Practitioner Roles in Executive Transition

The **Executive Transition and Leadership Continuity (ETLC)** field encompasses preparation for the episodic and inevitable needs of leadership change in nonprofits. Ensuring leadership continuity, at the highest levels, are carried out by boards of directors as part of their board agenda throughout the year, when vulnerabilities are discussed and succession plans are created. An investment in leadership continuity can ensure positive organizational outcomes, such as:

* Strengthening mission results through thoughtful and aligned hiring decisions;
* Rebuilding and re-engineering organizational capacity through assessment of current strengths and challenges;
* Recognizing diversity, equity and inclusion as key components of culturally responsive nonprofit leadership and organizational ethos; and
* Reducing potential risks and disruption of systems resulting from a leadership void.

Practitioners capable of assisting with these tasks both proactively and during the change episode include: *Interim Executive Directors/Interim CEOs and Search Consultants* that operate within the broader framework of transition management. Practitioners include:

**Interim Executive Directors/CEOs (IED/ICEO)-** Interim leaders are experienced and knowledgeable professionals who have the skills to assess and build capacity of nonprofit organizations. Knowing these times of change can be transformative, particularly those with founder or legacy leader successions, Interims model effective leadership while making necessary corrections and adjustments. In some cases, volunteer board members might serve in this capacity, however, most organizations prefer trained professionals to achieve the needed results.

**Search Consultants-** Recruiters locate and onboard the best prepared candidate to the open position through a process that includes thorough vetting and community input to identify the attributes most desired and required in the future leader. Recognizing diversity, equity and inclusion as key components of culturally responsive nonprofit leadership and organizational ethos. (Can be part of succession policy – we commit to hearing a search consultant who uses a DEI lens…)

It is useful to understand these transitions within a framework introduced by Organizational Psychologist, William Bridges[[1]](#footnote-1):

1) Transitions begin as a result of something known having ended and creating vulnerability in the organization;

2) There is a neutral period of adjustment during the transition that if managed properly, can be a creative and productive period of preparation; and

3) A new beginning marks the end of the transition period and includes a plan for forward momentum.

1. Managing Transitions, Making the Most of Change, William Bridges, PhD, 4th Edition, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)