LEADERSHIP & SUCCESSSION PLANNING BEST PRACTICES

These best practices serve as a guide for Clubs and SIGs to help build and maintain a strong succession plan and volunteer pipeline.

Importance of a Strong Succession Planning Process: A strong succession planning process creates stability within the organization, eliminating the need for frantic searches to fill open positions. It encourages new ideas and creates an enjoyable team dynamic—attracting new volunteers and instilling a sense of pride in participation.

Recruiting Process:

Establish a clear strategy for attracting, vetting, nominating, electing, and onboarding new board members.

- Look for alumni who have demonstrated a commitment to the organization
    - Review event participation to identify highly engaged members
    - Consider active members from standing committees and Schools and Scholarships interviewers as potential Board members
- Match their interests and skill sets with a need of the organization
    - Have them organize a networking social or curate a content session
    - Require a bit of sweat equity
- Seek out candidates with integrity, enthusiasm, and time to commit to the Club or SIG. Focus on candidates who display passion and willingness to do more
    - Avoid self-interested people and those who demonstrate vision but lack time
- Actively recruit a diverse Board by considering age, schools, gender, and interests. Use surveys of new members' interests to enhance engagement and involvement
- Encourage existing Board members to recommend new candidates with the needed expertise or skills for a successful Board
- Make general solicitations to membership for Board recruitment and program volunteer support. Announce entry volunteer positions in newsletters and at events. Outline the benefits and impact of volunteering.
- Provide comprehensive details about the role and its responsibilities, time commitments, and expectations, and ensure candidates understand the organization's operations and its relationship with the HAA
    - Job descriptions are strongly encouraged. They allow the individual to understand the full scope of the role and make and informed decision.
- **President Role**
    - Use Board roles to develop future presidents. Ideally, the president should be selected from the Board, to ensure a smoother leadership transition and knowledge transfer.

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- o Add a President-Elect or First Vice President to shadow the president. Co-presidents can share responsibilities effectively
  - o Consider staggered terms for co-presidents to ensure continuity in leadership and historical and operational knowledge
  - o There are several methods for nominating a president, which should be determined by the Board and outlined in the Bylaws. These methods may include, but are not limited to:
    - A self-nominated candidate from the Board
    - A candidate nominated by the Board
    - A candidate nominated by the Nominating Committee
- **Eligibility:** Review the HAA Clubs and SIGs Operating Agreement for guidelines on who qualifies to be a Board member or President, can nominate candidates, and vote in elections of the local Harvard Club or SIG

Nomination Process:

Implement a formal recommendation or nomination process for selecting new board members.

- If your organization has a Nominating Committee, the Nominating Committee should recommend members to the Board
  - Ensure that the Nominating Committee, like your Board, is representative of the demographics of the organization's community
- Nominate VPs to the Board to balance workload and support each other. Assign each member to manage a specific program or strategy
- Inform the community about nomination requirements, as stated in the Bylaws
- Encourage nominations to be just, and verify nominees' willingness and commitment
- Have the Nominating Committee or Board confirm nominees' availability and interest, and request their profiles and goal statements

Election Process:

Communicate a Bylaw-defined election process to all members.

- Confirm new members through the Annual General Meeting or similar event, either in-person or online
  - o If a US-based Club or SIG has filed an IRS Form 990, it is required to hold an annual meeting. International Clubs and SIGs are required to abide by their local laws and regulations
  - o Define any additional voting requirements based on your organization's Bylaws
- Voting can be conducted in-person or virtually, as specified in your Bylaws
- Announce nominations and elections, including deadlines and eligibility requirements, well in advance

Sample Nominating and Election Timeline:

A solid and consistent nominating and elections process usually takes about six (6) months from beginning to end.

