

New Mexico State University

The Succession Planning Toolkit

A step-by-step guide

This toolkit will guide you through the Succession Planning process. The toolkit consists of steps, forms, and the proper documentation to support your planning process and the potential discovery of talent within our organization.



At New Mexico State University, we strive to create equal opportunities for our employees while recognizing diversity as a source of human excellence, cultural enrichment, and social strength. Succession planning should be a transparent and collaborative process within your department that ensures equitable treatment for all employees.

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Succession Planning - Cultivating Our Talent

Overview

NMSU promotes the preparation of employees for future roles. Rather than pre-selection or replacement, we encourage continuous career development within our own employees, strengthening their competencies to be ready for essential roles that meet the institution's strategic needs and optimal operations. NMSU makes no promises on positions, instead, NMSU anticipates potential changes, retirements, or absences in critical roles, and plans ahead in order to promote our own talent to fill these gaps. With a whole person view of the employee, cross-training opportunities, mentorship, and professional development plans, we will be able to set the stage to proactively create diverse work environments that anticipate future skill gaps and organizational talent needs.

Succession Plans will strengthen...

- employee development
- departmental competencies
- cross-training opportunities
- mentoring relationships
- internal talent



Succession Plans are not...

- pre-selection
- random replacement
- favoritism that overrides proper hiring procedures
- a one-size-fits all approach
- a secretive process

Why do we need Succession Planning?

Stability and continuity: A succession plan to protect critical roles will minimize the risk of potential disruptions in service and processes.

Prepared pool of talent: Succession development plans will include a variety of opportunities to explore and personalize learning opportunities. These learning activities might include internal or external training, mentoring, coaching, and/or participation in departmental activities expected to strengthen our employees' competencies thus preparing our NMSU talent for eventual vacancies.

Growth of leaders: Ensures a competitive process that promotes talent from within and becomes an opportunity to recognize and encourage the development of future leaders.



Keep in mind...

When an employee goes through this process, there is no guarantee that he/she will get hired for the potential vacant role. The employee will engage in a career growth process with a professional development plan that will increase the likelihood to be selected for the position when the official hiring process starts.

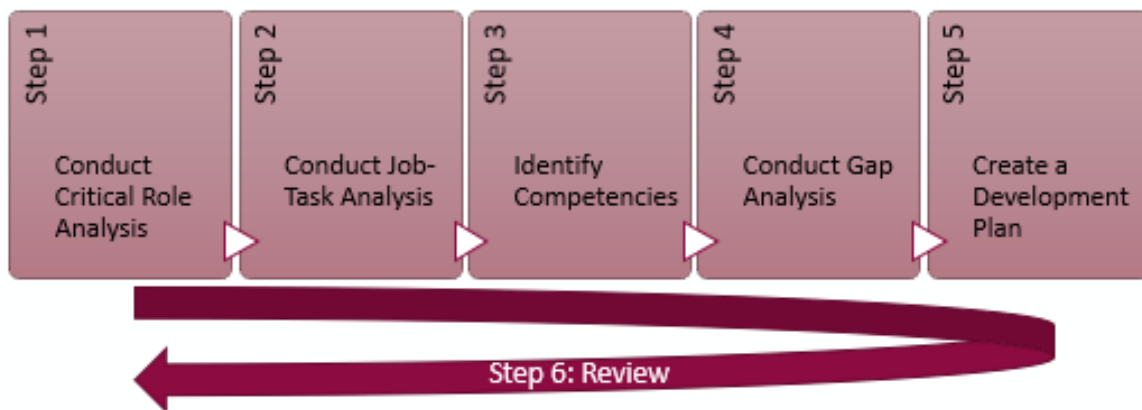
Who is a potential successor?

A potential successor is an employee with the knowledge, experience, skills, and abilities to take on a role that might be vacant in the near future. If an internal candidate is not feasible at the moment, the knowledge and skills identified through this process can help identify minimum requirements for a potential external candidate. How do we know an employee can be a potential successor? Following the process outlined below, you will find the rationale and tools to determine if one or more of your employees could be a potential successor.

