

About Face – A Guide to Founder Transition

by Debora Ott

About Face - A Guide to Founder Transition, is a 61-page monograph presenting eight case studies of founder transitions at community arts organizations including: AMAS Musical Theatre, The Children’s Carnival, The Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center, The Guild Complex, Third World Newsreel, The Thurber House and The Caribbean Cultural Center.

The monograph contains a detailed study of *Just Buffalo* literary center, inc., the organization founded by the author, in which founder, board, support staff and new leader points of view of are discussed. Also considered are knowing when to leave, finding the right consultant, the search process and post-transition compensation for the founder. Useful appendices of tools and instruments developed during *Just Buffalo's* transition process are included, such as the founder's task-oriented job description, a job announcement for the position opening, interview questions and a scorecard for evaluating interviewees. The Fall 2002 *Grantmakers in the Arts* “Reader’s Review” of *About Face* offered that “this monograph contains a rich range of individual and organizational experiences. Most founders will recognize themselves and their organizations in one or more of these scenarios...It is a must-read guide for any board dealing with leadership transition—founder or otherwise...[About Face] includes information and insights of interest to any founder considering her or his own leave-taking.”

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Introduction

Two years ago, when I couldn't remember the phone number of *Just Buffalo*, the organization I had founded over two decades before, a sense of completion spread through me and settled slowly as a smile on my lips. The feeling of closure and satisfaction, so heady after my initial surprise, left me thinking "I have finally arrived;" I knew my lapse was a grace note of letting go.

Like other individuals of my generation, I founded a cultural organization in the mid-'70s when government support of the arts was well-established, and there was growing recognition of the arts' contribution to a community's quality of life. I was driven by the desire to make cultural offerings more diverse in my adopted city of Buffalo, New York, and by the conviction that artists were deserving of respect, audience and compensation for their work. For a time, my life and the life of the organization were synonymous. For a time - ten years to be exact - my goal was to make myself dispensable so that the organization I founded would be sustained beyond my tenure and truly be owned by its board and the community that it served. How I did this is central to the concerns of this monograph. My story is blended with wisdom and advice from others, and is intended for use by individuals and organizations who want to plan, craft and implement successful founder transitions of their own.

Some basic principles and issues of founder transition are discussed alongside eight case studies of nonprofit organizations; readers are encouraged to select or modify a transition model that will work best for them. Tools and resources are included as sidebars and appendices, as well as contact information for consultants who have expertise to share.

Unanticipated transitions - those due to death or relatively sudden decisions to leave - will not be detailed in this monograph, nor will transitions in which a founder is fired abruptly by her/his board for misconduct or incompetence. Preparation for such emergencies is discussed, however, in *Emergencies & Sudden Departures*, as even a non-founder's sudden departure can shock an organization's soul. Regardless of the scenario, the reader is encouraged to view the board's engagement in true stewardship as a strong indicator of any transition's success. Consider the age-old question, "What would happen if the founder got hit by a truck?" and embrace planning as part of your organizational culture. For, according to arts management consultant Greg Kandel, the usual founder-driven board dynamic has to change if the organization is to survive the transition, and much is predetermined five to ten years before the actual transition occurs.

Know When to Hold It

To prepare for a successful transition, a founder's nature and temperament must be understood. Founders in general are compelling and self-directed individuals with a mission to fulfill. They tend to be controlling, though their temperaments and reasons for wanting or needing control differ. Whether or not a founder really wants her/his organization to be sustained is fundamental to the success of the transition. Since the board will hire the next leader, it must ask the founder if s/he really wants the organization to continue on an ongoing basis. Planning is lip service without asking this question. If the founder answers "yes," additional questions must be asked: Is there agreement that the organization should continue? What is the compelling case? Is it accepted and deeply held by enough good people? These are difficult questions, and the biggest indicator of failure is not asking them.

Since the founder is most often the one who brought the board in, s/he has to have worked aggressively against the board's usual dynamic of offering deference and not challenge. When a founder wants an organization to sustain itself beyond her/his tenure, s/he is likely to be willing to help create that possibility, but not all founders have the temperament to do this even with the will. If planned succession is not possible, practical or desirable, a valuable community organization can sometimes be sustained by merging with a like-minded organization or by seeking shelter under the umbrella of a larger institution such as a gallery, community center, museum, university or arts center.

Know When to Fold It

Many an organization's service is rendered complete with the term of its founder. There is no shame in this, and the tent-folding nature of the arts world is rife with examples of organizations that strike camp and move on. There is often a real need to let an organization fold, and there are a lot of symptoms that indicate movement in this direction. Not enough founders, however, admit that they don't want an organization to continue even if they know it should not. If the founder doesn't want a challenging voice on the board, for instance, what does this behavior indicate, and how does it relate to founder-dynamics with others? Many transition failures can be traced to the dynamic of the founder's temperament along with that of others. The new leader will be different, but how different does the organization want to envision itself going forward? If the founder abused her/his position of leadership, does the community want to deal with the organization's continuing?

Know When to Walk Away

The founder's drive, passion, and vision keep an organization moving forward from its inception, but beyond the founding genius, many more skills must be mastered for an organization to thrive. Consultant John Taylor notes that many founders don't have the skill sets necessary to develop organizational support systems that maintain operations, as they are often more animated by ideas than by matters of system and collective engagement. The smart ones bring in that kind of counsel, delegating responsibility for managing the administrative affairs of the organization, while continuing to be the organization's artistic director and leader. The majority of founders, however, don't get their organizations built up beyond an initial dream as they are neither interested in nor, in some cases, capable of, moving beyond it. Consider, for a moment, the irony of the definitions of the word *founder* in this light: as a noun it means *originator*, as a verb it means *to take on water and sink*. Management consultant Susan Kenny Stevens also refers to this dichotomy.

It is rare that a visionary founder knows when it is time to move over and make room for a "builder" to move in. When this wisdom does greet the need, it is important that the authority, responsibilities and reporting requirements of each one of these individuals are defined, as well as their relationship to each other. It helps if there is board interface - weekly meetings with designated trustees, for example - to smooth the way toward effective communications.

Staying Afloat and Moving Ahead

In "Helping Founders Succeed," Susan Kenny Stevens compares the founder's calling or mission to classic entrepreneurial characteristics including intensity, self-determination and urgency. She relies on research conducted by George Rubenson and Anil Gupta from a longitudinal study of "initial leadership" in Fortune 1000 companies to conclude that as long as founders can put their organization's requirements ahead of their own inclinations, they will not automatically doom or derail their company's growth and/or development. According to Stevens, three stages of separation lead to successful transitions: Delegation, Separate Identities and Institutionalization, each stage leading from being "the one" to being "one of." As it is a founder's values and aspirations that constitute her/his legacy, Stevens suggests that founders identify what their values are and seed them throughout the organization during the institutional stage before they step down (26-29).

Most successors to long-term executives in community-based nonprofits have a difficult role, and many leave. Sometimes it is the leader chosen after the immediate successor who succeeds. Smaller nonprofits in particular are often faced with so many challenges - they need money (always), board leadership, competent staff and so on - that a change in management can often prove quite damaging. It's hard to follow a founder, and if a successor just tries to manage her/his way through the transition and does not prepare for the special challenges it poses, s/he may not succeed. To reinvigorate, maintain or galvanize an organization's purpose takes time - for planning and implementation, for gathering resources - both human and financial; and it takes energy - realized as commitment from the founder, board and staff as well as the constituencies that the organization serves.

Emergencies and Sudden Departures

An easy first step toward preparing for emergencies is to store important information in an accessible place known to key staff and board officers. Keep it current. Include documents such as:

- o Lists of board members, staff, funders and program partners with contact information
- o A schedule of deadlines for the year's grants and reports
- o Important papers such as the organization's 501(c)(3) designation letter from the IRS, its state Charities Registration, Articles of Incorporation, banking resolutions, etc.
- o Papers that describe the people of the organization, and especially the dynamics among them
- o A description of sensitive issues not covered by mere lists

Internal leadership ready to rise to the top would obviously make a difference in an organization. It's unlikely there will be a cadre of people poised to become leaders, however, if the founder was the type of person who took it upon her/himself to take care of everything. This type of founder also tends to choose people that appeal to her/him when forming an organization and board members' loyalty to the founder is key. These organizations may be faced with a struggle once the founder is gone.

San Francisco Performances developed founder succession strategies in 1999, and each year the board designates a Succession Committee of three trustees to review and assess the status of the policies with the founder. An operating timeline is also developed annually; it allows the board and staff to see the activities of the organization month by month. In the event that there's an emergency and the founder is expected to return to work, the board designates one or two staff directors to be in charge of operations and one or two staff directors to be in charge of programming on an interim basis; they report to the Board of Trustees. Each year the founder helps determine which staff directors should be so designated. The founder also reviews and updates the organizational structure and operating timeline.

In the event of an emergency, where the founder is not expected to return to work, the emergency measures delineated above go into effect immediately. In addition, the Succession Committee engages a professional search consultant to draw up a job description for an Executive Director, and it establishes a Search Committee of trustees, staff and knowledgeable outside representatives to approve the job description, identify qualified internal and outside candidates, interview qualified candidates (who have been screened by the consultant), and make candidate recommendations to the full Board of Trustees. The organization has developed a strategy for a planned transition as well.

***Just Buffalo* literary center, inc., Buffalo, New York - A Case Study**

I decided to step down from my position at *Just Buffalo* for personal reasons in the fall of 1996. I told no one at first as the implications of my departure were far reaching and I wanted to have a plan in place prior to any announcement. My partner of several years had presented me with an offer I just couldn't refuse - a chance to move south (after having lived nearly thirty years in Buffalo, New York), and not have to work 24/7 sustaining a cultural institution. It was also an opportunity to regroup at midlife and pursue interests I'd put aside while building *Just Buffalo*, like writing and teaching, making art instead of presenting it, and having a personal life alongside a professional life - things that hadn't come easily during *Just Buffalo's* formative years when as a single mom I juggled the needs and the dreams of my daughters with the demands of a burgeoning literary center.

My vision of building community through the written and spoken word having been realized, I knew that *Just Buffalo* was also in an excellent position for a transition. It was financially secure and had a strong and committed Board of Directors and staff. It had stable program partnerships that had been cultivated in collaboration with businesses, educational and cultural institutions as diverse as the Bisons baseball team, the Albright Knox Art Gallery, the Buffalo Board of Education and the local

National Public Radio affiliate WBFO, to name a few. Its programs and publications had achieved national and regional recognition apart from their identification with me, and the number of writers, teachers, students and readers it served had grown exponentially in just over two decades. The organization that I had willed and shaped into existence, that I had dreamed up at my dining room table, refined in my attic and realized in the community had grown into a viable institution, and I felt comfortable moving on. By the close of 1997, my last year as Director, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) had awarded *Just Buffalo* primary institution status, and I accepted the Governor's Arts Award for Excellence in the Arts at Lincoln Center.

Reaching Out by Reaching In

Before crafting the transition plan, I consulted Helen Cash Jackson, Program Director of NYSCA's Special Arts Services (SAS) Program, and Barbara Ho, Program Associate, as their Technical Assistance Program (TAP), now in its eleventh year, had supported many consultancies for successorship. TAP facilitates sustained long-term impact on the institutional development of emerging and developing multicultural arts organizations by strengthening their managerial infrastructure. Developed in conjunction with the field, TAP offers an excellent opportunity for consultants and organizations to solve key managerial issues over an extended period of time. The issue of successorship was a priority for TAP; its successorship project was in its seventh year when I contacted Helen and Barbara. They advised that eighteen to twenty-four months were optimum to effectively deal with the emotional and practical aspects of a transition (see Transition Tips). I went back to Buffalo and talked to my Board President, Paul Battaglia. We agreed that in eighteen to twenty-four months we could set a timetable, refine the transition plan with the staff and board, gain the confidence of funders, strengthen our cash reserves, conduct the search, and mentor and train a successor. I laid out my initial plan for the transition (which was later refined by the *Just Buffalo* board), and we discussed how and when we'd announce my departure to the board and to funders.

I was certain I'd have few problems letting go as I felt ready for this move, but I had to make sure I took care of my needs as well as those of the organization. In corporate America, the founder is given a "golden parachute" when s/he retires. But I was working for a cultural nonprofit. I just wanted to land with my feet on the ground.

Just Buffalo's transition took place at the beginning of its fiscal year when the following year's grants and the prior year's final reports and audit were due. I considered the resources (human and financial) that it would take to make this leap successful and thought it best to be available to the organization for at least a year after my departure. Because I wanted to be totally available to the new Director for the first six months of the transition, it meant not accepting other work during that time. I also wanted to make

sure that several new initiatives I was developing - a real estate project, a major audience development project and a speakers series with the University at Buffalo - would all fly without taxing the incoming Director.

The Pitch

I proposed that I'd work with the new Director in a consultant capacity for one year, limiting my work in the second year to a couple of special projects if needed - the speaker series and the audience development project. As I planned to work as an arts management consultant after I left *Just Buffalo*, it made sense for it to be my first client. The proposed work provided continuity for the organization and me. It allowed me to share years of experience and knowledge with the new Director while slowly letting go of the organization's needs and my need for the organization. We had, after all, been very tied up in each others' lives. It helped that I was moving out of town.

Salary was an issue my last year on the job as I had been compensated for years below industry standards; there was no way we were going to attract a qualified candidate through a national search with the salary I had been making. I conducted a salary/benefits assessment in January 1997 by surveying cultural organizations in Western New York and beyond. Although salaries at *Just Buffalo* were equal to or greater than those in some WNY organizations of similar size, they were low when compared to literary centers in like-sized cities across the country. I included a 30% raise for myself the last year I worked as Director at *Just Buffalo*. This provided a reality check for the board, and I felt well compensated (at last). I was asked to leave the room during the budget deliberations - first time ever - but in the end the board approved the raise and understood why it was necessary. Other staff members were given raises as well.

Parallel Lives

My post-transition compensation as a consultant was calculated to equal two-thirds of my annual salary the last year I was on the job. This provided me with an ongoing sense of economy, and enabled me to build my consultant practice gradually once I stepped down. By helping the incoming Director get started, I was also bridging a gap in staffing that we'd identified early on in the transition process. I had suspected that I'd been doing the work of two people for some time based on the pace I kept up (my close friends called me "Streak" - the verb, not the noun), and since the incoming Director could not be expected to do the same, I had to find a way to demonstrate this to my board. I drafted a task-oriented job description to evaluate my role in the organization; and to prove my point I listed all of the things I was responsible for at *Just Buffalo* and presented the list to the Executive Committee (see Appendix A).

