

Introduction

Succession planning is a systematic process of identifying and developing the talent pool for key positions that have a significant impact on the mission of an organization. It also mitigates the risks associated with the planned or unplanned loss of knowledge and skills critical to the organization's success. This desk guide provides resources to support succession planning activities across USGS. As you use this desk guide, these are some questions and answers you may want to think about.

What is succession planning?

- Succession planning is done to prepare broad pools of talent to be able to compete for key/essential position(s) in the organization. For example, Human Resources Assistants are the talent pool for Human Resources Specialist positions.
- Succession planning is also done to capture knowledge of those soon to depart the organization and share relevant knowledge with the existing employees. For example, seasoned Hydrologic Technicians can mentor junior Hydrologic Technicians and document their knowledge using the Knowledge Transfer Questions.

Why should I do succession planning?

- It is possible to have one or more reasons to do succession planning. Here are some likely needs:
 1. promote seamless staff transitions
 2. preserve legacy of achievements and experiences
 3. focus planning on critical vulnerabilities in the workforce
 4. build pools of talent capable of competing for essential positions
 5. encourage employee engagement, collaboration and mentorship

What is the succession planning desk guide?

- This desk guide provides resources to support succession planning activities across USGS and at all organizational levels.

Why was the succession planning desk guide developed?

- The desk guide was developed to educate supervisors and managers about the concept of succession planning and the tools to support succession planning for various positions and situations. Succession planning is not a one-size-fits-all process.

Is there a difference between succession planning for one position versus succession planning for a group of positions or the full organization?

- The concept behind succession planning (establishing strategic direction; identifying key positions and analyzing talent; and developing strategies) is similar whether planning for a single position or for many positions. However, there may be differences in numbers and/or types of competencies identified and the granularity of the analysis. When doing succession planning for one position, you are probably looking with specificity at a variety of skills and abilities; when planning for a group of positions, you are probably looking at a more limited set of competencies, or even a single competency, to be analyzed and developed across a range of series, or other skills and abilities. The succession planning process can be used for “soft” skills or abilities (example: leadership skills, like communication or cultural savvy), or for “hard” or more technical skills and abilities (example: knowledge and skills needed to perform scientific work, like groundwater geology). The approach the USGS developed can be adapted to support succession planning for a single position or an organization.

Do I need to use everything in this guide in order to do succession planning?

- No. The guide is intended to be flexible and offer resources for different scenarios. When an organization decides to conduct succession planning it inevitably touches on other human resources topics including: workforce analyses, performance management, training and employee development.

How does succession planning relate to workforce planning?

- Succession planning complements and is a follow-up to workforce planning. Succession planning efforts build a pipeline/talent pool to ensure continuity by developing potential successors who could compete for future positions. The decision to pursue succession planning is typically determined in Step 3 (Develop Action Plan) of the [USGS Workforce Planning Model](#) as a result of analysis in Step 2 (Supply, Demand, Discrepancies) of the USGS Workforce Planning Model.

