

## Steps for Successful Succession Planning

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As we spend many late nights researching, cramming, absorbing for our upcoming midterms, many of us can't forget the next greatest MSA milestone: MSA Elections. Yes, that potentially ugly and somewhat stressful time of the year. What does our MSA look like? Who will be good for what position? Who should we nominate? Unfortunately, many times that is as far as our thoughts reach. We forget that it's not enough to just elect a new board.

As MSAers across North America it is our duty to establish long term goals and strategies to promote the development of more mature MSAs. We need to start thinking long term, beyond this semester or this year. Just as we'd receive training when starting a new job, it is crucial that our MSA Leadership also be trained.

But how do we do this? Well first of all, we need a plan...a succession plan. A succession plan is vital for retaining and developing a MSA's culture, knowledge, and networking base. It determines, "an ongoing process of systematically identifying, assessing, and developing talent to ensure the leadership continuity for all key positions in an organization." A succession plan extends beyond finding the right person for the right job and encompasses the projected future needs of an organization: What talents does our MSA lack, where will we find these talents, and how can we develop them so that our MSA can grow into being better year after year?

An effective succession plan makes sure to:

- Identify the competencies critical to an MSA.
- Detail the roles and responsibilities of each level or position.
  - Don't forget to stress the weight of each position.
- Establish means for evaluating and monitoring each role and/or responsibility
- Describe and detail which programs the MSA wishes to implement
- Establish means for evaluating and monitoring each program
- Define the means to be used to support such programs and all individual involved
- Establish methodology for developing a sound knowledge base.
  - How can we establish organization maturity?
  - How can we generate a regular schedule of events?
  - How can we avoid/prevent rework?

But how do I develop a succession plan? Don't worry its easy, just follow these four steps.

Step 1: Establishing Objectives

First things first, we need to know what the jobs are and what everyone's job is. It's not safe to assume that, for instance, the secretary knows it's his or her duty to take meeting minutes. Not everyone was involved in high school activity clubs. So to make things easier, define each of the roles on the MSA board and what the responsibilities of each position entail. For many MSAs, these definitions can be easily found and modified in their organization's constitution.

Now that we know what everyone's job is, we need to figure out what we want our MSA to accomplish. Do we want to establish weekly halaqas, raise 10k for a charitable cause, build ties with other organizations, what do we want to do? What can we accomplish this year and what do we want to have accomplished in 3, 5, or even 10 years? The key here is to establish long and short term goals for your MSA. Then from that analyze the current state of your MSA. What talents do we have to help us fulfill our goals, what talents do we need, what talents do we need to develop? Look at the activities of the past year for what worked and what didn't. Don't forget to look at your MSAs history. Rework, is our worst enemy and should be avoided at all costs. Finally make sure to see what external factors can affect your goals.

## Step 2: Creating a Formalized Succession Plan

We know our jobs and we know our goals, now we have allocate and see who is best suited for taking on which jobs. Keep in mind the strengths and weaknesses of individuals to make sure you that the best person is truly selected for each position. It is also very important to take members' schedules into considering. A certain br/sr may be perfect for a job, but if you know they are too busy to take on the task, assign it to someone else.

Lastly, it is crucial to set up an evaluation method. Set milestones to determine if the right selections have been made. It's okay to move people around. Remember the objective is to complete the goal in the best possible manner for the sake of Allah (swt). Don't make things personal.

## Step 3: Implementation

Now its time to make it happen! Make sure that your succession plan is agreed upon by board and other key MSA members. Also develop a list of tactics that will help you implement your plan. For instance, if it's easier to keep alumni board members as advisors if elections are held in December instead of May, do it.

Document EVERYTHING. I'm serious, it's best to create a history for future MSAs to refer to. Keep track of how events played out from beginning to end. Keep project/program event guidelines and calendars to help plan for next year. Reports of meeting minutes, financial statements, event evaluations, and feed back will only help improve the quality of future activities as well as provide a starting point. Don't leave out networking and contact information. Also make introductions in person. It is easier

to maintain current relations then to create new ones. Have senior members personally introduce the new board. That helps make people real, instead just being a title.

#### Step 4: Monitoring, Evaluating, and Revising

MSAs are dynamic. As your MSA grows and matures so will its needs, goals, and objectives. So modify your plan to suit your MSA. Conduct evaluations at the end of each semester, each year, or even after an important event. Document what worked, what didn't work and why. Just as rework is the enemy for you, you want to protect future MSAs from it as well. Then adjust your succession plan.

Ultimately, an effective succession plan will help your MSA by establishing valuable training goals, improving community relationships, and promoting a positive image of your MSA. Inshallah this in turn will help your MSA retain members and board members (less burn out), work for a greater cause (with defined short and long term objectives), and improve MSA member satisfaction overall.

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<sup>i</sup> Hagberg Consulting Group