

Action Learning Scenario #3 Room 155 IW

Who's in Charge? Effective Succession Planning across USGS

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Issue/Challenges

Succession Planning was identified as a goal for the USGS in the [2015-2020 USGS Workforce Plan](#). The strategy identified to achieve this goal is “to evaluate and establish processes and practices to develop and enhance employees’ capabilities to ensure a smooth transition of duties and responsibilities.”¹

Succession planning is a process that ensures the availability of well-qualified staff to fill leadership and other key positions. It is a systematic approach to building talent pools to ensure continuity can take place at any level of the organization, and for any type, occupation, or group of employees. Succession planning is not about preselection, and it is not a guarantee for promotion.

Succession planning can better prepare an organization for risks associated with the planned or unplanned loss of knowledge and skills critical to the organization’s success. Succession planning incorporates related topics, such as leadership development and knowledge transfer. Succession planning can focus near term on the immediate future, or long term on development and recruitment options.

Just as workforce planning has a different look and feel depending on the organizational level or type where it is being conducted, so does succession planning. It is important to view the topic of succession planning from the field perspective and explore what activities and processes are needed to promote and implement succession planning at the center and local levels.

Succession planning must be firmly rooted in workforce planning in order to be effective, and workforce data usually drives issue prioritization and approach. For example, retirement eligibility data illustrates the need for succession planning for specific segments of the workforce by showing the possibility of losses due to retirements. As of July 7, 2018, over 17% of our USGS workforce is eligible to retire by the end of FY 2018, including over 22% of our science professionals. The retirement eligibility for our leadership is even higher: 60% of Senior Executive Service (SES) positions; almost 52% of GS 15s; 70% of senior advisors (SL positions); and almost 86% senior scientists (ST positions). The Retirement Eligibility Tables provided include these data points for USGS leadership as well as for general workforce categories and select occupational series. However, employees usually do not retire as soon as they become eligible, and retirements are only one type of separation. Trends in all types of separations (voluntary and involuntary) along with general staffing trends need to be examined, along with internal and external threats and opportunities. Possibly even more important to examine are employees’ attitudes towards the USGS, their organizations, their supervisors, their work, etc. Do employees want to remain with the USGS? Their organization? Employee attitudes are indicators of potential problems with retention; conversely, employees’ attitudes and engagement

¹ USGS Workforce Plan: 2015-2020, page 31.

levels are the best indicators of employee desire for advancement, and whether they are willing to take on added responsibility and “do what it takes” to progress in their careers.

Background Material/Resources

USGS Workforce Plan: 2015-2020, pages 19-20, 31

<https://www2.usgs.gov/humancapital/sw/workforceplanning/documents/USGSBureauWorkforcePlan15-20.pdf>

USGS Succession Planning Desk Guide, page 6

<https://www2.usgs.gov/humancapital/sw/workforceplanning/successionplanningdeskguide.html>

Leaders Blog on Succession Planning

<https://internal.usgs.gov/thecore/leaders/2017/02/27/usgs-succession-planning-what-it-is-why-it-is-important-and-what-were-doing/>

Rothwell, W. J. (2010). The future of succession planning. *Training and Development*, 64 (9), 50-54. <http://www.pls.net/talent-strategies-workshop/rothwell-article-future-of-succession-planning.pdf>

Retirement Eligibility Tables (attached to Action Learning Scenario)

Expectations

1. The USGS is boosting its efforts to educate management bureau-wide about why succession planning is important and how to do it. Recently, the USGS hosted a webinar series² to educate supervisors and managers about succession planning and posted the Succession Planning Desk Guide³ on the Human Capital website. To help further raise awareness, especially in the field, please **recommend ways to educate the USGS community about the benefits of succession planning and the business case for how it advances our ability to achieve our science mission. Come up with some “What’s In It for Me” marketing materials to encourage the practice of succession planning.**
2. Exploring the barriers to succession planning in the field and generating possible solutions to those barriers is a critical part of achieving success in succession planning. (For instance, in the succession planning pilot for building an SES pipeline, it was determined that unwillingness to change duty station location was a major barrier to aspiring to SES positions.) **Brainstorm barriers to successful succession planning along with possible solutions. Consider these questions:** “How can we be more successful at improving leadership opportunities in the field?” “How can we provide stretch/developmental assignments for people working remotely or at locations with few employees to engage those who may not normally have such opportunities available?” “What are the mechanisms available that offer career growth and leadership opportunities in the field, or what can be done to develop options and make such opportunities available?”
3. The need for succession planning is different for leadership or management positions versus professional or technical positions. **Identify succession planning scenarios, using positions commonly found in the field, to illustrate how succession planning can be used for leadership/management, professional and/or technical positions.** Use

² <https://atthecore.usgs.gov/leadership/employee-announcements/succession-planning-webinar-series>

³ <https://www2.usgs.gov/humancapital/sw/workforceplanning/successionplanningdeskguide.html>

the succession planning phases⁴ in the USGS Succession Planning Desk Guide to frame the scenario.

⁴ <https://www2.usgs.gov/humancapital/sw/workforceplanning/successionplanningdeskguide-phasesof.html>