Everyone at the retreat planning sessions agreed that the position of Program Director should be created to support the work of the new Director. The board concluded that it would be difficult to secure resources for this new full-time position during the transition, that the new Director would most likely want to make the hire her/himself, and that s/he could start considering the ideal candidate and the hiring process after six months on the job. They felt strongly that if the new Director was from out of town, someone locally should be hired as Program Director or the organization would not be able to maintain its inside track in the community. We updated the Executive Director's job description and developed a list of tasks for the Program Director, including additional marketing responsibilities, based on the task-oriented job description I had drafted.

My role during and after the transition was defined, establishing clear lines of authority with the new Director as boss. An Upstate Challenge Grant from NYSCA helped us increase our cash reserve and provided some funding for consultant fees in year one of the transition. A Stabilization Grant from the Arts Council in Buffalo & Erie County, as well as an increase in funds from Erie County contributed to making my work possible. A subsequent request to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) helped with salaries and the cash reserve; however, the part of the request to continue the consultancy for a second year was turned down. The position of Program Director remains vacant at this writing, and the speaker series with the University was never realized as planned.

Finding a Consultant

At first we had not considered hiring a consultant to work with us around the transition, though in retrospect I'm glad we did. There was (and is) a rich pool of talented individuals on *Just Buffalo's* board, and the organization was (and is) well versed in long-range planning. One of our funders, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (LWRDF, now named the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds), insisted that we do so. As we were in the midst of a major audience development project with them, the Audiences for Literature Network (ALN), we wanted to maintain their confidence in the viability of the organization.

We had already engaged a consultant to facilitate Board planning sessions for the ALN audience development project. Finding someone experienced in founder/director transitions within cultural institutions was much more difficult. I called colleagues locally and at literary centers across the U.S.; I called NYSCA and the NEA. Since a transition consultant had not been part of our annual budget, I was especially concerned about the cost. I interviewed people on the phone to ascertain fees, availability and experience. People referred me to people.

Gigi Bradford, who was then Director of the Literature Program at the NEA, mentioned John Taylor who had served as a panelist for the NEA. He was known at the LWRDF, and several colleagues I admired and respected had suggested him as well. John is a nimble thinker. He is insightful, responsive, and he likes challenges. He fit right in at *Just Buffalo*. An interesting footnote is that I'd called Ed Taylor, my successor, thinking he might be able to recommend some consultants from his days at the NEA Advancement Program. That is how he first learned about the position opening. Small world. Really.

Retreats and Planning

My first face-to-face meeting with John was in North Carolina in June of 1997. He explained that care in the appointment of a new Executive Director must be taken as we were moving from an era of visionary risk-taking individuals in the arts to an MBA platform of arts administrators that have bottom-line-driven skills. They tend to consolidate—throw programs out—and though that might look good to a mostly businesslike board and may make financial sense, it doesn't make community sense. The candidate's profile and other issues were discussed: Were we looking for a visionary or a manager?

Should we conduct a local or national search? What would the ideal candidate's educational background and work and life experiences look like? What was the salary level we had considered?

Board and staff retreats were held over a two-day period in early July. They provided an opportunity to craft the transition plan and to draft the goals and objectives of a three-year audience development plan for ALN. We used facilitated retreats to:

Re-examine the organization's mission

Explore the ideal candidate's profile, characteristics and qualifications

Examine board and staff fears and apprehensions concerning the transition

Determine if the new Executive Director should be a visionary or a manager

Conduct a self-assessment

Identify staffing and staff needs

Define my role as outgoing Director

The board's first thought was to look for a visionary with some management experience to fill the Executive Director's position. They reasoned they could always find someone who could "backfill" operations' needs. As retreat planning sessions continued, however, they became concerned that a visionary might scrap the ALN audience development plan. Their conclusion by retreat's end was that the organization was already blessed with strong vision in its programs, and since they'd gone through the ALN process to refine them, they wanted to hire someone to carry out the plan and make adjustments if needed. All maintained that the new Director needed to have a passion for literature, a commitment to *Just Buffalo's* mission, a knowledge and appreciation of contemporary writing, and a proven track record in fundraising, board relations, and community outreach through the arts. Preferred qualifications were also listed, including: must be energetic; well-organized; have good leadership, interpersonal, and decision-making skills; possess excellent written and oral communication skills and have a demonstrated ability in arts management or the equivalent in nonprofit management with an emphasis on long-range planning.

Because a transition in board leadership paralleled the founder transition at *Just Buffalo*, the "board created the position of President-Elect the year prior to my departure. Its intention was to provide the incoming President with an opportunity for "on-the-job training." The by-laws were amended the following spring permitting the Board President (whose term was due to expire) to continue for a one-year "transition term" as Immediate Past President. The position of President-Elect was also added as a board office for use in times of transition. Hal Payne, who had served as President-Elect for one year before becoming Board President, found it helpful that thought had been given to creating the President-Elect and Immediate Past President structure. It enabled him to prepare for the presidency and observe the position with the knowledge that he would be stepping into it. It also gave the board a chance to adjust to the idea that there was going to be a new President. Equally important to Hal was that Paul Battaglia, the past President, remained on the board. Paul was instrumental in evaluating and amending the by-laws; the evaluation of the new Director was made easier due to his presence as well.

The Board's Response

Though individual board members responded differently to my leaving and were all saddened, they were supportive. They understood that change creates opportunity,

and they worked hard to define which opportunities to take advantage of during the transition. One board member, whose term was nearly up and who had served the organization since its inception, saw it as an opportunity to step down. Another didn't feel guilty when she left the board to accept a new position at a university. She recognized that my departure as the driving force of the organization was not disastrous because I had notified the board of my interest to move on well in advance of my actually leaving. She also knew that the organization was in capable hands and was certain that its general good health would help prevent panic. Board and organizational problems were minimized as we worked through the transition process together with the advice of our consultant. Hal Payne, our President-Elect, noted that because funding was in place to ensure my continued presence, the burden of inculcating a new Executive Director did not fall solely on the board. Former board member Courtney Walsh observed that board members who may have been inclined to be more involved as energies and had drifted off-point over time, sought to be redirected.

The first response board member Sandra Mobley-Terry had to my intended departure was fear - fear about the future of the organization in general, and fear that we would not find the appropriate person to carry out the board's and my vision in particular. Her commitment to the organization became stronger in response, as did her desire to maintain the organization's presence in the community. On reflection, she shared that it is almost impossible to relieve the awkwardness of transition and doesn't feel that it should be dragged out.

Board member Janet Kaye remembers being acutely aware of how much the success of the real estate project we were involved in depended upon the goodwill, connections and powers of persuasion that I had; and she and others were quite anxious about whether *Just Buffalo* could see the project through after my departure. The projected multi-arts facility included new office and workshop space for *Just Buffalo* and, as a project leader, I had gotten the board to sign on as fiscal agent. Board members worried about exposure for themselves and for the organization should it not be realized; one board member resigned because she was scared of the board's fiduciary obligation. Our Board President researched the issue and assured board members that they would not be personally liable. Leadership within the project shifted to a committee, my successor joined the committee, and the design plans were modified. The board recommitted itself to the project, and the idea of making it work took hold as they sorted through its remaining details.

Avoid Radical Departures

During the year or two before my departure there were many discussions at board meetings and retreats about the direction *Just Buffalo* should take for greater visibility and income. Ideas included writing workshops at corporations and outreach to suburban children and adults. Marketing studies, focus groups and retreat sessions all indicated that we should maintain our connection to engaged writers while cultivating support among readers and mainstream audiences - a new venture. The Lila Wallace - Readers Digest Fund (LWRDF) advised that we avoid radical departures or undertaking new ventures during the transition, and they suggested that we enhance an existing program with a strong track record instead.

We agreed to focus on only one of our traditional audiences - school-age populations. As *Just Buffalo* was the only organization within the Audiences for Literature Network (ALN) with well-developed arts-in-education programs, we understood that our gift to the field would be significant even in our audience development plan's revised form. This was not an easy decision, but it was a simple and wise one. The demonstrated need to expand our markets and the new project ideas we generated remained with the organization and the board; some were explored under the new Executive Director.

To maintain confidence in our transition process, I kept in close contact with the LWRDF during the search, interview and selection process. LWRDF's concern reinforced what we already knew - that the program plan was only as good as the organization's ability to carry it out. By including staff at the LWRDF in the process, they came to understand that we had attracted individuals worthy of the position. In securing *Just Buffalo's* place in ALN, I was able to hand over a well-wrought audience development plan to my successor. For me, it was a parting gift to the organization as well.

The Executive Search Committee

The makeup of the Executive Search Committee was diverse in every aspect, and this balance gave birth to a focused and fair process. It was composed of five people, three women and two men, all of whom had strong ties to the organization historically. Three were from *Just Buffalo's* board, including the President (its chair) and the President-Elect; two were from the community, including the Arts Council Director and a former board member with human resources expertise. Two were professional writers, three had law degrees, and two had extensive experience conducting searches. It was suggested that this committee might be the core of individuals to monitor the process after the hire was made. Janet Kaye accepted the invitation to serve on the committee because it was vital to her that our increasing - and important - emphasis on marketing be done in conjunction with, and not at the expense of, our mission. She felt *Just*

Buffalo needed a new Director who would remain committed to giving voice to emerging writers, and she wanted to ensure that the organization remained committed to placing writers in city as well as suburban schools, thereby benefiting children regardless of the monetary contribution their parents could make.

The Executive Search Committee invited me to join them as both witness and expert, a non-voting staff member and silent partner if you will. I was present at the interviews and offered insight, when asked, into the position and the candidate's ability or qualifications. I also facilitated correspondence to the candidates and between the consultant and the committee as per the committee's instruction. Other community members were invited to serve as outside experts as needed. Each had a connection to the organization and a vested interest in its ability to remain stable over time. Committee and former board member Susan Swarts reflected that the dynamics of the team were such that they complimented each others' strengths and challenged each other just enough to inch the process along to a better outcome.

Timetable and Budget

The timetable for the search process was set by working backwards from my anticipated exit date of December 31, 1997, with the new Director starting at the beginning of *Just Buffalo's* fiscal year on January 1. Preparing for the interviews took longer than anticipated, as did the interview and selection processes itself. I agreed to push my departure date back one month to the end of January, 1998. In the timetable below, revisions are indicated where appropriate:

Original	Revised	Task
April-May '97	no change	Selection of Transition Consultant
June 26	no change	Initial Meetings with Transition Consultant
July 10 & 11	no change	Board/Staff Retreats
August 15	no change	Public Announcement of Position Opening
September 30	no change	Resume Closure
November 15	December	Selection Process Concluded

December 1 late December Offer Extended
January 1, 1998 February 2, 1998 New Director Begins

The interview process actually commenced on November 23, and staff interviewed the final three candidates between December 2 and 13, 1997.

The transition budget included money for: 1) consultant fees for meetings and a board retreat; 2) other retreat and meeting expenses; 3) advertising; 4) transportation for incoming candidates; 5) relocation of the incoming Executive Director.

Announcing the Position Opening

We understood that we'd most likely get what we said we were looking for, so we were very careful when drafting the position description and the job announcement, considering legal requirements as well (see Appendix B & C). We relied on news coverage of the transition and not on advertising locally, as we didn't want to get swamped with resumes from unqualified candidates. Press releases focused on my relocation to Atlanta for personal reasons, assured that I would be in a continuing relationship with the organization, and included the organization's high achievements - such as receiving the Governor's Arts Award, inclusion in the ALN project, and examples of our support to writers early on in their careers such as United States Poet Laureate Rita Dove. Throughout, the community was urged not to anticipate a decline in the quality of our programs.

I compiled a list of over two hundred professional associations, related national agencies, literary centers, and organizations that received funding from NYSCA and the NEA and sent them a one-page personal letter asking them to help us identify qualified candidates. I included information about the organization's programs, audiences, long-range plans, and the job announcement and resume deadline. It was staff's responsibility to announce the opening in *Just Buffalo's* calendar and to take out ads in national trade publications such as *Art Job*, NSFRE's newsletter (National Society of Fundraising Executives, now named the Association of Fundraising Professionals), and *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Ads were also placed in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Internet sites for the NEA, NYSCA, Amazon.com and the New York Foundation for the Arts' *FYI* were also explored for ad/announcement placement.

The Selection Process

The selection process was guided by the following outline:

1. Initial screening of candidates using a standard evaluation format
2. Executive Search Committee consensus on final four candidates
3. Format developed for interview:
 - A) Initial phone conversation to determine interest
 - B) Phase I interview
 - C) Phase II interview
4. Candidate selection
5. Transition plan implementation

Screening of Applications

As the staff representative to the Executive Search Committee, I reviewed all incoming resumes to make sure that candidates were qualified for the position based on the criteria we had set forward; of the 35+ resumes we received, only a few were not. Each committee member reviewed the resumes of all qualified candidates using a rating sheet we had developed to assess skill sets; the rating was not for the purpose of ranking by numerical score (see Appendix D).

The Executive Search Committee met in early November to reach consensus on four final candidates to interview. They also developed a "B" list of candidates for consideration, although the individuals' strengths did not closely match those on the "A" list. I drafted a letter to send to candidates who were not being considered, and faxed it to the Board President for his approval and signature. A separate rejection letter was sent to two candidates encouraging them to continue on their career paths in arts administration. The process work conducted in advance by the committee resulted in a very professional, comprehensive and fair candidate assessment.

The Interviews

Candidates were telephoned to determine their interest in the position prior to scheduling interviews. The committee decided to do the Phase I interview with the

West Coast candidate on the phone and would have flown her in for a second interview had she been one of the finalists for the position. Of the remaining three candidates, two lived in Western New York (WNY) and one in the Mid-Atlantic region. All interviewed in Buffalo, and transportation costs were paid as applicable.

