among the approaches used:
 - Use of alternate or non-voting members who participate on behalf of absent members and receive training and experience that prepares them for voting membership.³
4. *Establish and implement a succession process*, for example:
 - Identify PC/PB leaders (officers, committee Co-Chairs) likely to leave at a specified time due to officer term limits.
 - Identify members who will not be eligible for renomination due to term limits and will need to be replaced – including those holding seats that are often difficult to fill.
 - Ask members and leaders eligible for renomination to tell the committee their plans as far ahead as possible, and always before recruitment begins.

- Ask members holding seats that are hard to fill to recommend potential successors – such as another person within their Medicaid or RWHAP Part B or Part C recipient agency.
- Chart succession planning requirements for the next one or two years.
- Integrate succession planning into overall recruitment, focusing on specific seats or subpopulations that need to be included.

End Notes

¹Based on the definitions from the National Institutes of Health, *Succession Planning: A Step-by-Step Guide*, undated; and the University of Washington, *Professional & Organizational Development*.

²See RWHAP Part A Recipient Letter from the Director of the Division of Metropolitan HIV/AIDS Programs (DMHAP), undated.

³See *Use of Alternates and Proxy Voting by RWHAP Planning Councils/Planning Bodies* prepared by EGM Consulting, LLC for Planning CHATT, 2020.