

SESSION OUTCOME

By the end of this session, you will know exactly where your fair is vulnerable during leadership transition — and exactly what to do next.

BOARD SUCCESSION PLANNING HEALTH CHECK

Before we discuss solutions, we assess structure.

Succession planning is not emotional.

It is structural.

How to Score (Use the same meaning for every statement)

1 = Not in place / Never true

2 = Inconsistent / Rarely true

3 = Partially in place / Sometimes true

4 = Mostly in place / Usually true

5 = Fully in place / Always true

Rate each statement:

1. We have written role descriptions for every officer position.

Score: _____

2. Succession planning is discussed annually — not only during crisis.

Score: _____

3. Sponsor, vendor, and contract information is accessible beyond one individual.

Score: _____

4. Officer transitions would not significantly disrupt operations.

Score: _____

5. Emerging leaders are being intentionally developed.

Score: _____

6. Governance responsibilities and operational tasks are clearly defined.

Score: _____

7. Leadership transition conversations feel normal — not political.

Score: _____

Total Score: _____ / 35

Overall Interpretation

30–35: Structurally mature (protect and refine)

20–29: Some protection, some exposure (choose 1–2 upgrades)

10–19: Reactive vulnerability (stabilize with minimum standards)

Under 10: High transition risk (urgent structure and knowledge capture)

How to Use Your Results

Step 1: Circle your two lowest scores.

Step 2: Those two areas become your priority focus for the next 90 days.

Step 3: Any score of 1 or 2 is a red flag and should be addressed first.

Priority Rule:

Lowest score = highest risk.

Fix the lowest score first.

Low scores are not failure.

They are exposure.

Today is about reducing exposure.

WHY SUCCESSION PLANNING IS STEWARDSHIP

Every fair will experience leadership transition.

The question is not if.

It is whether it will be intentional or disruptive.

There are two ways to think about succession.

Replacement mindset asks:

“What happens when they leave?”

Stewardship mindset asks:

“How do we protect what they built?”

Replacement focuses on personalities.

Stewardship focuses on the institution.

Succession planning protects institutional knowledge, preserves community relationships, and maintains confidence in the fair.

Strong institutions outlive strong personalities.

That is stewardship.

WHERE FAIRS BECOME VULNERABLE

Leadership transition typically exposes three areas.

For each category below, rate your current level of vulnerability:

1 = Highly Vulnerable

2 = Significant Risk

3 = Moderate Risk

4 = Mostly Protected

5 = Structurally Strong

1. Knowledge Loss

If vendor history, insurance documentation, grant processes, and sponsor agreements live only in someone's memory, the institution is fragile.

Rate: _____

2. Relationship Disruption

If sponsors, county officials, or exhibitors are connected primarily to one person rather than the organization, transition creates instability.

Rate: _____

3. Confidence Erosion

When succession feels sudden or unclear, volunteers hesitate and communities sense instability.

Rate: _____

Vulnerability Snapshot

Knowledge Loss Score: _____

Relationship Disruption Score: _____

Confidence Erosion Score: _____

Lowest score = Primary Vulnerability

Highest score = Current Strength

Your lowest score identifies where you begin.

ROLES • PEOPLE • SYSTEMS

Most succession challenges are structural, not personal.

The Person — who serves today.

The Role — what the position requires.

The System — how the work is consistently executed and documented.

If the person were unavailable tomorrow,

would the system still function?

Choose one key role at your fair:

Is it documented?

Is access shared?

Could someone step in with clarity?

If not, the solution is structure — not replacement.

STRUCTURE SUPPORTS STEWARDSHIP

Structure exists to protect continuity.

Every board should periodically ask:

Do we have defined officer terms?

Are board member terms staggered?

Is leadership rotation normalized?

Are emerging leaders mentored before transition?

Term limits are not about pushing someone away.

They create rhythm.

They encourage renewal.

They open space for development.

Term limits without mentorship create loss.

Term limits with mentorship create legacy.

Structure preserves wisdom while allowing renewal.

WHAT SHOULD EXIST BEFORE TRANSITION

At minimum, every fair should have:

- Written officer role descriptions
- A month-by-month operational timeline
- Shared document storage for contracts and sponsor information
- A basic onboarding checklist for new board members
- An annual succession planning conversation on the agenda

Without these, transition becomes emotional.

With these, transition becomes procedural.

Procedural transition builds confidence.

FROM DIAGNOSIS TO ACTION

Strengthen What You Identified as Weakest

If Knowledge Loss Is Your Risk:

- Conduct a 60-minute knowledge capture interview with a long-serving leader. Record it.
- Create a shared digital folder for contracts, sponsor contacts, timelines.
- Build a written month-by-month operational calendar.

Institutional memory must be documented, not assumed.

If Relationship Disruption Is Your Risk:

- Shift key relationships from individual ownership to shared board visibility.
- Maintain a sponsor and stakeholder history document.
- Introduce incoming leaders to major stakeholders before transition occurs.

Relationships should survive leadership change.

If Confidence Erosion Is Your Risk:

- Normalize succession as healthy governance.
- Communicate leadership development to volunteers and community.
- Build short transition overlap whenever possible.

Planned transition builds stability.

If Structure Is Your Risk:

- Define officer term expectations clearly.
- Stagger board terms to balance experience and renewal.
- Consider advisory roles for long-serving leaders.

Structure protects continuity.

YOUR ONE PRACTICAL STEP THIS YEAR

Choose one improvement.

Document one key role.

Schedule one succession conversation.

Create one onboarding checklist.

Record one knowledge-transfer interview.

Write it here:

Completion Date:

Momentum creates maturity.

CLOSING

Transitions do not weaken institutions.

Unprepared transitions do.

The fair is bigger than any one board member.

It is part of the fabric of the country.

Succession planning is not about endings.

It is about continuity.

You do not replace leaders.

You protect what they built.