The Executive Search Committee developed lists of questions for each phase of the interview process seeking feedback from John Taylor along the way. Phase I interviews focused on the individual's values, work experience and leadership style, and questions progressed from the personal to the organizationally specific level (see Appendix E). Phase II interviews focused on the candidate's knowledge of *Just Buffalo's* mission, vision, strengths, challenges, and opportunities (see Appendix F). Candidates were sent packets that included the organization's by-laws, the Executive Director position description, the mission, and program literature and information.

Candidates were also sent interview questions in advance so they could be well-prepared; each candidate was asked the same questions. Spontaneous questions were asked on site, and candidates did not have access to these beforehand. John suggested we watch the candidates' eyes, hands and body language as that's how they would present themselves, if hired, when representing our organization. He also told us to consider how adept and reflective they were, and to note if they could go from one crisis or issue to another and how smoothly they could do so. Although the committee had hoped to reduce the candidate pool to two after the first round of interviews, three candidates were brought in for second interviews.

In Phase II, candidates were asked to identify and describe how they'd manage challenges facing the organization; how they'd insure the financial and artistic vitality of the organization; and how they'd transition into the organization knowing they were succeeding a founder. During the spontaneous questions, they were informed that I had been engaged as a consultant, and were asked how they'd handle that, how they'd use me, and if they were comfortable with this arrangement. Before the interview concluded, each candidate was asked to choose one of three scenarios and develop a five- to ten-minute presentation. They were able to leave the room for up to fifteen minutes to prepare. Presentation scenarios were not shared with the candidates in advance of the interview.

References were verified by the committee from both on and off each candidate's list. For example, if candidate "A" had listed five places of employment and cited individuals at two of them as references, a Committee member would call the designated references, and call at least one other past employer as well. This system provided a kind of cross-checking and deepening to the verification process. As

individuals understandably list references that will speak favorably of them, we wanted to round out the picture.

Interviews with the staff were conducted at *Just Buffalo's* office in my absence. This allowed all present to have open discussions during the interview and evaluation process. I had prepared a set of interview questions with the staff, however, which were given to candidates in advance. Some of the questions mirrored those asked by the Executive Search Committee as they warranted repeating for the staff's benefit and edification. Others were particular to staff concerns such as, *Describe your management style* and *What steps will you take to raise the confidence of the staff during the transition?* Spontaneous questions included asking candidates to reflect on their experience and give some examples of how they'd measure and maintain high morale among the staff. I was offered the opportunity to interview candidates separately.

Making the Offer

Choosing the new Director was difficult, as the finalists for the position were all highly qualified though possessed different strengths. One was a Buffalo native, a writer and former employee of the organization. One had strong management skills and an academic background. One had worked in the arts on a national level, was a writer, and had contacts with national funders. The modest salary level offered was an issue for one of the candidates, so she was eliminated from further consideration. The Executive Search Committee recommended Ed Taylor for the job, as they felt his experience and connections on the national level would benefit the organization. *Just Buffalo's* funders were comfortable with Ed as well.

The board was unwilling to offer Ed a starting salary equal to what I had earned after twenty-three years. They also considered that if they started high, they'd have no way to offer increases over time given the restrictions of our somewhat limited budget. As a compromise, they offered a salary and benefits package that included a relocation expense. The combined dollar amount came very close to my salary level, but as the cost of relocation was a non-recurring expense, the offer left room for raises.

Saying Goodbye

After Ed was hired, I worked alongside him for six weeks before leaving Buffalo. I completed the prior year's audit with our accountants and prepared final reports for

grants. I wrote select grant requests for the coming year as well, such as the City Grant, which was due his first day on the job. I helped him prepare his first annual budget for the organization, and, at his request, accompanied him to the board meeting when he presented it, just in case the board members wanted figures substantiated, based on what had been done in the past. Thereafter, I stayed in touch through fax, phone and e-mail, making monthly visits to Buffalo through July. Ed and I flew to Chicago where I introduced him to colleagues at a meeting of the National Association of Independent Literary Centers hosted by The Guild Complex. We visited with funders in New York City and with WNY artists, writers and individual contributors who had been generous to *Just Buffalo*. Most of our work was done by the end of September, but I was available for questions and advice throughout the year when asked, and I remain so today.

At my going away party I called Ed onto the stage and asked all present to give him their support. In an informal and symbolic passing of the baton, I presented him with my ergonomically designed snow shovel and shook his hand. It snowed for days after, but I didn't mind. I remember sitting in a hotel room in San Diego a few weeks later. The sliding glass door to the balcony overlooking the harbor was pulled open, and the sheers were billowing in toward me as I sat at my computer. I pressed a button and transmitted the NYSCA/Arts-in-Education Grant request I had just written to the "home office" in Buffalo while I stared at the ocean. "I can do this," I thought with a smile - and headed down to the shore.

Postscript: In August of 2001, after 31½ years at the helm, Ed Taylor stepped down as the Executive Director of Just Buffalo to pursue his writing career, and to spend more time with his family. At this writing, the board is engaged in a search process and Cass Clarke, Director of Education and Outreach for the organization, is Interim Director.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Organizations of Color

For decades, organizations of color have had to define and promote their aesthetic, art and artists in an environment that values Eurocentricity. As an example, several years ago, Third World Newsreel had to struggle to be included in lists that represented media arts organizations until people realized that works by artists of color were money makers. Scholar and activist Marta Moreno Vega advises that the new leader of an arts organization of color must understand that cultural racism continues to exist. Marta asserts, for example, that major funding still goes to a few major organizations

and limited sums are directed towards ethnic organizations. Filmmaker and nonprofit development consultant Ada Griffin shares this view, adding that organizations of color receive less funding from foundations than other organizations doing similar work.

It is difficult for any small nonprofit organization to bring about and sustain a capacity-building and stabilization process; the financial stability needed to attract new staff and board members is often not present in these organizations. Melody Capote, Executive Director of the Caribbean Cultural Center, says the problem may be compounded by the fact that organizations of color often don't have boards that are in a position to either contribute to or raise money for their organizations; they don't have the same access to corporate funding as other organizations; and they often lack development staffs. The lucky few who are able to draw down major funding do so after years of trying, and each succeeding year is not promised. Melody indicated that it's especially important for organizations of color to develop succession strategies, as many of them are primarily identified with their founders rather than with their mission and purpose.

Ada Griffin cautions that the issue of transfer of leadership is further complicated by the fact that there aren't enough opportunities for people of color to develop as leaders, and young leaders in these communities are not being educated to see arts administration as an option. Since leadership opportunities for people of color are often not developed outside of these organizations, Ada feels that organizations of color should create opportunities to develop leadership internally. She understands that arts institutions have a critical need to cultivate new leaders for decision-making roles, such as programmers and administrators, and she maintains that organizations of color have played a significant role in identifying new talent and cultivating leadership despite the inevitable increased burden on their resources. She feels many such organizations could use more support for their efforts to attract and retain skilled professionals and to provide staff development activities such as paid internships and residencies. She concludes that it is reasonable to assume that increasing commitments to career development opportunities, and building staff capacity and leadership within these organizations would result in a broad spectrum of beneficial outcomes.

Founders

A founder needs to separate her/his identity from that of the organization and learn to let go *before* beginning the transition. Even the most seasoned pro may have some separation anxiety, but preparation - including asking, "Am I ready for this move?" - is key. Holding on may take many forms, and while it's understandable that a founder wouldn't want ruined what s/he has spent her/his lifetime trying to build, the impulse

s/he may feel to correct her/his successor may crop up well after the completion of the transition and must be countered. Desires or actual attempts to control, run things, or question the authority of the new Director are disruptive for the founder as well as for the organization. In one example, a founder was listed in the publicity for an organization's 25th anniversary celebration as a co-founder. She was understandably upset as she had created the organization alone. This situation might have been avoided had an official history and artistic philosophy of the organization been approved by the board before her departure. It goes without saying that she should have been one of the individuals the organization contacted for historical information when preparing for the celebration, but she wasn't.

Founders should plan their exits, making sure they have strategies that work for them that are in concert with the needs of the organization. A founder's personal exit strategies should address why s/he is leaving, what s/he is going to do after s/he leaves the organization, how s/he can remain financially secure after her/his departure, and how s/he can ensure that her/his legacy will live on. Founders create an organization to meet a stated or implied need in the community. Their principles embody their vision; it is important to make sure there is board and staff commitment to this vision and to the principles that carry it forth.

Some consultants recommend that a founder have her/his own advisory group when planning a transition, as the organization's board must stay focused on its needs. If this seems difficult, at the very least, consider getting expert advice or referrals from colleagues or trusted friends with knowledge in the areas of financial planning, law and employment/artistic opportunities. Founder strategies for the organization should be developed in collaboration with the board and staff, and should center on leaving the organization financially stable, developing and empowering the staff and Board of Trustees, making long-term relationships to funders and other significant players in the community available to her/his successor, and mentoring the successor as a consultant for a pre-determined time after s/he has assumed the job. *Just Buffalo* Board President, Hal Payne, noted that the idea of funding the founder's continuous involvement with the organization is something that others should consider as it keeps the founder involved in a way that doesn't burden the organization, and it gets funders on board who have an investment in the transition.

Founders of smaller organizations may stay on past the time when even they know they should retire, because they feel that they have nowhere else to go, and they have no money or pension set aside to make their departures possible. This is often not the case in larger organizations where pension plans and other retirement arrangements have been made. Boards can help alleviate this issue by taking steps to provide for the founder's retirement. Retired CEO and Walker Arts Center Trustee, Bruce Atwater,

advises that compensation plans include a pension fund, that they be developed early on with more than one director in mind, and that they be funded by the organization over time (24).

Founders often fear leaving because they don't know how they might continue to earn a living. Scholar, founder and cultural activist Marta Moreno Vega asks that we consider what happens to a founder's wealth of knowledge and expertise when s/he leaves an organization. There's often no future for her/him in the nonprofit world, especially if s/he founded a smaller organization. While some transition literature advocates that boards encourage their founders to resume careers as artists, Vega suggests that special initiatives should be developed - perhaps by policy makers within the nonprofit and philanthropic communities - so that founding leaders can obtain jobs once they step down and have a means to continue contributing to the arts community.

Functional Leadership

Great organizations are often identified with great leaders. Harvard University Professor J. Richard Hackman compared this "personcentric" view of leadership with a functional approach, in remarks he made during the Leadership Development and Transition in the Arts panel at Grantmakers in the Arts' (GIA) fall conference in 1999. Citing the shortcomings of the personcentric view, he indicated that placing responsibility for the greatness of an organization on an individual puts undue emphasis on identifying who the next leader might be. A leader's behavior is more strongly predicted by how subordinates act than by the leader's intended or espoused style. It follows that finding out what influences the actual behavior of people in an organization will enable a leader to exhibit a preferred style.

According to Hackman, the effective leader needs to:

Know her/his strengths and limitations

Understand what conditions are needed to promote an organization's effectiveness and be able to put them in place

Set a good direction and get people to work together

Engender a culture of shared leadership within the organization in which people use their special knowledge, personal styles and unique skills to help it achieve its goals, (4-8)

Hackman defines the functional model leader as someone who gets functions that are critical to an organization's effectiveness in place in such a way that they become part of the organization's culture. The model measures a leader's effectiveness by her/his ability to balance the satisfaction of the organization's constituents; the collective growth or strength of an organization's operations as realized through increasingly capable performing units or teams over time (rather than those that burn themselves out or fizzle out); and the personal growth and fulfillment of the individuals who contribute to the organization's work.

A functional rather than a personcentric approach allows leaders to play to their strengths, avoid their weaknesses, and accomplish functions in their own way. This approach does not focus on traits and styles in defining a leader; however, courage, emotional stability and personal values are identified as essential qualities for effective leaders, since people who have these qualities are better able to obtain and use the knowledge and skills they need to function as good leaders ("Leading Groups in Organizations" 109-110).

Individuals described as the most effective leaders by Management Consultants for the Arts in "Leadership: The Key to the Future" are visionaries who understand that good management is a must. They facilitate the alignment of an organization's operations so that everybody is working toward the same goal, while making their staff and board feel valued. They also have an open and interested manner when interacting with others and have a high tolerance for debate within the organization. These leaders have the courage to take necessary risks, facilitate decision making, and keep the future of the organization in mind, ever mindful of the issue of succession.

Finding the Ideal Candidate

To begin with, a board must know what it's looking for. Successors of long-term leaders are often doomed to failure, according to Hackman, when they are hired based on strengths and skill sets that are the perceived weaknesses of the founders. In other words, boards will ask, "What didn't the founder have?" and then go out and look for someone who has it. This method ignores founders' gifts, and doesn't properly take into account their legacy, or acknowledge their contributions as leaders. It is a mistake (GIA Conference 19).

As a transition's success depends upon individuals' temperaments as much as anything else, the board must seek candidates who will be able to work well with people in the community, forging new relationships as opportunity and need dictate. Successors must be able to build upon relationships the founder has created, so that the strengths of these relationships can continue to enhance the goals of the organization. All aspects of the community - artists, friends of the organization, patrons, etc. - must be included. Beyond the particular skills, work experience and educational criteria that qualify an individual for the position, s/he must be able to communicate effectively and be a good listener, be comfortable delegating responsibilities, and be responsive to others by honoring their input and contributions. The search process should be designed to reveal if potential candidates possess those sets of relational skills.

Because it's difficult to test for these qualities in an interview, the challenge is in identifying the desirable behaviors that underscore a candidate's ability to lead and in asking the right questions. Open-ended questions allow candidates to demonstrate if they're able to incorporate feedback. A good "gut" check would include posing exploratory questions and observing candidates' styles as they respond. If, within the interview, they improve key behaviors, such as actually listening vs. hearing, and demonstrate desired competencies and leadership qualities based on the feedback you've given them, then there's a good chance they'll incorporate feedback if hired. Another way of exploring issues with candidates is by asking for examples of how they have handled particular situations. For example, "How did you handle meeting the organization's largest donor?" and "What did you think were the most important things to get across in that first meeting?"

Candidates with Arts Administration or MBA degrees who lack relevant work experience do not make the best directors. Most people trained in arts management see it as a job, says Marta Moreno Vega, but that is only one part of it. Schools may not have trained them for real-life situations, their "book learning" may stand between them and an accurate assessment of a situation, and they may cut important community programs in an effort to maintain the bottom line. Look for individuals who have had internships at relevant organizations and check on their successes. As it's not possible to make the selection process foolproof, intuition can help lead to the right choice in the end. Always check a candidate's references - on and off their reference list. Involve staff in the hiring process and communicate everything up front when actually making the offer.

