

## Preparing Your Staff and Yourself for Life After Office

The last few months, weeks and days of an administration provide an opportunity to finish with class, integrity and restraint. The departing governor and staff should continue good management practices, even while anticipating the end of the administration. Decisions should not be made that would not be acceptable if the current administration were continuing. Expenditures should be planned at a rate that can be sustained and that will not erode budget levels for the balance of the fiscal year. Lastminute personnel reclassifications should be avoided. Maintaining the integrity of the administration extends to the immediate office as well. Drastic changes in pace can be expected in the governor's office toward the end of an administration. One former aide recalled the transformation at the end of the last legislative session "like a plug pulled from an electric clock." Whether the transformation occurs at the end of the last legislative session or the day after the general election, enthusiasm inevitably wanes, anxieties about the future intensify and animosities may develop toward the strangers who will be occupying the office. The troops need to be rallied, reassured and energized

### PREPARING YOUR STAFF

Just as help provided to the staff of an incoming administration should focus on their needs, the needs of the incumbent administration and staff cannot be neglected. Departing governors leave at a time certain. Incumbent gubernatorial staff and cabinet appointees may leave sooner than either they or their governor may wish.

Some may want to remain in state government during the next administration, while some may prefer jobs elsewhere. Others may be uncertain.

Ostensibly, all have strong loyalties to the incumbent governor. Most will be worried about breaching that loyalty if perceived to be more concerned about their own future than the current needs of their governor.

Incumbent governors should take into consideration these very human concerns of their loyalists. An overall plan should be developed to: motivate retention where needed, communicate the policy on departures and detail mechanisms for placement assistance. The incumbent governor should take the lead in clarifying his or her expectations of immediate staff and cabinet officers (e.g., stay until the end, with assistance ensured; or leave beforehand, with backup ensured). Those staff members and cabinet officers should do the same for their subordinates.

### *Maintain a Core Nucleus of Staff*

Inevitably, as the time for change in administration nears, individuals in the present administration—often in key positions—seek employment outside of government. While this cannot be prevented, there are some steps that can be taken to lessen the attrition rate and, when there are vacancies, to mitigate their effect. First, discussions with each staff member who serves "at the pleasure" of the governor regarding their future plans in the waning months should be held. Staff members may accept jobs not necessarily in their best interests because they feel pressured to take some action. Past experience has shown that if staff members are asked to stay to the end, 100 percent success will not be achieved, but the number of those who stay rises exponentially.

One can pursue certain incentives, as allowed by state law, to encourage people to remain to the end. For instance, in some states, if a person leaves their governor's office position, then a portion of the vacated salary may be apportioned among those

remaining, especially if the remaining employees take on some of the key responsibilities of the position being vacated. Inevitably, some people will leave before the end of term. As the end of the administration draws near, replacing a person with another full-time employee (FTE) may not be the wisest move. The departing individual's responsibilities should be analyzed to determine which responsibilities truly still need to be accomplished versus those that are not vital as the end of term approaches. The tasks deemed essential can be assigned to another staffer, perhaps removing some of the less essential tasks of the remaining staffer from his portfolio. Certain functions will go on unabated to the end, but the reality of no more legislative sessions and declining workloads may truly mean that it is better to re-allocate than to hire anew.

When it is necessary to fully replace a departing staffer, look within:

- Is there someone in the office who can take over that position fully and have their job responsibilities re-allocated?
- Will such a job change or promotion potentially serve a double purpose of re-energizing the remaining staffer?
- If there is no one in the governor's office suited for the position, is it possible to bring in an agency or career person on a special short-term basis to work in an area in which they had perhaps been the agency liaison and can now take the in-office slot on a temporary basis?

All of these suggestions are based on the fact that the team you have now is the best team. Bringing in a completely fresh staff member (especially if it is in a non-administrative support position) may be a burden for training or could introduce a damaging change to the staff dynamic or both.

