

Campaign to Win, Prepare to Govern

Introduction

Victorious gubernatorial candidates will have between four to ten weeks from Election Day to their inauguration — the gubernatorial transition. Understandably, the odds of a successful first year in office will increase with a well planned and executed transition period. The number of tasks that must be accomplished during the transition is daunting. Therefore, delaying transition planning until after the general election can result in a less than effective transition.

The Partnership for Public Service issued a 2010 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. “[We] 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: <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/download.php?id=118>

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 plan for the transition well before the general election. NGA is the bipartisan organization of the nation's governors that promotes visionary state leadership, shares best practices and speaks with a collective voice on national policy. NGA suggests candidates address the following to ensure a smooth and successful transition into office:

- Preserve post-election flexibility
- Assign responsibility for transition planning early;
- Begin to build a knowledge base; and
- Establish connections with NGA.

Preserve the Flexibility to Govern Effectively if Elected

Promises and proposals necessary during an election campaign may limit the choices that will be available to the governor-elect when he or she begins to govern. Flexibility is important as newly elected governors face continuing fiscal and management challenges.

Scheduling

The governor-elect's most valuable commodity during the transition period through his or her entire term in office is time. The governor-elect will need time to review and establish priorities for the new administration, interview and select key appointees, review the state's budget, prepare an inaugural address, begin to interact with legislative leaders and help prepare the family for the move into the governor's residence and a more public life.

During the campaign, the candidate will receive numerous requests and invitations for post-election meetings and events. The candidate and the candidate's staff should strive to preserve flexibility in the governor-elect's schedule post-election.

Budget

States are expected to face fiscal hardships for several years. Therefore, funds for new programs or initiatives are very limited or only possible through the elimination or reduction of current programs. To ensure that campaign promises can be met, candidates should obtain a comprehensive picture of the state's fiscal condition.

To the extent possible, financial commitments and promises should be deferred until the governor-elect has access to official state fiscal data and begins to prepare, to the degree possible, to respond to fiscal challenges facing the state.

Personnel

During the campaign, gubernatorial candidates should resist pressure to make commitments to campaign staff, volunteers and supporters regarding appointments. It is strongly recommended that commitments be made only when there is a clear understanding of the position and the skills necessary to perform the position successfully. The skills critical to the success of a campaign may not necessarily be those needed to serve the governor as a senior staff member or cabinet member. If a commitment is necessary, it may be better to make a general commitment rather than a commitment to an appointment specific position.

While considering agency appointments, it may be helpful to think of a management team rather than a single appointee. Each agency needs a leader, a manager and a navigator. The navigator should be familiar with state government and agency programs and services.

Similarly, in selecting key governor's staff, it's helpful to understand the dual staff role of serving the governor and assisting the governor to lead and manage state government. While there are clear

examples of individuals who combine the skills necessary to work effectively in both the campaign and governors' office, there are many examples where the move from campaign leadership to leading the governor's staff has proven unsuccessful.

Assign Responsibility for Transition Planning

During the campaign, it is ideal if gubernatorial candidates can establish a formal and structured approach to transition planning. Realistically, the candidate's ability to do so will be influenced by factors such as tradition, personal preference and political concerns.

If a formal or structured approach is possible, the candidate will usually name a transition director. 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.

If 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 address 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 a successful transition. Some issues that merit priority attention include:

- Documenting the critical tasks which must be completed in the two or three weeks immediately following the election;
- Determining what assistance and resources are available from the state to the governor-elect during the transition period;

- Identifying and prioritizing key appointments that will be made by the new governor and determining the skills;
- Documenting opportunities for the governor-elect to influence the development of the upcoming state budget; and
- Examining the status of key policy issues in order to begin the development of a legislative agenda.

Support from the National Governors Association

NGA offers a number of services to assist governors-elect during the transition period.

The Seminar for New Governors

Every two years, NGA conducts a Seminar for New Governors. A faculty of current governors provides critical advice and insights designed to help governors-elect prepare for the transition from campaigning to leading and managing their state. In between even-numbered years, NGA conducts customized transition briefings for governors-elect and key staff in their state capitols. The 2018 Seminar for New Governors is being held November 16-18 in Colorado.

Mentoring

NGA welcomes the opportunity to facilitate contact between veteran governors and new governors during the transition and first six months in office.

Written Guidance

NGA provides publications designed specifically for newly elected governors and transition teams about 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 provided to candidates and their staff prior to the election.*

Advocacy and Best Practices

Since their initial meeting in 1908 to discuss interstate water problems, the nation's governors have worked through the 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.

Critical Contact Information

NGA will work with your campaign to identify key campaign staff and key transition staff contacts in order to review NGA services that will be available during the transition period and throughout the administration.

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