The New Leader

Incoming Directors should prepare for their new position by honestly evaluating their skill level and preparedness for the job. They must be willing to work on skills they need to improve or acquire and may be able to negotiate professional development training as part of their benefits package. It is important for an incoming Director to define her/his relationship to the founder, the board and the community, to embrace the concept of shared leadership, and to be able to distinguish when a function of the organization needs to be fulfilled by a collective or an individual act.

Incoming Executive Directors, who imagine they are taking an organization to a “new level” by virtue of their institutionalizing it, will only be fooling themselves if they neglect to nurture relationships that have been significant to the organization over time, or if they assume a leadership style that is not inclusive. Sometimes the succeeding Director sees her/himself in the shadow of the founder. S/he can establish her/himself as an individual force by getting involved in the community, attending events, joining boards and meeting people in other organizations as the predecessor did. This is not an overnight process; it will take time and perseverance.

Some cities may lack a pool of qualified arts administrators in general. Otherwise qualified arts administrators may lack experience managing people, which can lead to staff turnover. The new leader must be a skilled arts administrator, arts programmer and people manager, as well as an arts advocate. S/he must understand the demands of nonprofits, embrace the mission of the organization, bring her/his talents and connections to the table, and be able to handle staffing issues as well. In this way, s/he can face challenges in good faith and work towards doing the best for the organization.

It is important to remember that new leaders are entitled to “lesser successes” when they are exploring new directions for the organization. They need to be able to make mistakes without the board panicking and considering their efforts failures. Conversely, new administrators would be smart to review with the board the risks/rewards of any new program; it should fit in with the strategic plan and direction of the organization.

Salary Level

Underestimating the salary for a new executive can be a major downfall in the deliberations. More than one organization has gotten to the “invite” stage only to find that its compensation offer paled either in comparison to what the executive was presently making or to what her/his expectations for the position were. Cover expectations early in the interview process as pressure to pay competitive salaries is very high. Bruce Atwater states that the board must make sure an executive's compensation package is tied in with what the world is like and what the institution is trying to get done (12). Founders bring a driving passion to their work that cannot be expected of their successors. They, and their main support people, often do more than one job or do too much within their job. This needs to be taken into account when planning for a transition. Staffing needs should be assessed, and the founder's job sometimes needs to get recast into work for more than one person.

Where salary constraints are a factor, organizations may wish to reconsider their needs and search for someone more junior and at an earlier stage in her/his career who is using the organization as a stepping stone to another position. Working for an organization must be the right move for someone, the next stage in her/his career. It is therefore important to ask potential candidates where they would like to see themselves professionally in the next three to five years before you offer them the job. Of course, the younger and less seasoned the new employee, the more time and attention the board must spend with the individual.

Support Staff

Although boards often do consider salary level when trying to attract a new director, they need to consider salary levels for support people as well, especially if they're trying to attract them at the time of a founder transition. Jen Abrams, former Administrative Assistant at Guild Complex, observed that in smaller organizations in particular, the main support staff person often has something to do with creating the organization's environment. S/he might manage volunteers, for example, despite the fact that the founder drew them in. Anticipate what you might lose in terms of human and financial resources when replacing support staff. While it's necessary to articulate the incoming support staff's responsibilities via a task-oriented job description, it's also important to consider the constituencies the outgoing support person has drawn into the organization. If the main support person is going to stay on with the organization, the new Director should be aware of what space s/he has created for her/himself.

The Board

The board's role doesn't need to be the same one it played while the founder was with the organization. Giving the board a sense of responsibility during this risky time is crucial if its stability is critical or if the organization is less stable. According to Atwater, governance is not only the link between leadership and the Board of Directors, it is also the vitally important link between the regimes of two successive leaders. Effective artistic leadership through multiple transitions, he continues, is the critical element for sustaining a strong arts institution (11). As organizations are built upon founders' values, if they have led well their legacy has to be continued. Organizations ought to consider continuing the term of the board's chief officer, at least through the first year or so of the new executive's term. S/he represented the organization to the new executive, knows the details of the offer, has a good hand on the challenges to the board and the new leader, knows where most of the skeletons are hidden, and can be a very positive part of the transition. However, if the board leader was the cause of the previous executive's leaving, that is a very different matter.

The board needs to carefully think through exactly what kind of person the organization needs to lead it into post-founder life, have shared goals for the transition based on the organization's needs, and be willing to actively support the new Director. They can accomplish this by being clear about what kind of a leader they expect and by setting an agenda for accomplishment that includes performance expectations and time frames. Regularly and frequently scheduled performance evaluations are important during the first year. They allow for course correction, clarification and feedback between the board and the new Director. Without a system for evaluation and feedback in place, the new Director can become blindsided by individuals who harbor resentments and complaints. Atwater's signals of poor performance include: declines in audience over time, outside funding shortfalls, poor artistic reviews and declining artistic reputation (12).

Some organizations form a small transition team of two to three persons that meets on a regular basis with the new executive. They are seasoned managers in the community and, often over coffee, can head off any misunderstandings during those critical first months. In addition, requesting a small number of the board to informally provide personal support to the new Director can be especially helpful if s/he has come from out of town. Be certain to involve the spouse or partner in the mix because often the source of the questions is not only the new executive. Information on housing, cultural and recreational opportunities, good schools, restaurants, shopping and the like are needed and will be much appreciated. Above all, the board should be welcoming, providing opportunities for the new Director to network and feel secure in her/his new role.

A supportive environment is the likely result of a transition process in which board members have made a commitment. This includes making sure that the new Director

doesn't have to do too much catching up or taking care of old business during the critical early period of her/his service, leaving her/him free to concentrate on more strategically important work. New leadership will bring its own style and hopefully will be able to grow in the medium offered by board and staff and embraced by the community. "A Board Member's Guide To Founder Success," by Susan Kenny Stevens, provides an excellent summary of the board's role before and during a transition.

The Process

Successful transitions are mission-driven and come from a sense of shared leadership for and ownership of the organization. Review and evaluate the mission early on in the transition process, and be certain everyone involved is clear about the organization's core values. Having a long-range plan in place for the new Director to refer to is preferable, as it provides her/him with a map of expectations, time frames and delegated tasks. If this is not possible, a less in-depth plan should be developed so the new Director can begin to know where the organization wants to go and determine how her/his vision can be incorporated. A third party's objective view lends insight to potential or actual transition roadblocks and helps board, staff and founder remain focused on putting the organization first. Many of the interviewees for this monograph considered consultant assistance essential to their transition processes.

Allow eighteen to twenty-four months for a transition, although it's good to have a contingency plan in place in case the search takes longer than planned. Make provisions for the founder to remain at least as an advisor. Consider paying the founder to work alongside the new Director as a consultant for a determined period of time. Since the planning and implementation of a transition does take time, consider whether to make allowances for these demands by limiting your organization's normal programming. Gaining and maintaining the confidence of funders is critical; keep them apprised of the organization's progress. When building the transition budget, remember to include consultant fees, travel costs for interviewees and relocation costs for the incoming Director if you are doing a national search.

In *Managing Executive Transitions*, the authors question how long an executive can be an effective leader once s/he's decided to move on. If her/his heart isn't in it anymore, they reason, chances are s/he can manage the organization but not lead it (5). The motives executives may harbor when they are signaling their departure are described below:

The Plea - which may be used as a final negotiating strategy when an executive director feels unheard or unappreciated.

The Ploy - which is a clumsy negotiating strategy used by an executive to achieve additional benefit or authority (boards should reassess the value of the executive, as such poor negotiating in-house may signal a time to call her/his bluff).

A Statement of Fact - which is what it is. Accept the resignation and begin finding a replacement (2). Properly integrating the new Executive Director into the organization is considered just as important as making the right hire (26).

Regardless of motive, when an individual decides to leave a job s/he has held for some time, her/his energy is best used for organizing the position for the next person by: prioritizing her/his workload; delineating the tasks and responsibilities of the position for the incoming successor, as well as for themselves in the time remaining; and making sure everything essential to the performance of the job is accessible and clearly marked. Some of this information can be shared with the successor, particularly a list of what has to be done in the next 30-60-90 days. All of the above should be left for the successor in clearly marked folders so that s/he knows what has happened in the organization during this transitional period. When a founder decides to leave, the same holds true. In addition, the founder should introduce the new Director to colleagues, funders and key people in the community to help sustain their trust in the organization and its new leadership.

Transition Tips

Board and support staff must be strong and committed to the transition

The founder/director has to be willing to let go (it's a long process that needs preparation)

Adequate planning must take place; adequate resources must be in place

- o Define roles for board, staff, founder/director and map out expectations
- o Expectation level is important as the new person won't put in time and energy like the founder - if this is not dealt with, failure and disappointment are likely
- o Financial stability is essential

Funding sources may react conservatively and retrench funding

Strategies to diversify income and a financial cushion should be in place

Salaries and financial practices must be sound

The board must be ready to make a financial commitment to fund additional salaries as the founder/director often does more than one job

Consultant(s) can help facilitate issues that are close to the founder and the board

Ways to promote the community's involvement should be identified - people that are invested in an organization's succeeding and being around can speak out for it at various levels of funding and in the community

Ongoing communication with legislators may result in line-item funds for the transition

In Conclusion

I've been obsessed with planting trees ever since I moved to Atlanta, and the lush evergreens behind my house have grown six feet taller since I planted them two winters back. They didn't do too much more than just set down roots the first year, but they're in the right place and getting what they need, so they "jes' grew." Yesterday, as I stepped out on the back porch to survey my garden, their great green presence pulled at my attention, and I regarded them across the lawn in awe. I remembered a rhyme a friend had taught me about how trees grow after they're transplanted: "First they sleep, then they creep, then they leap," and I laughed realizing that the same could have been said of me in my post-transition life; that the same could be said of an organization in transition.

The move was difficult, but I moved toward something good, not away from something I wanted to leave. It took time for me to lay aside constellating reality each day for a community, but I've come to embrace a more focused life and find myself still and humming at its core. I set out new roots. My work as a consultant keeps me involved in the arts community and close to the high-spirited founders I admire. Whether as midwife, hired gun, surgeon, facilitator, coach or friend, I help these inspired individuals and others work to their capacity, build their boards, strengthen their organizations and sometimes transition out to something new.

Founder transitions are critical in the United States as many worthwhile and significant organizations are still founder led. Most of these organizations will merit sustaining, and their founders will want to move on, leaving their communities richer for the gift of

their dreams made real. The life-after for founders is crafted of the same imagination and drive that set them apart from the first. A life-after for the organizations they so passionately tended is possible as well. It's bedrock is commitment, compassion, integrity and perseverance, and it takes time and money, yes. Just like growing them did. Several transition models and motivations will be offered in the following pages, as well as insights for success. My hope is that readers will find this document useful as a planting guide as well as a planning guide, so that the founder's legacy and values can hold root in the community s/he so willingly served.

A Board Member's Guide to Founder Success

1. As early in your organization's life as is practical, begin open discussions about whether you have a "limited life" corporation or one whose value to society supersedes the person of the founder. Then function accordingly.
2. Understand your founder's underlying motivation, both in terms of her/his art and his or her psyche. Let the achievement-oriented founder achieve. Structure the independent founder's role with enough autonomy and elbow room that s/he doesn't feel trapped or fenced in. Build security into the control-oriented founder's job. The more secure s/he is, the less s/he will feel the need to control.
3. Surround your founder with competent professional staff and board members, the best you can afford. Founders find it hard enough to give up control. The challenge is even more difficult when the organization can afford only underskilled managers. Lack of competent, experienced staff and board members can play a significant role in a founder's failure.
4. Recruit arts-motivated retired CEOs to your board, as well as entrepreneurs who have sold their businesses or made transitions into new roles within their companies. Their experience provides a number of benefits to a founder-led organization, not the least of which is their personal experience with separation and succession.
5. Understand that successfully moving beyond a founder will be a two-steps-forward, one-step-back process. Support the positive efforts, coach through the backsliding and remind your founder of the shared goal of permanence.

6. Hold your founder accountable for her/his management position. The founder may be an artistic giant and founder genius, but if s/he holds a staff position within the organization, s/he is responsible for performing in a way that strengthens the organization. Offer the founder an emeritus position if s/he can't or chooses not to pull the full weight of her/his staff position.

7. Likewise, pull your own weight. Show up, prepared. You are not just a volunteer stakeholder; you hold the ultimate responsibility for governing the organization through its quest for sustainability.

8. Encourage the founder's reinvention as "artist." Love of the art is still at the core of your founder's motivation.

9. Encourage your founder to have a personal board of advisors, people who offer unconditional respect and support and who will give good solid advice. This is especially important to founders as they maneuver through second- and third-stage separation. Too many conflicts of interest occur when the organization's board is also the founder's advisor. The Board of Directors, while respecting the founder's role, needs to make decisions in the best interest of the organization.

10. Encourage a systematic process that allows your founder to transfer her/his vision to others. Whether through staff development, shadowing or board meeting discussions, making sure the organization's "essence" is well-rooted is undoubtedly the most important task a founder has to accomplish, and is always the first step in assuring a founder's succession and success.

From the article "Helping Founders Succeed" by Susan Kenny Stevens. Published in *Grantmakers in the Arts Newsletter*, Autumn 1999. Permission to reprint granted by the author.

Additional Case Studies:

AMAS MUSICAL THEATRE, New York, New York

Background

Founded in 1968 by Ms. Rosetta LeNoire, Amas is devoted to the creation, development and professional production of original musical works, and to the training and encouragement of new musical theatre. Using her own savings to found Amas as a theatre where people could work together with emphasis on individual skills without regard for race, color, creed, religion or national origin, Rosetta grounded her vision for Amas (“you love” in Latin) in non-traditional, multiracial production, education and casting. Amas celebrates its impact in pioneering multi-racial casting in the American theatre while reiterating its commitment to this reflection of our diverse society.

Rosetta received the National Medal of Arts in 1999, and Actor’s Equity Association acknowledges both her and Amas’ contribution to American theatre by bestowing an award in her honor, the treasured Rosetta LeNoire Award, making her the first recipient. Producers and theatre companies who exemplify Rosetta’s commitment to multicultural production and casting are annually given the award. Over the past seven years, Amas has produced workshops of three musicals that have been awarded the Richard Rodgers Award. This award is presented to a composer and lyricist, and funds are given to a nonprofit to produce a reading, workshop or full production.