On a parallel track, these issues apply as well to the agencies and their non-career personnel. Although the nature of the agencies' permanency makes it a somewhat different matter, it is suggested that the

governor's office staff responsible for regular supervision of the cabinet and agencies discuss these issues with agency heads as they pertain to agency staff.

## ***Prepare Staff Who Hope to Carry Over to the New Administration***

Regardless of who wins the race, the governor-elect is likely to bring in his or her people and current staff members need to be made aware that the realistic chance of continued employment for those who serve at the pleasure of the governor is slim.

Staff carryovers to a new administration are more likely when the transition is friendly and within the same party. Even so, reluctance can be anticipated. A former chief of staff explains, "An outgoing governor can expect from an incoming governor the same reluctance the outgoing governor might have felt about retaining key incumbent officials when he or she was an incoming governor."

Incoming administrations may argue the need for a clean slate, filled by those loyal to the new leader and committed to his or her policy agenda. Outgoing administrations may point to the need for governmental continuity, immediate technical competence, and professional—not just political—loyalty and commitment to the governorship rather than to a particular administration. Such arguments need not be debated; personal persuasion offers more promise. Departing governors and officials can and should lobby their incoming counterparts, where truly important and appropriate.

However, history has shown that after the first year of a new governorship, very few appointees from the previous administration are carried over permanently. Staff of the outgoing governor must recognize this reality and prepare their individual exit strategies.

## ***Provide Placement and Exit Assistance to Outgoing Staff***

Staff should be given the same care and attention at the end of an administration that was given to them at the beginning. Consequently, departing governors should determine the degree to which they will help incumbent staff and other appointees obtain new employment. Some former governors were very active and open in providing placement assistance. Others were quietly active and less visible in their efforts, perhaps reflecting a concern that “patronage-out” may be as sensitive politically as patronage-in. However, as a rule, providing placement assistance—when properly planned and sensitively given—is one way to finish an administration with class. In the words of a former governor who regretted not doing enough, “Make sure people in the administration have somewhere to go after the term ends and are on track in finding other employment.”

First and foremost, placement assistance should be given to those who need it most, such as clerical staff, and to those who are frequently overlooked, including the residence staff. Placement assistance can include personal intervention, such as contacts, lobbying, personal interviews, written recommendations or outside professional help. Governors should consider whether career counseling, advice on job-hunting strategies, résumé writing assistance and targeted training pertinent to future jobs can be offered to outgoing staff—particularly to those who have been out of the job market for a long time—that allows them to broaden their skills, knowledge and abilities and enhances their marketability. The labor departments in many states can offer assistance with future job planning activities such as résumé preparation, interview skills, negotiating skills, etc. Assistance also can be made available through referrals or by professionals who are hired to provide such support. Help to departing staff may need to extend well beyond contacts, referrals, recommendations and training. Departing staff and officials should be briefed on applicable administrative and personnel procedures (e.g., health insurance conversions, retirement fund options, the use of or payment for accumulated leave

balances), as well as any conflict of interest policies or restrictions that may affect future employment and activities. The state human resources division should prepare briefings and materials on such personnel transition issues as COBRA, retirement benefits, etc.

One detail that also needs to be considered is to what extent job seeking while still on state payroll could create conflicts of interest. It is strongly advised that legal counsel brief staff on what the effects of seeking jobs with certain employers may have on their ability to work on their regular tasks within the governor’s office and that if, as a matter of policy, the staff are allowed to seek future employment—whether or not it is immediate or planned for post-transition—they remain in touch with legal counsel in the governor’s office to ensure that ethics violations do not occur.

Some staff may want to remain in state government. Some former governors and officials have attempted to “bury” these staff members in the bureaucracy. Such protective actions should not be taken. Staff may be vulnerable to public resistance and to private retaliation and change by the next administration. One former gubernatorial aide cautions, “It’s hard to hide a red flag in the snow.”

