INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, victorious gubernatorial candidates will have from 4 to 10 weeks between Election Day and their inauguration. In many ways, the success of their initial year in office will depend on the degree to which they are prepared to make the maximum use of this brief transition period. The number of tasks that will need to be accomplished during the transition is daunting. Unfortunately, too many candidates choose to postpone serious planning for the transition until after the election. While there are many reasons for this delay, the end result may be a less than effective transition.

The Partnership for Public Service recently issued a report titled Ready to Govern: Improving the Presidential Transition that underscores the need for early and proper planning. Although it focuses on the presidential transition, the report’s conclusions are also relevant to gubernatorial transitions. Two findings seem particularly important:

1. “[W]e need to change the cultural norm. Rather than viewing early, pre-election planning as premature and presumptuous, our nation must recognize it as prudent and necessary....”
2. “The preparation to govern must not wait until the two-and-a-half month period between the election and the inauguration; it should begin during the height of the presidential campaign....”

For the full report and specific recommendations regarding critical pre-election transition activities, see:

PLAN FOR THE TRANSITION

The National Governors Association (NGA), like many others who have examined transitions at both the state and federal level, recommends that all gubernatorial candidates begin to consider the transition process well before the elections. The National Governors Association (NGA)—the bipartisan organization of the nation's governors—promotes visionary state leadership, shares best practices and speaks with a unified voice on national policy. Specifically, we suggest that candidates address the following to ensure a smooth and successful transition into office:

- Assign responsibility for transition planning early rather than late;
- Begin to build a knowledge base;
- Preserve post-election flexibility; and
- Establish connections with NGA.
ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

Ideally, gubernatorial candidates would be able to establish a formal and structured approach to transition planning during the campaign. Realistically, the candidates' willingness or ability to do so will be influenced by a combination of factors including tradition, personal preference, and political concerns.

Where a formal or structured approach is possible, the candidate will usually name a transition coordinator, either in a paid or volunteer capacity. The transition director may be supported by a transition committee or advisory group and/or by a designated transition planning staff. In most cases, the transition effort will draw heavily on individuals with broad knowledge or experience in state government.

Where a formal or structured approach is not possible, candidates will often designate one or more individuals to be alert to transition issues. In other cases, the candidate may choose to consider potential transition issues through a series of low-key discussions with key advisors.

BEGIN TO BUILD A KNOWLEDGE BASE

Whether the pre-election process is formal or informal, the campaign provides an opportunity to begin to collect the information that can contribute to the success of the post-election transition. Some issues that merit priority attention include:

- Identifying the critical tasks, including the designation of a transition director, which must be completed in the two or three weeks immediately following the election;
- Determining what assistance will be provided by the state to the governor-elect during the transition period;
- Identifying key appointments that will be made by the new governor and determining the skills and experience that will be needed to succeed in those positions; and
- Documenting opportunities for the governor-elect to influence the development of the upcoming state budget and beginning to collect detailed information on the state’s fiscal situation.

PRESERVE THE FLEXIBILITY TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY IF ELECTED

Promises and proposals are a key element of every election campaign. They provide the voters with important information about the candidate and what they can expect if he or she is elected. At the same time, they begin to prescribe and limit the choices that will be available to the governor-elect. This loss of flexibility may be of extraordinary importance because newly elected governors will face continuing fiscal and management challenges.

Budget

States are expected to face continuing fiscal problems for several years. Revenue forecasts remain uncertain at best, with a number of states still unable to accurately project even short-term revenues. Moreover, new federal mandates and federal deficit reduction efforts are apt to shift additional fiscal burdens to states and localities. As a result, it is likely that funds for new programs or initiatives will be very limited or that they can be found only through the elimination or reduction of current programs.
To ensure that campaign promises can be met, candidates will want to obtain the best possible picture of the state’s fiscal condition. This information may be available in the public record, from the current administration, or from the legislature.

Every promise, whether to fund a new program or to increase or continue funding for existing programs, essentially limits new governors’ flexibility because they are forced to prepare their initial budget within a few weeks of election.

To the extent possible, financial commitments and promises should be deferred until the governor-elect has access to official data. Moreover, the fact-finding that will normally take place during the post-election transition period will often identify issues and opportunities that will need to be addressed by the new administration. In many cases, these findings may contradict input from advocates and special interest groups during the campaign itself.

Bottom Line: Recognize the unique fiscal challenges you will face during your initial years in office and prepare, to the degree possible, to respond to those challenges as you begin to govern.

**Personnel**

Any candidate is surrounded by large numbers of staff, volunteers, and other supporters. Many of these individuals may be seeking positions with the new administration if the candidate is successful. While it is likely that the candidate will be pressed to make commitments regarding appointments during the campaign, it is strongly recommended that these commitments be made only when there is a clear understanding of the job to be done and the skills necessary to do so successfully. Often, the skills critical to the success of a campaign may not be those needed to serve as the governor’s chief of staff or to manage departments and agencies.