Amas’ board worked with a New York State Council on the Arts/Special Arts Services Technical Assistance Program (NYSCA/SAS TAP) consultant, who helped them strengthen their administration, maximize their fundraising efforts, develop a three-year plan and address the issue of founder transition. Although the financial position and mission of Amas were focused when the new Director began, programming had been modified for a time as there was not enough money to mount full-scale musicals. Cutbacks in public funding had reduced Amas’ budget by 75 percent prior to the transition. In addition, the company had downsized when it lost its space, and a lot of reorganization was taking place at the time of the new hire. Amas’ board wanted to restore the organization’s budget and program offerings when Donna Trinkoff, the new Director, started. Some of Amas’ funders remained confident in the organization, while some wanted to wait and see how Donna established herself in relation to the organization. Donna experienced some staff turnover when she came on board, though initially the staff was in place for the children’s training program.

Transition

Due to the founder’s advanced age, Amas’ board understood that transition was an issue for the organization. Its founder transition was a four- to five-year planned

process that included a local search. Donna heard about the position opening through the grapevine. She was the second Director to succeed Rosetta and was Rosetta's choice as successor. Though hers was an external hire, Donna was familiar with the organization, as she had worked for it in the 1980s as an actress. Donna experienced the transition as a continuum insofar as she was doing the work Rosetta began in the spirit in which Amas was founded.

Rosetta was working part time in Hollywood as well as for Amas when Donna was hired in 1994. She had the final say early in the transition, but thereafter Donna managed things assuming the role of Producing Director. During the first two years of the transition, Donna consulted Rosetta before making decisions, wrote letters and conducted business on her behalf, and she kept her fully informed through regular conversations. During year one, for example, Rosetta asked to read the scripts of plays under consideration, as it was still her company and she was nominally still the Artistic Director. In time, however, when Donna achieved good results, trust and confidence in her ability grew. By year three, Rosetta had given up her administrative position with Amas. Donna kept her informed as she would a Board member, with Rosetta coming in from time to time to do consulting. Rosetta is now Director Emeritus and she has given Donna her blessing. Donna appreciates Rosetta's enduring link to Amas as she was an inspirational leader, and people continue to be attracted to the organization because of her.

THE CHILDREN'S ART CARNIVAL, New York, New York

Background

The Children's Art Carnival, located in the Hamilton Heights neighborhood of Harlem, was founded by Betty Blayton Taylor in 1969 as a community outreach program of the Museum of Modern Art. In 1972, it became incorporated as an independent 501(C)(3) community-based organization. The Carnival provides innovative visual and communication arts programming for young people ages 4-21. Its success in integrating creative art activities with other curriculum areas has resulted in its being included in the 1996 President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities Report; and being recognized as a model program for the nation in alternative education by the National Endowment for the Arts, the United States Office of Education Career Education Department, and the Education Resources Information Center. The Carnival has been the recipient of many awards including the 1989 New York State Governor's Arts Award, the 1995 CBS Fulfilling the Dream Award and the 2000 DREAMS Award.

A plan for founder transition was included in the long-range plan adopted by the Carnival's board, and the organization was supported by a NYSCA/SAS TAP Grant throughout the transition process. Marline Martin heard about the position opening through a friend and colleague after the organization had been conducting a search for about two years. Although Marline lacked experience as a manager of a nonprofit corporation, her professional credentials included small business consulting in areas of marketing, personnel and income development, site management, program planning, evaluation of youth mentoring programs, and fund development for arts and cultural organizations - all critical arts administration skills.

When Marline Martin was hired, the organization was nine months into its fiscal year, and the year-to-date statements showed a deficit of \$102,000. Some personnel, but mostly consultants, had not been paid for months. Major and long-term funders visited the organization during Marline's first three months on the job to speak with her about her vision for the organization, hopefully to gain confidence in her ability to manage it. Some funders waited for at least six months for Marline to realize her vision and assume full responsibility of the position. As the organization's mission was focused at the time of Marline's hire, this allowed her to concentrate on finding the necessary resources to maintain and sustain the Carnival's programs and activities.

The Carnival had a minimal staff when Marline was hired. Positions included: fiscal manager, receptionist, administrative assistant and a part-time accountant. The staff's loyalty to the founder was evident, however, and at the end of first year it was clear that a change needed to occur; over time all of the administrative staff was replaced. The Carnival has explored maximizing key management positions, and they've hired a full-time Program Director (the position was only eight hours per week previously) and created a new full-time position for curriculum development.

Transition

A Transition Team of Carnival Board members and technical consultants created the position of Artistic Director for the Carnival's founder, and delineated the duties and responsibilities of the newly created position so that Betty could stay involved in the organization. The Transition Team remained in place to ensure a smooth transition once Marline assumed her duties as Executive Director. The board consisted of long-term friends of the founder and the organization. It was a young board, however, and members needed time to clarify and realize their roles. Although it was evident that Carnival Board members were committed to the organization and had been involved in many aspects of its programs and activities, their position as trustees seemed ambiguous. Marline had difficulty understanding their vision for the organization until about eight months into her first year when a retreat was held. It was also difficult for Marline to be creative when she assumed leadership for the organization, as she had

to deal with many issues and personalities. Marline feels she was able to maintain the integrity of her position, however, by understanding human nature and not allowing her authority to be undermined.

Despite the challenges, Marline was able to increase the organization's visibility through innovative marketing and public relations efforts. There have been some additions and changes to the board, and now people are in place to help the organization achieve key objectives. The Carnival received noteworthy recognition from its funders, and some gained enough confidence in the organization to reinstate their support. Marline benefited from working alongside the founder who provided her with a knowledge of the organization's programs and operations, as well as its history, background and stories. Marline said that it would have been difficult to gain the confidence of funders without this in-depth understanding of the organization's past, and even more difficult to determine a course for the future. Betty Blayton Taylor formally gave up the Carnival's reins and passed them to Marline at a board-hosted reception to introduce Marline to the community. Betty held the position of Artistic Director for one year before taking a sabbatical; she is still active with the Carnival and serves as its Special Projects Coordinator.

THE FREDERICK DOUGLASS CREATIVE ARTS CENTER, New York, New York

Background

The Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center was co-founded in 1971 by Fred Hudson and Budd Schulberg as a "branch" of the renowned Watts Writers' Workshop. Prior to that time, Budd had founded the Watts Writers' Workshop in Los Angeles, and Fred had set up the playwriting and theater programs for the Watts Writers' Workshop branch in San Francisco under the auspices of the San Francisco Arts Commission. The newly founded NYC-based Center grew rapidly under their direction, and it continues to be a place where highly qualified faculty members help writers start careers and develop their work. Fred teaches dramatic writing at New York University in addition to his work at the Center. He says he has had to overcome shyness and learn business skills to run the Center. He has given some thought to transition, as he knows that he'll want to leave the organization at some point. Budd is now living on Long Island; he is Chairman Emeritus of the board and is a very active writer.

The Center is dedicated to the discovery and development of literary talent, with a strong emphasis on African American talent. It has offered writing and acting workshops; supported The Black Roots Festival of Poetry, Prose, Music and Drama; staged rehearsed readings of plays under development with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; presented Equity productions of original plays;

sponsored arts-in-education programs for secondary students and after-school programs for youth, ages 8-13; and hosted book parties to celebrate the release of new works by writers.

Center writers have been published by all major publishing houses, and many alliances and friendships have been formed there. For example, the first play that was written and produced at the Center in the early 1970s, by Alexis DeVeaux, was bought on opening night by Barbara Schultz for TV's *Visions*; poet Maya Angelou directed it. Alexis' first novel and her first children's book also came out of Fred Hudson's workshops. Several individuals selected nationally by Nickelodeon for its annual fellowships have been from Fred's workshops and, each year, the American Film Institute accepts several of the Center's students. In 1996, the New York Community Trust began funding the Frederick Douglass Awards, giving \$15,000 each to three young people; in 2000, two individuals received \$20,000 each. In addition, author Terry McMillan funded the Doris Jean Austin Awards, providing \$4,000 each to four young people. The Center received the New York State Governor's Arts Award in 2000.

The Center's workshop instructors are paid at competitive levels, and it has a tiny salaried staff. As is often the case with founder-driven organizations, Fred, who serves as President and Artistic Director, has assumed many of the jobs that need to be done. He realizes that no one will step in to fill his position and do these jobs at the current salary level, so when NYSCA/SAS's TAP focused on founder transitions in the mid-'90s, the Center asked to be included in the program.

Transition

As the Center moves toward transition, it has been engaged in professionalizing its operations and building organizational capacity in the areas of board development, staffing, marketing and finance. The Center is assessing staffing needs, and doing job descriptions for existing positions and those that will come with staff expansion, such as a Managing Director and full-time Development Director. The by-laws have been rewritten and board and staff are formulating means to stabilize the Center's income.

Fred has begun to think of the Center's programs as products and, along with his board, is attempting to create "program products" that will eventually provide 50 percent of the Center's annual budget. Membership in a Harlem-based consortium that received a technology development grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, along with input from a Lucent Technologies advisor, will allow the Center to develop technology-based program products such as hosting workshops on its Internet site, making a movie and renting its editing suite. Fred believes that this will help make the

Center financially secure. Implementing these programs will be his parting gift; once they are in place, he will feel comfortable leaving.

THE GUILD COMPLEX, Chicago, Illinois (see "Experiences of an Ex")

Background

The Guild Complex, an independent nonprofit cultural center founded in 1989 by poet Michael Warr (along with a small group of writers, political activists, former union organizers, booksellers, teachers, musicians and visual artists), evolved out of the internationally renowned bookstore, Guild Books. The Complex serves as a forum for literary cross-cultural expression, discussion and education in combination with other arts. It is guided by the belief that the arts are instrumental in defining and exploring the human experience, and encourages participation by artist and audience alike in changing the conditions of society. From dramatic and traditional readings of poetry, fiction and prose to hip-hop poetics, performance and poetry combined with music, video and dance, The Guild Complex works to broaden the range of voices presented through literature and the range of audiences who experience literature.

Michael and long-time Guild Complex board member, Vicki Capalbo, met with a consultant from ArtsBridge, a multi-arts business incubator, to plan the search and key aspects of the transition. The consultant insisted that Michael not be part of the search process at all. Michael did do a task-oriented job description for his position prior to his board announcement and in preparation for the search process, however, and started dividing up some of his work - enough to allow the job to be for one very dedicated, hard-working person.

The Guild board considered qualities they wanted in a new Executive Director and identified absolute must-haves (see Appendix G). This guided the Search Committee, which was composed of eight people - four board members and four outside community partners. The Complex did a limited national search and received thirty resumes, two-thirds of which were from Chicago. Because they had a very small advertising budget, they focused on Web sites, e-mail, word-of-mouth and used calendar/newsletter announcements to communicate the position opening. The board got information out to strategic people in the media.

One of the Complex's greatest challenges was that its full-time administrative assistant, Jen Abrams, moved to New York City about six months before the transition.

Jen acknowledged that it would have been ideal for her to have been able to stay on for a year after the new Executive Director was hired, but that wasn't an option as it didn't fit in with her timed departure. The Complex planned to have a new person in place and trained to support the incoming Director, but Jen's replacement didn't work out and left after about a year. While it's always best to maintain systems and able staff so an incoming Director can get oriented in a stable environment, Jen advocated that the support person to do this would have to be someone who loved the organization very much; otherwise s/he'd start contending with the difficulty of the transition from her/his perspective instead of supporting the incoming Director. Mutual respect and support are as crucial as a strong investment in the organization during times of transition, and much of a transition's success depends on the personalities of those involved.

Transition

Some qualified candidates who found other jobs dropped out of the running during the search process, as did those who thought the salary offered was insufficient. The board was nevertheless determined that Michael should be able to maintain his timetable for departure; they had set the specific October 1999 deadline at least a year in advance. A contingency plan was developed when a board member agreed to fill the position for three months, if necessary, until a qualified successor could be found. Board member Julie Parson-Nesbitt was approached by Vicki Capalbo and asked if she would consider applying for the position of Executive Director. Julie was interested; she resigned from the Search Committee upon submitting her name for consideration. She was well-qualified for the position, having had fifteen years of experience as an arts administrator in organizations such as Woodland Pattern (Milwaukee, WI), and the Chicago Writers Voice. She had a demonstrated history of commitment to the Complex in diverse capacities, both paid and volunteer, since its inception, and it was also a very good step in her career. The Complex was very fortunate she accepted the position for the salary they were able to offer. Julie would have been willing to remain on the board had she not been hired.

Julie came in during year three of a three-year plan that she had helped craft as a board member. She found that it was both easy and difficult to follow in Michael's footsteps. It was hard for people to think of the Complex and not think of Michael, as he had built the organization and had inspired tremendous confidence in people. Julie knew many of the people who were central to the Complex because she was from the community, but Michael introduced her to funders, artists, artistic partners, and community people in her new capacity. Communications went out to funders, members, media, and key volunteers at various points of the search and transition. Michael announced that he was leaving in an issue of the organization's calendar and talked about what his leaving would mean. In the next issue there was a full page with letters that he and Julie had each written as well as their photos. The Complex's

reputation for serving the community earned it excellent media coverage, including public and commercial radio, newspaper reviews and follow-up coverage. Everyone cared about the transition and was waiting to see what would happen.

The organization's financial position was strong at the time of the transition. Former funders were confident, as staff had actively worked to create that confidence. Letters and timelines went out to key funders five months before Michael's planned departure to tell them what, when and how the board was planning the transition. Other funders were notified later. The transition plan called for Michael to have a three-month paid consultancy. He completed some administrative tasks, did some programming and helped Julie become secure in her new position. He was conscious of not getting too involved and balanced this with Julie's request that he retain some presence. He and Julie visited with key funders after she was identified as his successor. The Complex avoided negative feedback from funders because it let them know that the organization's mission wasn't going to change and reassured them that Julie was nationally and locally connected, was knowledgeable in her field and knew what she was doing. A measure of success is that a number of funders increased their grants to the Complex the following year.

