NONPROFIT STATEN ISLAND • ANNUAL CONFERENCE OCTOBER 22, 2026

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Preparing Organizations for Leadership Transition

Before the Moment Arrives

Governance • Leadership • Culture • Organizational resilience

Rev. Dr. Darlene Williams, Project Hospitality | Agatha Vassallo, Pride Center of Staten Island

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THE CENTRAL PREMISE

Leadership transition is inevitable.

Organizational instability does not have to be.

Succession readiness means preparing an organization to navigate change—not simply to replace a leader.

FIVE FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESSION READINESS

GOVERNANCE

Clear roles, decision rights, board support

LEADERSHIP

Capacity, development, authority

SYSTEMS & KNOWLEDGE

Continuity beyond one person

RELATIONSHIPS

Shared trust across stakeholders

CULTURE & READINESS FOR CHANGE

Trust, adaptability, staff voice, clarity, and openness to different leadership

A QUESTION FOR EVERY BOARD & LEADERSHIP TEAM

If your executive director left tomorrow...

Would your organization know how to move forward?

And would it be ready for someone to lead differently?

Take one question back to your next board or leadership team meeting.

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Beyond the Succession Plan

SEVEN-QUESTION SUCCESSION READINESS CHECKLIST | NONPROFIT STATEN ISLAND · OCTOBER 22, 2026

Succession and transition readiness is not just about finding the next leader. Use these questions with your board and leadership team to examine the governance, leadership, knowledge, relationships, and culture that sustain your mission through change. Check each area your organization has addressed. Leave unchecked the areas that merit a conversation with your board and leadership team. This is a discussion starter—not a formal assessment or score.

☐ **1. Governance and board support**

Does our board understand its role before, during, and after transition—including how to support, empower, and evaluate a new leader?

☐ **2. Continuity and interim authority**

If our CEO/ED were suddenly unavailable, do we know who would lead, which decisions they could make, and how we would communicate?

☐ **3. Leadership capacity and authority**

Are we developing leaders across the organization—and giving them responsibility *and* the authority, coaching, and support to succeed?

☐ **4. Knowledge and relationships**

Are essential systems, decisions, and stakeholder relationships shared and documented, rather than concentrated in one person?

☐ **5. Culture and adaptability**

Can staff raise concerns and contribute to change while adapting to new leadership, expectations, and ways of working?

☐ **6. Legacy and room to lead**

Can we honor a departing leader's contributions while giving a successor genuine space and authority to lead differently?

☐ **7. Ongoing organizational readiness**

Do we regularly revisit leadership continuity, board succession, organizational culture, and risk—not only when departure is imminent?

One conversation. One action.

Which area needs the most attention? _____

_____

One action for the next 90 days: _____

_____

SELECT RESOURCES

BoardSource — Executive Transition and Succession Planning
Practical materials on board responsibilities, planning, communication, and onboarding, including an emergency leadership transition plan. Includes practical guides, checklists, and related resources.

National Council of Nonprofits — Succession Planning for Nonprofits
Accessible starting point for smaller nonprofits, with ten concrete planning tips addressing unexpected departures, communication, cross-training, and board/staff responsibilities. Particularly accessible for smaller organizations.

Bridgespan — Nonprofit Succession Planning Webinar (2026)
Especially relevant to your broader message: succession readiness as an ongoing investment in leadership development, not simply an emergency replacement plan. Includes a practical framework and links to tools.

BoardSource — The Board-Staff Partnership
A useful complement for the discussion of healthy board/ED relationships, role clarity, accountability, and avoiding micromanagement during transitions.

BoardSource — Succeeding with Succession
Optional deeper reading, including a linked nonprofit executive succession planning toolkit with templates, timelines, and case studies.

Thank you!

Questions?

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Going Far, Together

