

# LEADERSHIP FOR TRANSITION

Groups are more than their leaders; a strong group can survive the departure of its leader, no matter how charismatic, with a good transition process. A key component of strong leadership is preparing the group for the leader's inevitable departure. The leader is a guide who captures the voice of the group and keeps them steered on the right course—but the group is the engine, the force that sustains energy and momentum. Groups that have undergone successful leadership transitions offered the following tips for individual leaders:

## PREPARE FOR TRANSITION FROM DAY ONE

- ✓ **Build leadership capacity among the group.** Delegate tasks and activities to others to give them an opportunity to develop and showcase their skills.
- ✓ **Share responsibility.** While it's important that one person keep the proverbial “big picture” in mind, thriving groups often divide most of the responsibility among a steering committee or leadership board. Dividing responsibility and control helps foster leadership skills among other members of the group, and avoids too much reliance on a single person.
- ✓ **Consider term limits** in your group's bylaws—not only do they prevent one person from dominating the leadership, they also motivate other people to step up into new roles. Remember, though, that people need time to adjust to a new position; be sure your terms are long enough to allow for a learning curve.
- ✓ **Always work to expand the membership base**, thereby attracting new candidates for leadership positions
- ✓ **If a leader steps down** before her term is finished, she should give the group ample notice to prepare for the transition

## THE TRANSITION PROCESS

- ✓ **Clarify the process and timing of elections** in the group's bylaws so that no one is surprised when a transition period draws near.
- ✓ **Clarify the roles of each position** (president, secretary, etc.) in the group's bylaws so that people know what each entails.
- ✓ **Nominate candidates well before elections** to give people an opportunity to get to know and feel comfortable with their choices.
- ✓ **Smooth the transition** by making official introductions of the new leader to key players, such as Parks staff, any past funders, local elected officials, etc.
- ✓ **Remain present in the group** after you step down so that your institutional knowledge isn't lost. Ideally, the past president should stay on the group's board or steering committee.
- ✓ **Let go!** Accept that the new leader won't do things in exactly the same way as you. Don't second-guess or undermine the new leader's authority. (Remember that US Presidents have a tradition of never criticizing the decisions/behaviors of their successors.)