Although there was no staff or board turnover as a result of the transition, two key people moved to New York City when Julie stepped in as the new Executive Director, and it was hard for her to communicate to others that their moves were not transition related. The two men who left (in addition to Michael) were African American. As Julie is of European descent, she needed to make sure that the Complex kept its cross-cultural commitments to the community, and that people continued to be drawn to the Complex even though some of the strong, Black male leadership was gone. The community's perception of this remained challenging for Julie, although the Complex still had Black male leadership on its board. One person returned to Chicago and rejoined the board, and Julie's promotion of a key, Black male staff member gained him greater visibility. Michael understood Julie's concern about race as a transition issue since it was something she discussed with him during their very first conversation about her applying for the job.

He recently observed that the diversity of the Complex continues to be overwhelmingly reflected every two months in its calendar and every week in the audiences that attend its events.

The Complex's 10th anniversary came at a time when Julie was on her own. It was an opportunity for people to say goodbye to Michael, say hi to Julie, and wish the organization success. The celebration washed away public/community concerns, so they never had a time to question the organization's survival. The Guild Complex's programs continue to engage the community, and the organization has thrived under

Julie's capable leadership with the support of an involved board. In December of 2000, the Guild Complex moved out of the ArtsBridge incubator space into its first independent office space. This move marked a turning point. They used it to promote the organization and had a big housewarming party where people could bring gifts of office supplies (an excellent garbage can and a lot of paper were donated). The new office is literally across the street from the performance space (the Chopin Theater). This convenient location creates strong visibility for the Complex in the Wicker Park community and a stronger identity for The Guild Complex as a whole.

THIRD WORLD NEWSREEL, New York, New York

Background

Camera News, Inc., dba Third World Newsreel (TWN,) is a nonprofit, multicultural media arts organization. Established in 1968, originally as a political and activist film collective called Newsreel, the organization became Third World Newsreel in the early 1970s with the mission of fostering the creation, appreciation and dissemination of independent film and video made by and about people of diverse ethnic, cultural and class backgrounds. TWN's work includes distribution, programming, and exhibition to a wide audience. As a progressive educational media organization, TWN provides program services and skills development to support innovative artistic and social issue work of both emerging and established media artists from local, national and international communities.

The first and most tumultuous leadership transition for TWN took place when the original founders departed within a three-year period, leaving Ada Griffin, J.T. Takagi and two other individuals to carry on the work - or not. Once they had determined that the organization was worth saving, the difficult period of maintaining its stability followed. Ada assumed the position of Executive Director and J.T. worked on finances and production as a consultant. They had become arts administrators by default, not by training, and the responsibilities of these positions were new to them.

Ada Griffin and J.T. Takagi worked incrementally to shore up the organization from 1988-1992, when TWN was accepted into the Advancement Program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); then they began a formal process of institutional stabilization. The newly hired Workshop Director, Herman Lew, aggressively sought work by emerging artists, and expanded the collection of films and videos TWN distributed. Realizing they needed additional help, but finding it difficult to identify consultants of color who had a proficiency in institutional development and media arts, they recruited Lillian Jimenez, a consultant who had been involved with TWN since the

mid-1970s; they got her on the NEA roster so she could assist them with strategic planning. A Steering Committee led them toward a period of stabilization in which they reconstituted their Board of Directors, but the assessment period was grueling and difficult. The staff was working at maximum capacity as the time devoted to planning and examination took them away from their program duties. Tensions heightened as the organization's problems surfaced, and they struggled to find sources and solutions. It became volatile at times.

The second transition occurred when Ada Griffin stepped down in 1998. TWN's original Advancement Plan did not call for her to transition out of the organization. In fact, Ada had thought that the stabilization process was going to teach her how to become a better Executive Director. But the more she went through the process, the more she understood the problems of being a "president for life." She realized that it's not necessarily a good thing to be the leader of an organization forever. Ada had been in the process of producing a film when the administration of TWN fell in her lap, so there was the additional problem of her trying to make art while simultaneously managing an arts organization. This contradiction, when coupled with the potential for perceived or actual conflict of interest, left her knowing that she had to choose between the two. She was able to ask herself emotionally what was important to her and she focused on it. Ada ultimately wanted to devote more time to her filmmaking, to her family and to her community activism. She is proud that she could leave TWN and that she did leave.

Transition

TWN's Search Committee, composed of board members, culminated its national search with Dorothy Thigpen's hire, over a year from the time of its official announcement. Dorothy learned about the job opening through word-of-mouth as she had been involved in independent media for years and knew of the founder's desire to leave well before it happened. A couple of board members called Dorothy about the position while she was working at another New York City-based nonprofit, Women Make Movies. Although she had never worked for TWN, she was familiar with the organization through her work in the field with different nonprofits. A consultant from NYSCA/SAS's TAP, who had a history of working with TWN, was essential in the planning and implementation of the transition.

The transition coincided with TWN's 30th anniversary in 1998 and was slated for year two of a three-year plan; but the first day Dorothy walked in the door as the new Executive Director, she was told that the organization had to move in 90 days. This was not part of the plan. TWN had received notice of the move between the time Dorothy was hired and the time she actually started working, so full disclosure of this issue was not possible at the interview. Though Dorothy found the plan very useful

and was able to develop activities and events based on its goals, once she began working for TWN, she worried constantly about finding suitable space for the organization in addition to making plans for its 30th anniversary. She would have appreciated more board and staff support and would have benefited from funds to hire additional workers.

As is the case with many small and mid-sized nonprofits, the organization was understaffed. Because it meant reconfiguring an already limited budget, Dorothy decided not to create a much needed new staff position but instead restructured an existing full-time position to include additional duties. J.T. Takagi, a long-time volunteer and producer who was heavily invested in the organization, remembers feeling confident that Dorothy's leadership was going to work as she handled these competing priorities so well. J.T. served as Production Manager in a consultant capacity. She knew everything about the organization and had been involved in hiring Dorothy, but her position - and therefore the nature of her relationship to Dorothy - had not been clearly defined prior to the transition. This made it difficult for Dorothy to understand the limits of her own authority. J.T. continues to work with TWN as Production Manager, and her relationship to Dorothy has become less ambiguous over time though nothing has changed formally.

During Advancement, the board had decided that TWN should maintain a balanced budget by any means necessary. Their determination to keep the organization out of the red each year meant that the budget might sometimes be very low. Projections were close to actuals, and that created stability insofar as there were grants in place to cover project costs. In preparation for her departure, and with additional funds available to TWN in connection with its 30th anniversary, Ada hired consultants in the areas of planning and media public relations, and a development specialist to help the organization secure contributed income. Dorothy had to gain general operating support to sustain the organization beyond its anniversary year as the budget was inflated with funds for 30th anniversary projects at the time of the transition. She was able to maintain the confidence of TWN's funders, and TWN's involvement in NYSCA's TAP program helped them establish credibility and trust.

Ada Griffin had raised enough money prior to the transition to allow her to work alongside Dorothy as a paid consultant for the transition's first six months. Since the transition took place at the beginning of the organization's fiscal year, Dorothy could have used her help longer, particularly for development, since grants and reports were due. Ada's transition work was limited in part by TWN's budget, but she also had been awarded a fellowship to make a film. Ada understood that Dorothy needed to assume authority as the new leader and that this would be facilitated by her stepping down. During the initial phase of the transition, the board didn't seem very invested in the

organization, but as new people joined the board, they began to share a vision for the organization, giving Dorothy leeway to fulfill the vision creatively.

Many at TWN agreed that having the 30th anniversary during the transition was a mixed blessing. It was confusing because so much was going on, but there was also a feel-good atmosphere that helped ease the transition for both Ada and Dorothy. Although Dorothy was known by many people in media, Ada helped her to become embraced by the community. After leaving TWN as Executive Director, Ada received a fellowship at Columbia University but stayed in touch with the organization. These days, while pursuing media projects, she works as a freelance writer to help build public health, education and workforce development programs. She is now coordinating a project for the City University of New York to foster long-term, community-responsive, economic revitalization in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.

THE THURBER HOUSE, Columbus, Ohio

Background

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, The Thurber House (James Thurber's home during his college years) is a literary center, bookstore, and museum of Thurber materials. With The Thurber Center, an adjacent contemporary conference and classroom facility, its programs include writing classes, authors' readings, Thurber celebrations, and events for children. Donn Vickers founded The Thurber House in 1980 to promote the literary arts for the enlightenment and delight of the broadest audience, increasing awareness of literature as a significant art form.

People who work at Thurber House are experts at what they do, and their positions are structured to encourage them to have a life beyond work. Donn's position at Thurber House had been part-time (55 percent) or the equivalent of three days per week since its inception. This allowed him to balance his professional and personal needs with that of the organization. The staffing structure has produced a well-trained and empowered staff, one capable of supporting the efforts of an incoming Executive Director. Some of the younger staff were encouraged to work 90 percent-time under Donn's direction and were given good starting salaries, excellent benefits (25 percent of gross salary is set aside for benefits; employees choose between health, retirement, childcare, etc.) and every other Friday off. The nine full and part-time people on staff work in 30, 50, 90 percent and full-time positions, the financial person having been there for fourteen years and the Literary Director for eighteen. The plan included provisions for the Literary Director's position to evolve into that of literary advisor, with

the incoming Executive Director picking up the slack when that position became full-time.

Transition

Thurber House's succession plan was part of a three-year strategic plan that was in place. Donn stepped down in June, 2001, Year Two of the plan. Donn told Thurber House's President's Group, a group of past Board Presidents that meets monthly, that he wanted to leave the organization's executive position about two years prior to his planned departure. The announcement to the full Board was made about six months later and the public announcement ten months after that, allowing for an eight-month search. Thurber House decided to conduct a national search, and ads appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in concert with the public announcement of his departure. Donn's executive behavior changed in relation to the transition, and he became more of a coach/mentor to the mid-level staff who really ran the place. Part of Thurber House's challenge was to hire an Executive Director who wouldn't take the play away from these people.

Thurber House did not use a consultant for transition planning or implementation as the Board included four to five people who were either full or part-time professional planners. They did hire a scribe and drafter of documents, however, at \$10 per hour rather than a higher-priced consultant. They never felt the lack of an outside facilitator as there was so much skill on board. Though Donn had not officially been part of the search process, he was invited to meetings when the Committee

wanted to talk to him. The Search Committee was co-chaired and composed entirely of Board members representing different program areas of the organization. They were selected with gender and ethnic balance in mind. The co-chairs' vast experience in Human Resource management and hiring especially suited them for the work as they both had conducted many searches.

In addition to the usual array of grants and other earned and unearned revenue, Thurber House's strong financial position at the time of the transition was due to the fact that all programs operated with a surplus. They were structured so that corporate and individual support exceeded program costs. Overhead is typically from 15-30 percent above program costs, leaving money available for general operating support. Thurber House's endowment, which began in earnest six years ago, is at \$600,000. Its fiscal year is a calendar year, and Donn had all of the revenue for FY 2001 in place before he left. Final reports for FY 2000, including the audit, and grants for FY 2002 with deadline dates early in 2001 were completed before he stepped down.

Donn is succeeded at Thurber House by Susanne Jaffe, a former editor at Random House in New York City. He is available to consult with her for up to 8 hours per month only at her request for the balance of the year after his departure. This includes, but is not limited to, introducing her to the community and to funders. Although Donn has remained close to some members of the Board with whom he has developed friendships, he doesn't discuss Thurber House business with them or with others in the community. There were separate parties to honor Donn's departure and to welcome Susanne Jaffe to Thurber House. There was also excellent newspaper coverage of the transition. The organization took a three-pronged approach to honor its past, ensure its future, and create greater national visibility:

A Board member (who is a former newspaper editor), volunteered to write a book tying together strands of the organization's first twenty-year history. Another volunteer is gathering items for archives that will be installed in a special collection at Ohio University. Thurber House produced an American humor road show and toured it in the Fall of 2000 and Spring of 2001. Regional literary centers included it in their reading series; there was no cost to the hosts. Thurber House's endowment fund will continue to be developed.

VISUAL ARTS RESEARCH & RESOURCE CENTER, New York, New York

Aka THE CARIBBEAN CULTURAL CENTER

Background

The Caribbean Cultural Center was founded by Marta Moreno Vega in 1976 with a mission of presenting programs that highlight the cultural contributions and creative expressions of people of African descent. This is achieved through research, documentation, archival projects, concerts, conferences, arts-in-education, exhibitions, and publications that have global impact. The Caribbean Cultural Center is located at 408 West 58th (between 9 and 10th avenue) and is easily accessible to the tri-state area. It owns the brownstone in which it's housed and draws a multi-cultural audience to this culturally diverse location. Marta had built or co-founded several nonprofit institutions before she founded the Caribbean Cultural Center, including: Amigos del Museo del Barrio, The Association of Hispanic Arts, and The Network of Centers of Color, where she also served as its first Director. The search process employed by all of these organizations culminated in a transfer of leadership to someone outside of the organization. Although these organizations are still surviving, Marta understood that succession at the Caribbean Cultural Center would be better realized if someone

from inside the organization was nurtured and trained to assume a leadership position. She reasoned that finding a successor who would exert the same level of energy as a founder would be difficult, so looking for somebody who already had a history with a vested interest in the organization over time made sense.

Melody Capote had worked at the Center for eighteen years before she assumed the position of Executive Director in 1995. She had the passion and commitment to the organization that was key. Melody had been the Center's Development Director and Acting Director before Marta stepped down, and she had attended all the Board meetings as Marta's assistant. Melody's strength was in fundraising and the Center's finances seemed strong at the time of the transition. The Center had always had a budget of about one million dollars; Melody knew what she was working with when she became Executive Director and thought that the organization was in good financial shape.

Transition

Marta prepared herself and the organization for five years prior to her departure. Although the transition was planned, there wasn't a written plan in place. Prior to and during the transition, two consultants were brought in to speak with the staff and Board. They evaluated the staff's needs; met with the Board and helped them articulate the mission and their vision for the Center; elicited staff and Board feelings about the transition; and explored their response to Melody's being proposed as the new Executive Director. Melody talked to the staff as well. The Board was asked to consider what had been missing from the organization, as well as what the new Executive Director could add. The consultants helped the Board not only define what the mission and the vision of the organization should be going forward, but also how Marta could be most helpful.