## ***Thank Your Staff***

One area that is often neglected during the transition out is thanking the staff for their service. One former governor offers rather simple and obvious advice: “Say thank you to employees. Leave them with a good taste.” Small things such as a picture with the governor please staff members. Similarly, consider opportunities to highlight “last events”—last staff picnic or barbecue, last holiday reception in the residence, etc.—and consider how these events can be used to truly say thank you to the staff who were vital in the administration’s success. Opportunities to offer tokens of appreciation may also help with staff retention.

The transition out may be bittersweet and that should be acknowledged. However, this period can also be an exciting personal transition to the next stage of one’s

life. Make the best and most of it and urge employees to remember and appreciate the opportunity that they have had to serve at the highest and most productive levels of state government.

## PREPARING YOURSELF

Governing is not easy; not governing is not either. Making the personal transition to a new life can be very difficult for a departing governor, spouse and family. Personal concerns range from decompression to resuming private responsibilities that had been handled by staff or others during the governorship.

One former governor described in a single word the greatest problem his family experienced when he left office: “loneliness.” Another former governor illustrated his own adjustment saying “I sat in my new office the Monday after inauguration and the telephone wasn’t ringing. That was an unnerving experience.” His personal secretary—who continued in his new office—put the adjustment in perspective: “Starting anew is as difficult as going into the governor’s office.”

Starting anew for some may mean adjusting to another public office. For others, it involves a return to life as a private citizen and seemingly mundane responsibilities frequently forgotten. One three-term governor remarked, “I never realized how much of a man’s life he spends on looking for a parking space.”

The personal transition may involve some very practical considerations—future employment, housing and moving, transportation and security. It always requires special attention to self and family. Personal and special needs should be anticipated and planned with the same care given to the transition into office.

### *Plan Future Employment*

Many departing governors and spouses face the prospect of changing careers and finding new employment. That obviously requires personal time

and attention. The transition schedule should reserve time for this important matter.

Moving from the governorship to another position may carry some restrictions and most assuredly will carry residual demands. Both should be anticipated.

Departing governors should review state laws and policies on conflicts of interest or other provisions that may affect future business interests or contacts with state officials. Some states prohibit certain activities for a period of time after leaving office, such as involvement in matters decided during, or pending from, a gubernatorial administration. Regardless of any statutory restrictions, departing governors might choose to impose their own constraints. For instance, some may choose to avoid registered lobbying. Such restrictions and self-imposed constraints should be considered carefully.

The flow of gubernatorial responsibilities does not stop on a governor’s last day in office. Unfinished business must be completed, and public demands continue. Residual and continuing demands should be anticipated and factored into employment plans.

### *Plan for Move and New Housing*

For most departing governors, leaving office also means changing residences, a universally stressful experience. Future employment may dictate location. Otherwise, geographic choices must be made. One former governor advises, “The worst thing you can do is stay in the capital.”

Whether returning to a home or acquiring a new residence, a move must be planned. Personal belongings must be gathered and moved. Some household and personal effects may need to be reacquired, such as a car, furniture and even cleaning supplies. Household maintenance responsibilities should not be forgotten.

Arrangements for housing and moving can be time consuming and costly. These arrangements should be anticipated and planned accordingly.

## ***Plan for Transportation and Security***

A new governor's inauguration generally spells the end of state-provided transportation and security for the former governor. For most former governors, the removal of security protection may be a welcome relief; however, any continuing requirements should be anticipated and planned.

The loss of state-provided transportation and drivers may be more traumatic. An automobile may need to be acquired and driver's licenses renewed. One former governor suggests this remedy: "Lease a car and hire a chauffeur." A former chief of staff relays this anecdote about the more independent travails of his departing governor who "slipped out of state late in his last year in office and rented a car in New York to brush up on his driving skills. As he returned the car at LaGuardia Airport, he abruptly changed lanes and cut in front of a cab driver, who rolled down his window, swore, and made an unfriendly gesture at the governor. 'I realized then my transition out was about complete,' [the governor] said."

These examples help illustrate the obvious. Arrangements should be made for personal transportation and licenses and, if applicable, retraining in requisite skills.