- **Month 1:** Review the terms and limits of current Board members. Check in to see if they will continue.
- **Month 2:** Ensure that the Nominating Committee doesn't have any conflicts of interest. This could be knowing a nominee personally or being a nominee for a senior leadership position such as President.
- **Month 3:** Finish gathering nominations and ensure that there is good representation of the alumni population.
- **Month 4:** Build out profiles for each candidate and conduct interviews. Have Committee members share expectations and job descriptions with the candidates.
- **Month 5:** Prepare the slate for approval by the Board. Connect back with all nominees. For those with high potential that weren't selected, find a way for them to have a role, even if not as an officer.
- **Month 6:** Onboard the board members. Align onboarding with an important Club or SIG event. This gives new officers a chance to meet the Committees they'll be working with and makes for a nice transition between the former and new team members.

Bylaws and Governance

Incorporate specific provisions in your Bylaws regarding board membership, including eligibility criteria, nomination and election procedures, confirmation, term lengths, renewals, and removal processes.

- Set term lengths and limits in the Bylaws, with provisions for exceptions
- Implement a process with checks and balances, including a code of conduct for the Board and members, in the Bylaws
- Review your Bylaws and update as needed to ensure that they incorporate key governance processes and any changes
    - Consider limiting the length of the president's term to ensure a healthy transition of leadership and maintenance of a succession pipeline
    - Avoid simultaneous changes in the President and Board to preserve institutional knowledge. Designate different term lengths for the president and Board members and staggered term changes for continuity.
    - Implement fixed terms for Board members, rotating or renewing a few each year to bring fresh perspectives. Specify the rotation number in the Bylaws.
- Add a conflict of interest clause to your Bylaws and require signatures from new leaders. Refer to the *Ethics/Conflicts of Interest* section in the [HAA Clubs and SIGs Operating Agreement](#) for more information.
- Establish a diverse and balanced Board with the authority to elect new members
    - Recruit candidates reflecting your alumni community's demographics
    - Incorporate the [HAA Community Values](#) into your bylaws
    - Use the confirmation process at the General Annual Meeting or Assembly as an additional check

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- Include a Bylaws clause for removing any officer convicted of a crime, except for political or ideological offenses. Place the officer on administrative leave if accused or indicted, pending investigation. Act swiftly to remove convicted or accused officers to avoid complications, while distinguishing between political persecution and criminal activity

Board Culture and Leadership

Foster a positive board culture and effective leadership.

- Promote a culture in the Board that welcomes and encourages the contributions of new members
- Keep past presidents engaged by offering them key roles on the Board or Executive Committee. They bring valuable experience and aid in smooth transitions, though their continued involvement should be assessed if the transition was disruptive.
- Over time, encourage prospective Board members to gradually take on more responsibilities at meetings and events to boost members' ownership and support
- Ensure new officers work collaboratively with existing leadership and secure Board and committee buy-in for succession plans
- Pair individuals for crucial Board roles to reduce dependency on any single person's circumstances (e.g., co-chairs, co-vice presidents, and co-presidents)

Onboarding Resource Managment

Develop tools and resources to streamline the onboarding process for new members.

- Create a RunBook or transition document to capture organizational knowledge and procedures, ensuring a smooth and organized transfer. Keep the RunBook confidential and share only with officers or Committee Chairs who need it.
  - Items to include in a RunBook:
    - The organization's mission, history, and keys to success
    - Structural organization, Board duties, and officer qualifications
    - Onboarding and election procedures, and term periods for roles
    - Key people currently involved and their contact information
    - Transfer essential data (bank, financial, insurance, tax-related) and key deadlines
- Ensure the president and one Executive Committee member have access to accounts and all signing privileges
  - Store passwords securely, separate from the RunBook
  - Key policies, procedures, and institutional memory (events, successes, lessons learned)
  - HAA services, resources, and main contacts

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- o   Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and the Annual Report
- Complete the [New Leadership Checklist](#) to ensure a successful transition of HAA Clubs and SIGs team information to incoming volunteer leaders
- Encourage leaders to attend HAA conferences to strengthen Club and SIG leadership.
  - o   **Alumni Leadership Conference (ALC):** Held annually in October, this conference offers networking and growth opportunities for Harvard Club and SIG leaders worldwide
  - o   **International Leadership Workshop (ILW):** Held every February, ILW offers international Clubs and global SIGs an opportunity to connect and learn from each other