Melody assumed a leadership position in the organization as Acting Director prior to the actual transition, since Marta was away from the office a lot working on her doctorate. Melody found that the responsibility and authority of her position shifted depending on whether Marta was in or out of town. After her first year as Acting Director, Marta approached Melody about becoming the new Executive Director as she didn't want to do an outside search. Melody was interested in the position and wanted to take some time to consider if it was the right thing for her and the organization. They decided to continue with Melody as Acting Director while measuring and considering their options. Melody served as Acting Director for over three years. All went well, and Marta broached the subject of Melody's becoming the

next Executive Director with the Board. The final decision to hire Melody was made between the Board and the founder.

Melody was already known to many of the organization's key contacts. Nevertheless, when she was named Executive Director, the Center presented programs to formally introduce her to the community and the organization's key constituencies. The Center developed an approach it hoped would assure funders, but despite the fact that it used consultants and met with funders to explain the transition process, some sources of private funding still adopted a "wait and see" attitude toward the new leadership and said they would hold back funding for a year or two. Since it never had received a lot of funding from the private sector, having any corporate or foundation funds withheld was a great loss to the Center. Melody didn't take it personally, however, and the Board understood. The Center has since had its funding reinstated.

Melody quickly learned that commitment is more important than book-learning when it comes to hiring staff, as individuals can be taught administrative skills, but they cannot be taught to have a passion

for the organization. The low level of commitment from young people on staff who are coming out of school with degrees in nonprofit management concerns Melody; she is confronted daily with staff versed in book knowledge that is not particular to the needs of the Center. The organization has not always been able to make the changes recommended by individuals hired over time to fill various positions, yet it has continued to do what was necessary to survive. In retrospect, Melody thinks she would have benefited from taking a few management courses before assuming her new role as Executive Director. She believes they would have better prepared her for how to manage a staff, delegate tasks, and interview, hire, and fire people.

I originally learned of *Just Buffalo's* impending Director vacancy through a conversation with the Founding Director, Debora Ott, who was a professional colleague, in the spring of the year prior to her departure. I was a former staff member of the National Endowment for the Arts Advancement Program, a national multi-disciplinary strategic planning and technical assistance program in which her organization had participated, and she called to ask for information about consultants who might help in planning a transition. After much thought, I decided to apply for the job myself - on the very last day the search was open.

The organization had a number of things going for it - it was a nationally recognized, leading institution in the literary world, known both for its artistic excellence and for its

resourcefulness and organizational "smarts." It had a successful track record of funding at the national level, and strong local support in a range of areas. It was in solid financial shape at the time of the transition and throughout its history, (finishing its fiscal years in the black in 22 of the then-23 years of its existence), and beginning a major grant program at the time of Debora's departure.

The Center offered a new Director the opportunity to make a difference in both a local community and the national literary and arts communities. As a strong believer in community arts and the importance of reintroducing an everyday connection to the arts at a grassroots level in this country, I saw the Executive Director's position at *Just Buffalo* as an opportunity to make things happen.

One key piece of the transition was the opportunity to work with Debora on-site for the first six weeks of my service. We focused on key areas of operations rather than attempting a comprehensive indoctrination. A formal component of our collaboration was joint trips for face-to-face meetings with funders and other important community members and friends of the organization. This began the process of building trust and confidence, which went a very long way toward ensuring a seamless transition. After Debora left town, she was available as a resource whenever questions arose or advice was needed through phone and e-mail, with occasional face to face meetings coinciding with her travel schedule as an independent consultant. Most of our collaborative work was completed by the end of September, 1998.

Staff members were included in the hiring process, and a solid, committed and welcoming staff was in place for the new director, another critical part of a successful transition. As my arrival came early in a new fiscal year, a time of multiple grant deadlines, the annual audit, and final report deadlines to funders, the planned transition permitted Debora to complete many of these responsibilities prior to my arrival or during my first few months on the job. This was a great benefit, as it allowed me to concentrate on other areas of organizational operation more immediately critical (e.g., building Board and community relations, building relations with staff, planning). Other than the regular challenges simply part of taking over such a job, the number of real difficulties I faced were minimal - most notably, a long-term real estate project in which the organization was involved required a lot more than the expected amount of work; and a newly hired senior staff person quit during my fourth month on the job, leaving a major hole to fill (Director of Marketing).

One challenge facing me was the organization's typical not-for-profit profile of working at a peak of busyness with barely adequate staff resources. The transition plan actually included the planned hiring of a Program Director to provide day-to-day oversight of programs and operations and free the Executive Director to concentrate

on strategic areas of organizational activity such as program development, community relations, and long-term resource development. Unfortunately, funding for the new position did not materialize and the position remained vacant. One of my priorities was working to increase, strengthen and stabilize staffing. The building of staff resources to support other staff members and to support *Just Buffalo's* constituencies is probably the single area of operations most directly affecting the functioning of the organization and the reaching of strategic organizational goals.

Although *Just Buffalo's* mission was focused at the time of my arrival, any organization's move from a founder-centered institution to a community institution regardless of its director, is an occasion for mission re-examination. My prime directive as new director was to build community trust in me and in the overall stability of the organization, before examining the mission and beginning to change it. The *Just Buffalo* Board had been open to new ideas concerning mission, and in fact the organization refined the mission statement one year after I arrived. A core of Board members had had long relations with the organization and were very invested in it; thanks to extensive experience with planning, the group understood and accepted the need for formal and ongoing organizational self-examination and change.

The Board was supportive, and weathered the transition well; paralleling the departure of the founding director was the departure of the Board's President, who had been in office for seven years. A process for building new Board leadership was created through an overlapping of Presidents paralleling the transition of Executive Directors, and the new President worked with the past President before and after assuming the job. A small number of Board members resigned either just before I arrived or just after, but real commitment to the organization had been built in the group as a whole and the Board remained largely intact after the transition. Part of the succession plan included a list of potential Board candidates (some of whom did join the Board) who were available to bring on as new blood, again offered to ease the new director's transition.

Debora remained a resource for me after my arrival, but at a smart, respectful, and cordial distance, providing technical assistance for a twelve month period after her official departure on February 1, 1998; her consulting and advisory role was beneficial and exactly appropriate. One of the key areas on which many transitions flounder is the founder's ability to genuinely "let go" and walk away. The ability of *Just Buffalo's* founder to actually let go was admirable and vital to the success of the transition, and her sincere commitment to truly moving on was vital to my decision to take the job when it was offered. Many of the challenges faced by a new director are those faced by the new kid anywhere - added to that, the fact that the new director may be replacing a strong personality with a long history and reputation in a community creates unusual challenges. I was lucky to come into a rare transition situation in

which careful thought and organizational and community support had been marshaled to ensure a successful transition. That was the primary reason I agreed to even apply for the job - I had a clear sense of the plan in place and its smartness, and respect for the founding director. My experience with founder transitions had been that only rarely are they successful, so I would not have even been interested in the job if I didn't feel that there was a good process in place for ensuring success.

Ed Taylor is a writer and the former Executive Director of Just Buffalo literary center, inc.; he was the National Coordinator of WritersCorps, and has been a staff member of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Smithsonian Institution.

Experiences of an Ex

by Michael Warr

Soon after my transition at the Guild Complex, a cross-cultural literary arts center, where as the founding Executive Director, I served for 10 years, I found myself teaching a seminar called "The Art of Leadership Transition" at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. As I began picking apart my transition experience in an attempt to condense it to a three-hour lecture, I realized that some of the key characteristics were too "perfect" to offer as a model.

There is of course no such thing as perfection. But relative to the typical transition reality, the Complex had a few ideal factors in its favor. To share the experience as a model I needed to determine the principles drawn from the process that would apply to any organization and this led me to the concept of The Transitional Organization, to which I will return later.

Too Good To Be True

One of the ideal factors was the timeframe. When I announced first to the Board and soon after that to our one staff member and 60 volunteers that I was not the president-for-life type, I projected that it would take three years to get the transition right. I had come to that conclusion after observing up close the transition of the founding Executive Director at ArtsBridge, the Incubator for the Arts, where the Complex administrative offices were housed.

In the culture of transition three months notice is a long time, but two or three weeks is more likely. I know of transitions that have had more advance notice, but they are anomalies. Three years notice is as rare as a white buffalo.

There are pros and cons to starting a transition so far in advance. It may appear to be a case of overkill, but the common reaction to any talk of my leaving the Complex was that the organization would not survive. I was obsessed with proving that assertion wrong. At the time I proposed a founder transition the organization was only seven years old and transition was not even a gleam in the Board's eyes. Although it was in mine.

Ultimately a planned transition has to be based in specific needs, stage of development, resources, organizational culture, and a balancing of the goals of the departing Director and the organization's strategic plan. At the Complex we had a lot of structural work to do. We had to create, fill, and fund at least three additional staff positions before even searching for someone to step into the E.D. position, so that the incoming E.D. would have one job instead of four. This was part of the professionalization of the Complex that was needed regardless of the transition. I was not going to leave until these posts were a stable part of the Complex structure, and in that context three years was not obsessive. Participation in the Audiences for Literature Network, a three-year project funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, now named the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, and a second multi-year grant from the MacArthur Foundation enabled the Complex to reach those capacity building goals.

Another key element that falls into the too good to be true category is that the incoming Executive Director was a founding member of the organization. She also had Executive Director experience, was a respected writer, recognized in the funding community, rooted in the local and national arts community, and possessed an arsenal of critical administrative skills, including development, programming, marketing, publishing and book selling, and more. We had also worked together on various projects for more than a decade.

The Complex also had a highly committed Board President, Board of Directors, volunteer base, and audience that were all instrumental to the transition. Also critical was the participation of a consultant who assisted a Board committee in developing and implementing the transition plan who had already worked with the organization on focus groups and two strategic plans. Funders also played a critical part in the transition.

A Little Notice Might Help

On hearing of my pending departure, with a little less than a year's notice, one funder responded that their continued funding would be tied to our transition plan. In short, the plan would have to ensure that the organization would continue its advancement and the implementation of its strategic plan. This was a concern because often the Complex was at the table with the "big boys" although still an "infant" in terms of budget. For instance, I once represented the Complex on an advisory committee to one of the country's largest funders when the annual budget was \$35,000. The next smallest organization on that committee had a \$375,000 budget. Being at the table, the concerned funder said, had a lot to do with my leadership. I recognized this but also knew that without a solid organization backing them up, even the most experienced Executive Director is not going to get very far with any funder.

The Complex had long-term relationships and multi-year support from an impressive group of funders, and I have to admit that the level of concern took me by surprise. I put on my game face, then put myself in the shoes of the funder, and quickly realized their concerns were legitimate and they would not be doing their job if they had not expressed them.

The Complex transition plan included my "post-transition" three-month consultancy to the organization, and stated we were seeking support for that part of the plan. The concerned funder went straight to that weak link in the plan and pointed out that seeking and having were quite different. How would we assure that part of the plan? I responded I would do the consultancy whether we had funding or not. Which I knew as soon as the words left my mouth was not the right answer. The Complex picked up the effort to get support and a foundation promised to fund the consultancy, telling us and encouraging us to inform concerned funders of that intention. This was very helpful, almost like money in the bank, although that funder reneged on their promise later in the year. Still this addressed a major concern from a major funder, and the Complex found a way to pay for the consultancy as planned.

When concerns about the transition were raised, I was certain that our soon due progress report to this funder would allay their fears, as it did, still it was a lesson in timing for me. We should have engaged this funder in the process earlier. There were differences among Board members about how and when to raise the issue of transition to the funding world. There was fear that funders would "freak out." While this is bound to happen with any founding director's departure, it will only be exaggerated if dropped like a bomb.

My advice is that most funders will be impressed and surprised by a well-conceived and thoughtful transition plan, and it is better to give as much notice as possible. But as a Marxist might say "conditions, time, and place." Each organization has to make this decision based on their specific circumstances. And it is not only a question of advance notice. Engaging the right funders in the process engenders trust, gives them a stake in the transition, and creates the opportunity for additional resources.

The principles of long-term planning, continuity, commitment, learning, relationship building, and the utilization of professional resources can be applied to any organization. These principles are also multi-layered. For instance, advance notice is not simply about more time, but about the psychological preparation of your constituency and the engagement of the community. This means that when it becomes clear that the transition is more than an organization strategy, but actually means the departure of one person and the arrival of another, the community is better prepared and supportive.

The challenge of clarifying these principles made me realize that ideally every organization should be in a state of constant and conscious transition. Transition is not static, but an organic process. The transitional organization does not wait for the announcement that someone is leaving to prepare for that event, because the challenges raised by the departure of any leader in an organization are relevant to its well-being, whether or not someone happens to be leaving. There are standard operations that are instrumental to an organization surviving transition that should be standardized and then constantly evaluated, replenished, and updated. A former Executive Director once told me "You can't predict and plan for everything." That is true and exactly why you have to plan for the things you can predict. Having prepared and possibly avoided the foreseen problems in transition will allow you to concentrate on the unforeseen dilemmas that will inevitably arise.

Time to Go

Part of my reason for "stepping down" as Executive Director may also be an anomaly. I was not burned out. In fact relative to where I had started, the job had become easier because I now had a staff, an expanding Board, and actually knew what I was doing. However, while I was quite active as an artist during my tenure as E.D. and was proud of some of my creative achievements, I knew I could be doing more and felt a community-based sense of duty to pay attention to my art. There were literary contests to which I could no longer even apply. I had suffered the embarrassing circumstance of editors asking for permission to publish my poetry for an anthology, only to find out that I was now too old to fit into their under 40 collection.

I also felt I needed, for the first time in my life, to be concerned about raising a family, owning a home, planning for retirement, etc., things I had ignored, but that most of the people I went to high school with had been dealing with for 20 years. I do not attribute my delays in dealing with these common parts of life simply to my time at the Complex. I went from five years of political organizing, to five years of working as a freelance correspondent in Africa, to 10 years as an Arts Administrator and artist. Twenty years can zip by when you're having fun.

I've also always felt that if you don't do things at the right time you may as well not do them. In addition to being excited about creating a life that facilitated my personal goals, I also wanted to leave the Complex while it was strong, because I did not like the idea of something I would have put 10 years of my life into (by the end of the transition) dying on my departure. The healthier the organizational body the better it could take the trauma that inevitably follows the collision of transition. And I believe that for organizations to reach new stages of development they need new leadership, this does not always mean a new director, but it made sense in the case of the Complex. I knew that my ability to juggle so many tasks at once and subsist on FOUR hours of sleep was not only bad for my health, but also hid the true capacity of the organization, while setting an unrealistic standard that might eventually prove fatal to the Complex. Maniac Executive Director syndrome had served its purpose and needed to end.