## ***Attend to Family Needs***

Many of the transitional challenges that confront a departing governor extend to the spouse and family as well. Their personal adjustments should be considered carefully. Spouses may bear the brunt of the more personal transitions that must be made—their own employment, the physical move and arranging for transportation. They must prepare for change and will need help in doing so.

Special consideration also may be needed for other family members, particularly school-age children. Adjustments to new status and location can be problematic.

## ***Explore Assistance Available During Transition***

### **Research Availability of Financial Support**

State funds appropriated or reallocated for transition typically are targeted for assistance to the governor-elect. Few states earmark financial assistance for the former governor, and, in those cases, the amounts are disproportionately small and generally inadequate.

The initial demands on a former governor are substantial. An office, support staff and related supplies and equipment will be needed. When possible, post-term assistance from state government—such as a stipend, staff retention or both—should be arranged beforehand to handle residual state business. Potential sources for supplementary assistance should be explored and arranged before leaving as well.

Some former governors have obtained help from foundations, while others have arranged fellowships with universities or nonacademic institutions. Many former governors have negotiated an understanding with their new employer, such as using a portion of time and staff support for public affairs.

Some former governors have borne the post-term financial burden themselves. Advance planning might help prevent that situation.

### **Seek Advice and Technical Assistance**

Many former governors and senior staff have offered to help their counterparts—while entering or leaving office. Incumbent governors and staff who will or may be departing office can benefit from those who have done so already. Such counsel and expertise can be pursued directly or arranged through NGA Consulting.

NGA Consulting can also help provide or arrange more intensive transition assistance. Such consultation can be tailored to the specific concerns and needs of an incoming or outgoing administration. And, as former governors and staff advise, the earlier the better.

## ***Manage the Months Following the End of Term***

### **Prepare to Handle Correspondence and Calls**

Much of what former governors do during their initial months out of office is essentially state business. For many, the volume of correspondence and calls is substantial and, for some, rather staggering. Too few receive adequate assistance from the state. More often than not, former governors must look for staff help and forbearance from new employers, or take on the burden themselves, a situation described by one former governor as “shameful.”

Demands on a recently departing governor (and spouse) run the gamut from residual gubernatorial correspondence to myriad requests for assistance—from the general public, former staff and even his or her successor. In transitional terms, the tables are now turned. The new governor now can help the former governor, by arranging for office space and staff. Indeed, retaining one or more former staff for a reasonable time may be an attractive alternative for a new administration, whose own staff may be overwhelmed with its own business. A cooperative transition might encourage such an arrangement.

A departing governor should anticipate these needs. Office and secretarial support should be planned and arranged before their governorship terminates.

### **Continue Involvement in State Affairs**

Incumbent governors spend a great deal of time during their administrations speaking about public issues and appearing at public functions. Such demands do not cease when leaving office.

Former governors are frequently pressured or personally tempted to comment on the new governor and administration. Some do and some do not. One who would not explained: “I imposed a moratorium on myself relative to issues, with no time limitations, because I did not believe I should be second-guessing a new governor. If I had wanted to, then I should have run for office again.” A former governor should set his or her own policy and follow it accordingly.

Involvement in and commentary on more generic public issues, such as education and the economy, may be more situational, depending on the issue and its importance to the former governor. Continuing demands can be expected for political and personal appearances, public statements, speeches and service on various boards or commissions. Some welcome the opportunity. Others prefer to take a less active role. Whether active or passive, a policy should be established on dealing with public issues and public appearances.

Former governors can also expect a variety of requests for personal help, including political advice, letters of introduction and assistance with business problems. These add to the pressures of other demands on a former governor’s time and schedule, and may call for scheduling assistance.

Approaches for controlling and managing these demands again are situational and personalized. One former governor responds “by saying ‘no’ frequently, but not with great success.” Another governor reports: “I have begun to tell some that I am in the practice of law and will have to charge for my time.”

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