Succession Planning Process

The process includes 6 steps (see chart below). Step six is to review the plan, creating a continuous improvement loop. Keep in mind the organization's strategic plan and the key roles within your department that need to be considered. This process will be driven by the identification of competencies within your unit. The process involves a detailed identification of strengths, gaps, and areas of improvement that will inform the creation of development plans for potential successors.

Succession Planning Process



Step 1

Conduct Critical Role Analysis

It is important to start with a review of the strategic plan that accompanies our NMSU vision. During this phase, take a look at your department's strategic plan and assess the alignment with the institutional goals. This is the first step to recognize priorities that will help you identify your critical roles and the potential successors for these roles, as they fit in the institutional strategy.

During this step, you should have clear understanding of what the organizational chart looks like so you can identify these critical positions and roles. During this analysis, you will be assessing different factors that have the most influence in your operations. You will take a look at impact by asking the questions on the following page. If we do not have this critical role, what could be the consequences and impact to our operations? Don't limit yourself to just leadership roles. Individual contributors are often in roles that, if left vacant, would significantly affect your operations.

If you have more than one critical role, you will work on one critical role at a time. With the critical role in mind, you are ready to start looking at the classification and job descriptions that are available for this role. (Please work with your HR liaison if you need support working with classification or job descriptions). If the descriptions available meets the expectations you have for this critical role, then you are good to go and can now move to the next phase. If you find that there is a need to make modifications to the job description, or there is a need to create a new job description, please work with your HR liaison to share your concerns and get the guidance you need. Whether existing or new, it is important to assess the job description available to cover for this critical role so we are able to identify potential successors.

Critical Role Analysis

Role

1. Identify key positions
2. Identify key roles within the position

Urgency

What is the possibility a vacancy will occur?

- No expectation of vacancy within the next 5 years
- This position/role has a history of frequent turnover
- A vacancy is imminent within the year

Risk

If the position or role is vacant, what is the risk to the organization?

- High Risk: risk to personnel safety, fines, loss of funding or accreditation, loss of public reputation
- Medium Risk: minimal or acceptable loss; errors are easily corrected
- Low Risk: no consequence to the organization or safety of employees

Recruitment

How easy is the position filled?

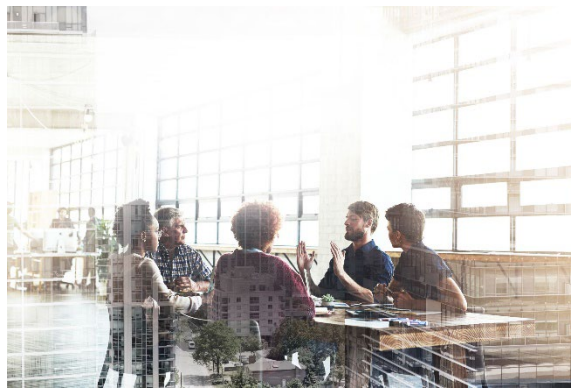
- There are multiple people who can fill in or the position is easily filled
- At least one person can perform the task or the position has a wide applicant pool
- There are few qualified applicants or specialized training/licensing required

Step 2

Conduct Job-Task Analysis

During this phase, you will review the roles break them down further into the tasks required to complete the job successfully. This step is important because while the role may be broad, the tasks associated with the role tell you exactly what this role does. For example, the role of Director may have the task of supervising employees, writing grants, providing strategic direction, etc.

Besides determining what tasks are associated with the role, you will determine the criticality of the task, similar to the critical role analysis you did in step one. It is important to poll everyone who does this task to gain an accurate understanding of its importance. If possible, it is advised to poll people in these roles in other departments or peer institutions to gain insight. When polling multiple contributors, average the results. If there are outliers, for example, three people rate the task as one but one person rates it at nine, it may be necessary to interview the contributor to determine why the discrepancy exists.