A transition team can help ensure that the candidate has a clear understanding of the appointments that he or she will make as governor-elect and that commitments to specific positions are made only when there is a close match between the skills and philosophies of the appointees and the governor’s priorities and the skill set needed to succeed in a given role.

In thinking about agency appointments, it may be helpful to think of a management team rather than a single appointee. From a simplistic point, each agency needs a leader, a manager, and a navigator. A navigator is someone familiar with state government and agency programs and services.

Similarly, in selecting key governor’s staff, it may be helpful to understand the dual staff role of serving the governor and assisting the governor to lead and manage state government. The skills needed to succeed as a campaign manager or campaign aide may be quite different than those needed for the successful operation of the governor’s office. While there are clear examples of individuals who can combine the skills necessary to work effectively in both worlds, there are too many examples where the move from campaign leadership to leading the governor’s staff has proven unsuccessful.

Since one of the most important appointments that the governor-elect will make will be his or her chief of staff, the candidate may want to review NGA’s publication “The Many Roles of the Chief of Staff” before making a commitment.
Bottom Line: Preserve the flexibility to make specific employment promises until you have a clear understanding of the skills required for success and the skills of potential candidates. If a commitment is needed, it may be better to make a general one than to promise a specific position.

Scheduling
The governor-elect’s most valuable commodity during the transition period will be his or her time. Time will be needed to review and establish priorities for the new administration, to interview and select key appointees, to review the state’s budget, to prepare an inaugural address, to begin to interact with legislative leaders, to review the results of transition work groups, and to help prepare the family for their move into the governor’s residence and a new, more public life.

During the campaign, the candidate will receive numerous requests for post-election meetings and invitations to post-election events. With very few exceptions, the candidate should defer considering these invitations and requests until after the election.

Bottom Line: The candidate and the candidate’s staff should do everything possible to preserve flexibility in the use of post-election time. To facilitate the post-election scheduling process, a transition staff can help by identifying key tasks and unavoidable commitments.

ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

The National Governors Association (NGA) offers a number of services to assist governors-elect during the transition period.

Critical Contact Information
The staff of NGA’s Office of Management Consulting and Training (OMCT) will contact your campaign to identify key contacts and to review the services that will be available during the transition period. Immediately following the election, OMCT will also need information on key transition contacts, including your scheduler.

Reserve Time to Attend the Seminar for New Governors
Every two years, NGA conducts a “Seminar for New Governors.” A faculty of current governors provide critical advice and insights designed to help new governors-elect prepare for the transition from campaigning to leading and managing their state. Without exception, former governors highly recommend attendance at these seminars. In 2010, the Seminar for New Governors will be held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, from November 19 – 21. Our advice on scheduling flexibility notwithstanding, we recommend that you reserve this time on your calendar now to attend the Seminar for New Governors.

NGA RESOURCES

Since their initial meeting in 1908 to discuss interstate water problems, the nation’s governors have worked through the National Governors Association (NGA) to address issues of public policy and governance collectively. NGA’s ongoing mission is to support the work of governors by providing a bipartisan forum to shape and implement national policy and solve state problems. The association works closely with the administration and Congress on state-federal policy issues through its offices in Washington D.C and serves as a vehicle for sharing knowledge of
innovative programs among the states and providing technical assistance and consulting services to governors on a wide range of management and policy issues.

Transition assistance from NGA is available to newly elected governors and their staff beginning the day after election. Transition assistance includes the Seminar for New Governors, mentoring, written guidance, and staff consultation via telephone or on site at the transition office. All services are available at no cost as part of the association membership.

**Seminar for New Governors.** Every even year, NGA conducts the Seminar for New Governors. The 2010 NGA Seminar for New Governors will be held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on November 19 - 21.

**Mentoring.** NGA helps facilitate contact between veteran governors who will serve as mentors to new governors during the transition and first six months in office. Mentoring relationships and direct assistance are offered by the governor, spouse, and staff of the mentoring governor.

**Written Guidance.** NGA provides publications designed specifically for newly elected governors and transition teams on governing, organizing the transition, operating the governor’s office and dealing with critical program and management issues confronting new governors. NGA’s publication, “Transition and the New Governor: A Planning Guide” provides a comprehensive framework and detailed checklists for planning and managing an effective transition. *These NGA publications are available to candidates and their staff as requested prior to the election. In addition extensive materials relating to state policy and programs can be found on the NGA website at [www.nga.org/omct](http://www.nga.org/omct).*

**Staff Consultation.** NGA staff is available for consultation via telephone or on site at transition offices on immediate management challenges such as how to structure the office, improve operational systems and office functions, and build the governor’s team. Assistance also is available to new governors to design and facilitate a strategic review and planning retreat for the new team, conduct a management review of a new governor’s office, and provide timely research and problem-solving assistance.

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**Additional Information**

This NGA management brief was written by Barry Van Lare, senior advisor to the Office of Management Consulting and Training (OMCT). For additional information on the full range of NGA transition assistance and to arrange such services, please contact Nikki Guilford, director of OMCT at 202-624-5422 or by e-mail at nguilford@nga.org.