

Top 8 Tips for Student Leader Transition

Congratulations! You have almost made it to the end of another successful school year and the finish line is right around the corner! Your final task is effectively transitioning leadership in your organization. Although you may be tired and worn out from this year, there are a few tips you can use to help you be successful.

What Is Effective Leadership Transition?

Effective leadership transition is the process by which past and future student leaders in an organization work together to review and learn from previous events and programs and prepare for the upcoming year. This process can occur in one or several days and may be accomplished in a formal or informal setting. The transition process an organization chooses to use during this time period truly depends on the needs and resources available to the group.

What Are the Benefits of Effective Leadership Transition?

Leadership transition greatly contributes to the success of the organization. Through this process, the organization gains the solid foundation needed to be successful in the upcoming year. This is accomplished through intentional and well-planned programming and the creation of realistic and attainable goals. During the transition period, the incoming leadership develops the skills needed to persevere through all the dynamic changes that occur within an organization.

This transition period also benefits the individuals in the organization. For returning or departing members, this is an opportunity to discover what they have learned, use the skills and knowledge gained to assist the future members, and assess the organization and programs for strengths and challenges. The future members, in turn, will benefit greatly by hearing personal accounts of the previous leaders' successes and challenges.

For the new leaders in the organization, this is the time to gain knowledge from past members. By listening to their wisdom, new leaders are less likely to make the same mistakes and are more likely to be successful in their endeavors. The energy, enthusiasm and new ideas that new members bring may help to revive the excitement of the continuing members. It is this convergence of the old and new that can create dynamic programming opportunities.

Tips for Effective Leadership Transition

#1: Review the organization's leadership roles.

Before electing new leaders, review what your organization's constitution states regarding each role. Often in student organizations, individuals just "pick up" the workload of others. Sometimes, individuals in a role never truly understand their purpose. Everyone can discuss the value of each position, discuss changes to the roles, perhaps consolidate or expand position descriptions, and begin to think of students who would be ideal candidates for those positions.

#2: Plan a retreat.

Planning a retreat allows time for members of the organization to focus specifically on its success. An effective retreat can occur in a variety of locations, over varying lengths of time, and can cover a variety of topics. Look at venues on campus to serve as your location. Ask faculty and staff to present sessions on various leadership topics. The bonding through the experience will be priceless. When planning the agenda, ask current organization advisors, student life staff, and members to give ideas on topics they feel all leaders should address at a retreat.

#3: Create a map of the organization's journey.

When looking toward the future, it's always a good idea to reflect on the past. For the new leaders, it is crucial that they have a strong sense of what has occurred before so they can effectively plan future events. By having all the members of the organization saving and recording the details of events, flyers, and contacts, the new individuals will have a stronger sense of the do's and don'ts involved. This time of open feedback also sets a positive example for new members. After experiencing this process, new members will be more likely to maintain traditions.

#4: Be honest about the past and realistic about the future.

Take time as a group to determine how you will discuss and assess past events. It is important to view all aspects of each event, from inception to completion. Doing this as a group allows for the opinions and ideas of everyone to be considered equally. Make sure the method of critiquing events is discussed early and is followed. Including ideas from everyone can give the audience perspective and bring up alternate viewpoints not always recognized.

#5: Take time to learn your available resources.

Many student organizations are strapped for cash, but that shouldn't hinder the success of any organization. Take a moment to look around you. Are there departments on campus with which you are not connected in your programming efforts? Are there staff and faculty who teach certain subjects or have special talents that could benefit your organization? New members can definitely use more experienced members as resources. Also, keep in mind that the fresh perspective of new members of the organization is one of the cheapest resources available.

#6: Implement teambuilding exercises and personality assessments.

Once the new leadership group is assembled, it's great to see how everyone works as a team. There are a variety of free teambuilding exercises available on the Internet. Leadership offices can offer assistance in facilitating teambuilding exercises. Working together early as a team can help build bonds that will be needed later in the school year. By conducting personality and leadership assessments, members can learn about the strengths and challenges of everyone in the organization. This will help members can discover where they best fit in the organization and where they may need to enhance existing skills or develop new ones.

#7: Build a relationship between group members and the advisor(s).

Relationship building is crucial in a group setting. It is important to not only have positive relationships among members, but also between members and the advisor(s). The style an advisor chooses to use with a group may vary for many reasons. It is important that members develop rapport with the advisor early in the transition process. Don't forget that the advisor is a free resource who can benefit the

organization in countless ways. New members must understand that keeping the advisor in the loop is essential when building trust. In the end, the advisor/student relationship can yield many positive results for an organization.

#8: Don't be afraid to try something new in your organization.

Have you ever heard, "But we've always done it this way?" As a past or returning member, encourage new thoughts and endeavors. By trying new programs, you keep your group fresh and new members are more likely to stay engaged. You will never know what new techniques will work in your organization unless you try something different. Many times student groups get stuck in a rut and members lose their enthusiasm for the organization. One of the best ways to tackle this type of boredom is by pursuing new initiatives and focusing in different directions.

Where to Begin ...

Review all the above tips for leadership transition, then ask yourself a series of questions when deciding which tips you would like to tackle first with your organization.

- What is needed for you to complete this tip?
- What current and upcoming members should be involved in the transition planning?
- What are the challenges for your organization?
- What staff and organizational support are available to you?

After you've decided how your organization will tackle its transitions, then set goals and thoroughly plan what you will do next. Don't forget that one of the greatest contributors to the success of an organization is the strength of the transitioning period. A transitioning period that allows members new and old to reflect on the past, build relationships and plan a dynamic upcoming school year is sure to be successful!