Dealing With Me

My life was tied into that of the Complex like circuitry. This made it practically impossible to deal with my pending post-Executive Director life. Plus my last year as Executive Director included the planned departure of an outstanding Administrative Manager, Jen Abrams, whom I had worked with for four years; three festivals and a conference, in addition to more than 100 annual events; the production of two Tia Chucha Press books in addition to a 10th Anniversary anthology, called *Power Lines - A Decade of Poetry from Chicago's Guild Complex*, which included poems from 105 of the thousands of poets who had read on the Complex stage. The 10th Anniversary benefit, which also doubled as my "going away party," were all based on the publication of the anthology. I say all that to say that in that final year, as Executive Director, there was little time to deal with my next life.

I did spend about six months leading up to my departure having lunch with friends and professional acquaintances getting their opinion on what I should do with my life, as I sold them on the transition. But the only planned consideration was a three-month "post-transition" consultancy, which turned out to be a safety net for the Complex and myself. I literally could not deal with myself until five months after the new Executive

Director "took office." While I seldom dealt with the Complex in this short-term manner, it was illustrative of the way I dealt with myself. As I told one interviewer, for the Complex I had a vision and a detailed transition plan, for myself I had only a vision. It has all worked out wonderfully, but I went through two scary post-transition months, and would not advise any one to follow the "deal-with-yourself-after-the-transition" model.

I remain very close to the Complex. While the new Executive Director asked me to join the Board of Directors, I did not think this would be good for the transition, and the Board and I concurred. I agreed to remain on the Tia Chucha Press Editorial Board and continue to act as an advisor to the Complex with a "speak when spokento" sensibility. I am often in touch with the Board President, Board members, the Director and staff, as well as volunteers and audience members. This has given me a unique perspective having participated in developing a transition vision and plan, implementing and surviving a transition, and being around to grapple with the aftermath. I am writing this essay one year after my transition, and I have found many occasions on which to be proud of the Complex and the remarkable job that has been done not only in maintaining the success of the organization, but also in starting the process of elevating it to the next level.

Michael Warr is Principal at WarrConsulting and specializes in succession and strategic planning, evaluation and assessment, diversity implementation, and community outreach. Details on his award-winning work as an arts administrator, poet and writer, can be found at his website:

www.Warrzone.net.

Appendix A

Task Oriented Job Description:

Debora Ott, Founder/Executive Director, *Just Buffalo*

Artistic Direction:

Artist selection for readings, workshops, residencies

Final approval for WNY Writers-in-Residence community service projects

(making sure they adhere to the spirit and intent of the program)

Program development from concept to implementation - internally for *Just Buffalo* and externally with collaborative partners.

Proposed programs include:

Writing Talks speaker series(University at Buffalo, Buffalo State College, Philharmonic Orchestra)

Art Changes Everything (ACE) - curriculum reform through the writing arts - *Writers in Education* extension into Hamburg Public Schools (suburban expansion)

A Picture's Worth - A Thousand Words - interdisciplinary program of writing and the visual arts; (Albright-Knox Art Gallery - collaborative partner) expansion to reach all Buffalo 4th graders

Established programs include:

1. *WNY Writers in Residence Writing Competition*
2. *Writers at Work* (writing competition)
3. *The Summer Reading League* (summer reading incentive program for children through 8th grade)
4. *WordPlay* (publication of students' work)
5. *A Picture's Worth - A Thousand Words* (see above)
6. *Interdisciplinary Programs in Poetry, Jazz, Dance & the Visual Arts*
7. *Readings, Workshops & Residencies*

Contract negotiation: with artists, their agents and with partners including presenters in other cities for writers' tours

Operations:

Communications:

Proofread and edit calendar & press release

Approve outgoing correspondence by new staff

Meetings with President & Executive Committee; liaison between Board and staff

Plan & conduct staff meetings

Represent agency to the public

Attend community meetings

Panelist

Speaker

Personnel:

Develop job descriptions

Prepare personnel practices; insure they are understood and carried out

Hire and terminate staff

Supervise staff

Conduct performance evaluations with staff

Train staff (if outgoing staff member is already gone)

Financial:

Prepare and administer the organization's budget

Develop and monitor program budgets

Analyze and maintain cash flow

Prepare final budget reports to funders

Development:

Write grants and/or strategize, supervise, and edit independent contractors' writing

Write final report narratives to funders and/or supervise staff to do so

Secure program contracts for services and/or supervise staff to do so

Make presentations to current and prospective funders

Maintain relationships with funders

Develop special event ideas

Other:

Founding member of NAILC - National Association of Independent Literary Centers;
current member of the Steering Committee

Oversee ArtSpace multi-arts facility development project

Provide for long-range planning opportunities for Board and staff

Committees:

Development & Finance

Nominating

Executive

Planning

Program/Marketing

Appendix B

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Just Buffalo Literary Center, Inc.

POSITION TITLE: Executive Director

General Responsibilities:

Under the general guidance of the Board of Directors, provides leadership, focus and direction for the Agency. Is active in and represents the Agency in the arts community.

Responsible for the Agency staff; hires and terminates employees under guidance of the Board of Directors and orients and evaluates staff performance.

Specific Duties:

1. Implements personnel policies and develops personnel practices and procedures consistent with such policy.
2. Oversees all aspects of program management through regular meetings with individual staff members and general staff meetings.
3. Oversees grant writing efforts of the Agency and the reporting to fund sources.
4. Assists the Board in fundraising.
5. Develops, submits for approval and manages the Agency budget.
6. Prepares and presents progress reports at Board meetings.
7. Oversees all aspects of program development and implementation.
8. Oversees staff support of Board activities.
9. Assumes other appropriate duties as requested by the Board of Directors.

Reporting Relationships:

1. Reports to: Board of Directors

2. Supervises: All Agency employees, directly or indirectly

Contacts:

1. External: Has frequent contact with arts community, community leaders and members of the Board
2. Internal: Has continual contact with all Agency employees

POSITION QUALIFICATIONS:

Key competencies include demonstrated leadership, problem solving, and interpersonal skills. Will also have strong oral and written communication skills and B.A. in an arts-related field and at least 5 years experience in arts or nonprofit management.

Appendix C

Job Announcement

Just Buffalo literary center seeks Executive Director:

22 year old, nationally recognized nonprofit center for the writing and spoken arts in Buffalo, NY seeking Director to succeed founder. Annual budget \$400K, staff of 5. Understanding of contemporary writing important. Must have track record in fundraising, board development and community outreach through the arts. Excellent written and oral communication skills important, as are demonstrated ability in arts/nonprofit management, with ability to develop and implement long range plan. Must have B.A., & be energetic, well-organized, and have proven leadership and

interpersonal skills. Send resume and salary requirements by 9/30 to Paul Battaglia, c/o Just Buffalo, 2495 Main St. ste. 436, Buffalo, NY 14214. No phone calls, please.

Appendix D

JUST BUFFALO LITERARY CENTER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

APPLICATION REVIEW

CANDIDATE _____

Appendix E

Interview Questions: First Round

1. Tell us about yourself. Include background and life experiences that have prepared you for the position of Executive Director.
2. Who are the three most influential people in your life? Why?
3. Describe your leadership style.
4. What do you believe are your three strongest professional attributes?
5. What three personal attributes would you like to improve?

6. Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?
7. What is your "hot button" (pet peeves)?
8. What would you like your legacy to be when you leave this organization?
9. Identify three strategies that you would employ to increase revenues through membership, special events and grant applications.
10. What are the three most important things to you?

Spontaneous Questions on Site:

1. What has your favorite job been and why?
2. What was your worst experience and why?
3. How do you choose your friends?
4. Describe what you think contemporary literature is; tell us your feelings about it.
5. Who do you think our constituents are?

6. How do you see business and arts connecting?
7. Any other questions?
8. Anything else you want to know?

Appendix F

Second Round:

1. Why are you interested in the Executive Director position?
2. What do you see as the three major challenges facing arts organizations?
3. What would you do to manage these challenges?
4. How will you work with the diverse groups in our community to ensure the financial and artistic vitality of *Just Buffalo*?
5. Describe how you will transition into this organization knowing that you are succeeding a founder.
6. Do you have any existing contacts with national funders? What is the nature of those relationships?

Presentation Questions:

Choose one of the following scenarios to present a 5-10 minute presentation.

- A. You have been called upon by the ABC School District to give a presentation on the merits of the Writers in Education program. Your audience includes the school superintendent, faculty and parents.

- B. There is a controversy brewing within the Board of Directors between two of your best members. How would you diffuse this situation?

- C. A member of your staff is not meeting your performance expectations. This staff member has been with you for ten years. She has had an excellent record until about six months ago. How would you proceed?

Spontaneous Questions on Site:

- 1. How would you determine the financial health of this organization from this income statement? Please analyze and discuss what you see.

- 2. We have engaged the current Executive Director as a consultant. How will you handle that? How would you use her? Are you comfortable with that?

Appendix G

QUALITIES OF A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - The Guild Complex

Attributes (these are personal qualities - not something that has been taught)

Commitment to not-for-profit domain

Passion for the arts (literature?)

Knowledge of/experience with the arts (literature?)

Integrity and ethical behavior

Commitment to "multi-culturalism"

Collaborative approach

Creative "hustler"... an arts "guerrilla"

Inventive

Flexible/Adaptable

Competencies (these are things that can be learned- skill level may vary)

People Development

Motivating colleagues/employees

Asserting authority while respecting others

Volunteer motivation and retention

Effective Delegation

Diplomacy in difficult situations

Problem-solving and Operational Skills

Financial management

Prioritizing and organizing day-to-day work

Analysis of problems

Creative approach and sound judgment in solving problems

Leadership

Strategic and critical thinking

Planning

Putting things in perspective

Providing guidance through long-term process

Arts Management Skills

Project/programming conceptualization

Grant writing and fundraising

Project implementation and supervision

Effective negotiator - working with artists

Promotion and Marketing Skills

Understands traditional and new ways to promote the organization and its activities

Providing leadership to the PR process - marketing plan - advertising campaign

Specific Must Haves Maybe Should Haves

Strong writing ability Literary experience (a writer?)

Experience with coordinating events Small press experience

E.D. experience for at least 2 years Success with individual donors

Experience with staff Local reputation/connections

Positive reputation with funders (local/national)

Experience with people from many cultures

Proven fundraising ability

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Author's Note: Citation of Sources

Books, Periodicals and Conference Proceedings:

The method for citing sources in this monograph follows the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. In this model, number(s) appear in parentheses following an individual's remarks or concepts once the author or speaker has been identified in the monograph text. For example, the quote below refers the reader to pages (26-29) of a work by Susan Kenny Stevens

According to Stevens, three stages of separation lead to successful transitions: Delegation, Separate Identities and Institutionalization, each stage leading from being 'the one' to being 'one of.' As it is a founder's values and aspirations that constitute her/his legacy, Stevens suggests that founders identify what their values are and seed them throughout the organization during the Institutional stage before they step down (26-29).

This second quote refers the reader to remarks made by Bruce Atwater at the Grantmakers in the Arts Conference; they appear on page (11) of the proceedings.

According to Atwater, governance is not only the link between leadership and the board of directors, it is also the vitally important link between the regimes of two successive leaders. Effective artistic leadership through multiple transitions, he continues, is the critical element for sustaining a strong arts institution (11).

In the event that more than one work is cited for the same author, or in cases where an author is also a conference participant, all or some of the title or the name of the conference sponsor is used in addition to pertinent page numbers. For example:

Hackman defines the functional model leader as someone who gets functions that are critical to an organization's effectiveness in place in such a way that they become part of the organization's culture. A functional rather than a personcentric approach allows leaders to play to their strengths, avoid their weaknesses, and accomplish functions in their own way. This approach does not focus on traits and styles in defining a leader, however, courage, emotional stability and personal values are identified as essential qualities for effective leaders, as people who have these qualities are better able to obtain and use the knowledge and skills they need to function as good leaders ("Leading Groups in Organizations" 109-110).

Successors of long-term leaders are often doomed to failure, according to Hackman, when they are hired based on the strengths and skill sets that are the perceived

weaknesses of the founders. In other words, boards will ask "what didn't the founder have?" and then go out and look for someone who has it. This method ignores founders' gifts, and doesn't properly take into account their legacy or acknowledge their contributions as leaders. It is a mistake (GIA Conference 19).

Interviews, E-mails & Electronic Media:

Information obtained from interviews or e-mails with individuals is referenced by using the name and affiliation of the individual the first time s/he is mentioned in the text, and generally the name alone thereafter. Individuals who contributed their insights to this monograph are listed under Interviews and Correspondence along with the date(s) and method of information exchange.

Websites are listed with the date accessed and the locator address. When possible, the means to obtain a printed format of the information is also given.

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National Center for Nonprofit Boards: www.ncnb.org

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation: www.nw.org

Nonprofit Risk Management Center: www.nonprofitrisk.org

The Foundation Center: www.fndcenter.org

About the Author

Debora Ott is a writer, editor, and Principal at Smart Solutions Arts Management Consulting. Her practice focuses on institutional capacity building, program development, collaborative partnerships, succession, and strategic planning. Her abiding passion is building community through a shared appreciation of the creative process. Toward this end, she has forged unique partnerships among business, education, and the arts. Ms. Ott founded *Just Buffalo* literary center, inc. in Buffalo, New York in 1975, and served as its Executive Director through 1997 when she accepted the prestigious New York State Governor's Arts Award for Excellence in the Arts at Lincoln Center. After over two decades of service, she crafted a founder transition to provide continuity of leadership and organizational stability for Just Buffalo. The plan, which she orchestrated along with her board, is a model for successorship. In March of 1998, the New York State Assembly honored her with a Citation for Community Service and Literary Accomplishments, and the Legislature of Erie County presented her with an Honor and Commendation for Accomplishments. Currently at home and at work in Atlanta, Georgia, Ms. Ott is on the New York Foundation for the Arts' Technical Assistance Program Consultant Roster and the Ohio Council on the Arts' Screened

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