

## Succession Planning is Governance in Action, Interim Leadership Makes it Real



Leadership transitions are no longer rare events in the nonprofit sector.

The latest findings in our [State of the Interim Profession Report](#) affirm what many nonprofit staff and boards are experiencing firsthand: **Sustained burnout, leadership churn, outdated systems, hybrid-work challenges, funding instability, and rollback of some equity commitments.**

A consistent message from the participants in the Report is that **board readiness** for executive transition and **awareness of the importance of strategic interim leadership** are the determining factors in guiding community causes to consider what's next.

**Forward-thinking boards** that plan for transition understand the value of interim leadership before they need it.

They **embrace their governance responsibilities** by creating conditions that pave the way for long-term organizational health. That includes planning for **short-term and long-term leadership solutions**, assuring a stabilized organization during transitions, and taking the necessary time to understand what should be the responsibilities of the new leader that are forward-looking and not an updated job description from years ago.

### Succession Planning Cannot Sit in a Binder

Many organizations have succession plans or policies, but few can actually operationalize them. **Written documents can offer guidelines**, but when an involuntary or voluntary executive transition occurs, there are factors and situations that few policies can adequately address:

- The messaging of the transition to **community members, donors and staff**
- The assurance of **daily operations and service delivery** during a leadership change
- Clarity about **board behaviors and roles**, especially when a claim of wrongful termination may be part of the transition process

That's where **interim leadership becomes an essential component of mobilizing a plan** for an entire organization, versus one position in the organization.

## **What the Field Is Telling Us**

Participants in the Report's research process **recommend that succession planning leans into interim leadership** as a critical policy decision. This includes:

- **Embedding an interim leadership strategy into the succession planning plan/policy**
- Declaring that transition is an **opportunity for intentional reflection and renewal**
- Emphasizing the **“third-party” nature of interim leadership**, especially during mergers or founder transitions, to assure candid, unbiased guidance
- **Establishing a transition team**, appropriate to the needs at the time, so that the board and operations don't abandon their primary responsibilities during times of executive transition

Together, these insights affirm **interim leadership as a purposeful tool that improves decision-making and supports long-term organizational health.**

## **How Third Sector Company Responds**

Third Sector Company has advanced succession planning and executive leadership transition practices since our beginning in 2002. Our founding mission was “fostering leadership continuity solutions”.

Today, **we provide succession planning services to national and regional organizations and associations, both in person and online**, to equip boards to reflect and prepare before a leadership gap occurs.

Our work is directed by training and facilitation services that help organizations develop succession strategies and build organizational consensus about leadership transition before confronted by the situation. The **goal is to help organizations build the best bridges between their prideful past and what's next**, including intentionality about thoughtful interim leadership solutions and informed hiring decisions about the subsequent leader.

Services include:

- **Board training programs that incorporate what we've learned about succession planning techniques, executive transitional approaches, and working effectively with interim leaders in over 900 nonprofits over 24 years**
- **Community facilitations in partnership with community foundations that bring together many organizations to talk about the lack of succession planning in nonprofits as a community issue, placing vital services at risk**
- **Succession planning consultation to apply best practices in succession planning and leadership transition, offered in partnership with a national community of succession planning consultants we have trained**
- **Interim executive resource and referral to provide boards and nonprofits access to our 700 alumni of Interim Executives Academy.**

## **What Our Customers Say About How Interims Care for Organizations During Executive Succession**



*"Our interim was just what FishWise needed at its moment of crisis. She brought strong Executive Director skills to the board, the leadership team, and the organization as a whole. But **more than her 'hard skills', she brought the 'soft skills' that were even more important.** She has a unique combination of sincere empathy, a commitment to listen deeply, and a willingness to collaborate with strong personalities to find a path forward. Importantly, she helped stabilize the organization and **heal the trauma that many staff (and board members alike) harbored** from the unexpected departure of the ED." **George Leonard, PhD***

Former Board Chair, FishWise, Santa Cruz, CA

**If your organization is navigating or anticipating a leadership transition**, we invite you to learn more about what effective succession planning and interim leadership looks like and how Third Sector Company can help.

→ [Explore the State of the Interim Leadership Profession](#)

→ [Learn How Third Sector Company Supports Nonprofit Transitions](#)

Third Sector Company supports **search committees and boards** of nonprofit organizations for interim executive recruitment and placement. The graduates of our Interim Executives Academy offer nonprofit organizations proven methods to ensure staff

support, operational best practices, and continued mission impact during an executive search and transition.



**Third Sector Company** is a nationally recognized pioneer in leadership continuity solutions for community impact organizations including charitable causes, professional associations, congregations and foundations. The organization offers interim executive training, placement, coaching, support services, and job advertising and counsel.

[www.thirdsectorcompany.com](http://www.thirdsectorcompany.com)