Job-Task Analysis

Frequency

How often is the task performed?

- regularly repeated (daily, weekly)
- occasional/periodic (monthly, semester, quarterly)
- Infrequent (annual, by request)

Complexity

For a novice, how difficult is the task?

- easy; anyone can do it
- average; some skill is needed or multiple steps
- expert; the task requires advanced skills or takes a great deal of steps

Risk

What is the risk if the task isn't done or is done incorrectly?

- None; if it doesn't get done, there is no risk to the organization or safety of employees
- Moderate; errors or omission results in acceptable loss
- High; risk to safety, fines, loss of funding/accreditation, loss of public reputation

Time to Complete

How long does it take to complete one iteration of task?

- Minimal; less than an hour
- Short; up to one day
- Long; several days

Step 3

Identify Competencies

During this phase, you will review the roles and tasks identified in the previous steps to determine the competencies needed to successfully fill the role. You will focus on the tasks identified as high risk or need; these are identified with ratings of 7 or above (red flags) in the job task analysis template.

When we talk about competencies, we are considering the knowledge, skills, and abilities that make an employee a potential successor for the new role. Additionally, consider other, albeit subjective, attributes such as, team dynamics, attitude, work environment, etc. This step is another opportunity to involve subject matter experts in these roles by asking them what knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes are needed to complete the task. If you are stuck on how to determine core competencies, an online search will usually give you a list of commonly-accepted competencies.

A pivot table may help you determine the core competencies; those required for more than one task. Once you have a clear understanding of the competencies needed in this role, you can now consider if there are qualified current employees who are interested in this role. If there are interested employees, but not entirely qualified for the role, please consider their potential to grow into this role with proper support and a formal development plan.

Step 4

Conduct Strength & Gap Analysis

Use the Strengths and Gap Analysis form to determine the potential of an employee to take on the role. This step requires the input and cooperation of the supervisor and the employee. Remember, succession planning is not secretive, nor should it be conducted in a vacuum. While you may have an idea, based on your experience with the employee, they may have a different viewpoint of their competency level. If you are not the employee's immediate supervisor, the employee's supervisor should also be included. When wide variances in the competency ratings exist, an interview with the employee and/or supervisor will provide clarification. Do not limit the gap analysis and subsequent development plan to just one or two employees. All employees should be considered and developed for future roles.

Assessing talent internally

Who is a potential candidate? Get together with your team to define collectively what the ideal candidate for that role would be like. Some factors to consider are: Understanding of the NMSU culture, deep understanding of the role, knowledge of internal processes and procedures, competencies related to the job, and familiarity with university policies.



Strengths and Gaps

For each competency, evaluate each employee to determine their competency level.

Competency (Divisional)	Employee 1	Employee 2
Communication (active listening)	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: Acquiring	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: Acquiring
Communication (Clear and concise instruction)	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: acquiring	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability:
Emotional Intelligence Self-awareness & self- management	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: average	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: Mastered
Emotional Intelligence Social awareness & relationship management	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: Acquiring	Knowledge: Mastered Skills: Mastered Ability: Acquiring

Step 5

Create Development Plans

Once you have a potential successor or a list of potential successors, and a good understanding of their strengths and possible gaps in knowledge, skills, or abilities, you can move forward and work on a development plan. You will come up with a plan that will include learning activities that will prepare the potential successor to be successful in the role. This plan might include formal training, coaching, mentoring, and/or involvement in learning activities or relevant team facilitations. Please document these experiences as this will be relevant during the assessment phase. Also, consider other less formal participation in various activities such as internal or external meetings, user groups, committees, or any other opportunity that can equip this employee to gain the necessary competencies to be successful in the role.

It is important to communicate with the potential successors and inquire about their career aspirations and interests so this development plan aligns with their professional growth areas. Also, it is important to notify the rest of the team of the development plan in place, especially if there are new activities in which this potential successor will be participating in the near future.