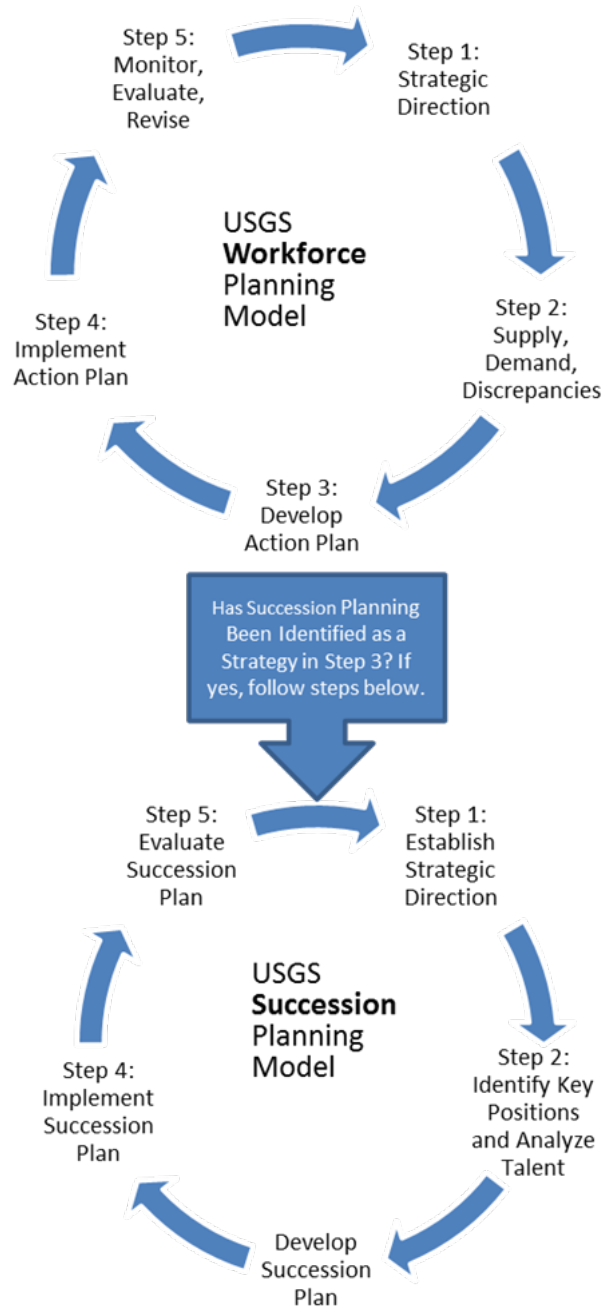
Can I do succession planning without workforce planning?

- It depends. If the intention is to prepare a talent pool for a position targeted for succession planning, it is best to determine what position(s) to target during the workforce planning process. If the intention is to capture knowledge of soon-to-be-departing staff, this does not require a workforce planning process. Select succession planning tools can be used on an as-needed basis, like the Knowledge Transfer Questions or the Succession Profile Worksheet.

Do I need to write a succession plan?

- It is helpful to write a formal succession plan when using the process outlined in this desk guide. A written succession plan captures the steps of the process; decision points at each step; and records these items in a single document. If the organization chooses to use some of the tools in the desk guide as stand-alone items (e.g. Succession Plan Profile or Knowledge Transfer guide) a succession plan may not be needed.

**Relationship
Between
Workforce Planning
and
Succession Planning**



Phases of Succession Planning

The desk guide is organized by the phases of succession planning. Each phase has relevant supporting tools. Some tools can “stand alone,” while others are to be used as part of a comprehensive planning process. The tools are also designed to be flexible when responding to the type or level of succession planning.

Phases of Succession Planning	Description of Phases	Relevant Tools
Getting Ready	Understand what succession planning is and how it can work for your organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession Planning Webinar Series
Phase 1: Alignment	Understand the strategic direction of the organization, based on the strategic plan and workforce plan. Conduct SWOT analysis. Determine barriers to success. Determine succession planning goals, keeping them aligned with the strategic and workforce plans. Estimate budget for succession planning strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) Analysis • Business Case
Phase 2: Analysis	Identify bench strength: key positions for succession planning and analyze how well the current talent pool will be able to fill those key positions. Include analysis of engagement, aspiration, and barriers to determine readiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of Key Positions • Identification of Talent Pool • Competency Modeling • USGS Succession Planning Pipeline Assessment Tool • Succession Profile Worksheet
Phase 3: Strategy	Identify succession planning strategies and related metrics that will be used to evaluate the success of the strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Development Plan • Knowledge Transfer Questions • Leadership Development Matrix
Phase 4: Implementation	Document and formalize the succession planning phases of Alignment, Analysis, and Strategy into a comprehensive Succession Plan. Manage the implementation of the plan and succession strategies, and communicate those strategies throughout the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession Plan Template • Communication Tool • Project Management Plan
Phase 5: Evaluation	Determine how well the succession management strategies are filling targeted needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample Metrics