Development Plan

The plan will be evaluated every three to six months and adjusted as needed based on organizational needs and/or personal priorities. This plan should be aligned to the employee's annual performance evaluation.

Competency to be Developed	Learning Activities	Target Date	Additional Comments

Employee Signature _____

Date _____

Supervisor Signature _____

Date _____

Step 6

Performance Evaluation/Review Needs

The potential successors will engage in the learning activities listed in the development plan for a period of 6 months to 1 year depending on your circumstances. It is recommended to follow up every 3 months, check on completion of activities and assess the progress made to strengthen each of the competencies that will close the gaps identified in the previous steps.

Additionally, it is important to reassess the needs of the organization at least annually. In our rapidly changing work environment, failure to keep up with shifting priorities, failure to strategically plan for future needs, and failure to keep up with advancing competencies will lead to a failure of the process and potential successors will not be able to keep up with external competitors. It is important to review the succession plans and go through all the steps accordingly to assure business continuity.



Keep in mind...

Transparency is key in this process; therefore, we strongly recommend discussing within the department a communication strategy to engage employees and other leaders into this process. We encourage conversations regarding the critical role, change management strategies, and potential learning activities that could speed up the potential successor's preparation process.

Provide constant reminders that preparing employees to be potential successors increases the likelihood of their chances but it is not a hiring promise.

Vacancy

Review successors pool

Once you have documentation of completion or significant progress of the development plan, successors are now ready to apply for vacant positions. Please refer to the hiring process and invite the selected employee to apply for the position, if that is still in his/her professional interest.

Be sure to document every step of the process and keep all related files within your department.

“Instead of anticipating that vacant roles will always need to be filled by external candidates, can we not find internal candidates who are already invested in the mission, the culture, and the community?”

(CUPA-HR)



Final Thoughts

The succession planning process is rooted in diversity and equal employment opportunity, [ARP 3.25](#). The process ensures that everyone involved understands that succession planning is intended to match the organization's needs with the employees' professional and career interests in mind and that there will be no promises on ultimate selection decisions. Additionally, the analytical steps in the process limits potential bias in the hiring process. Refer to [RPM 6.03](#) regarding Succession Planning.

NMSU's Center for Learning & Professional Development offers [guided facilitation](#) of the succession planning process for all NMSU units at no cost, other than travel expenses.

"Internal mobility gives employees greater incentive to remain engaged and productive. It also gives them chances to grow their skills (and develop new ones) while in the flow of work."

PeopleFluent



Glossary

Coaching: An individually tailored practice which provides support for employees looking to make a career transition, improve performance, or grow and develop leadership skills. Because coaches are dealing with personal and sensitive information, they should abide by ethical guidelines.

Competencies: The knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that contribute to successful performance in a particular position or occupational level. These might include: analysis, problem solving, initiative, strategic planning, etc. In general terms, everything that the employee would need to be successful in the potential position.

Development Plan: A learning plan designed to strengthen employees' competencies. The development plan is created by the supervisor, the HR liaison, and other relevant team members, with the employee's professional growth in mind. It is expected to list learning activities that may include training, mentoring, coaching, suggestions on memberships, committees or any other professional development opportunity that will equip the employee to fulfill the expectations for the potential position and the employees' interests.

Job Shadowing: A learning experience in which a person follows a professional throughout their workday and observes them as they complete their duties.

Mentoring: Reciprocal and collaborative at-will relationship that most often occurs between a senior and junior employee for the purpose of the mentee's growth, learning, and career development. Mentoring can be formal or informal.

Performance Assessment: A document that provides the employee with feedback on their performance after the development plan is completed or at key milestones during the development process. The supervisor will complete the assessment. After discussing with the employee, both the supervisor and employee should sign the assessment.

Skills: Abilities to perform a job – coding, writing, accounting, etc.

Succession Planning: The process of identifying and developing skilled employees as potential successors for leadership or other key roles within the organization.

