



Ready to lead with the rolling start readiness score

Why transition planning is not “measuring the drapes”

EY Parthenon
Shape the future with confidence

IN BRIEF

- **Election night is not a starting gun.** It is a checkpoint. The strongest transition teams arrive with “the boat moving;” with clear initial decisions already staged for execution.
- **The objective is a rolling start.** Entering the governing window at speed, aligned and ready to “pull together” are hallmarks of successful transition teams.
- **Preparation is not presumption.** Pre-election work creates stability, control, analysis and options; policy choices and appointments come after election night.
- **Readiness must be observable.** A practical eight-dimension scorecard converts good intentions into: accountable owners, governance frameworks, clear expectations, an execution roadmap and supporting templates.

Transition planning isn’t about jumping the start. It’s about avoiding spending the first mile learning how to row together.

The first governing decision is made before the votes are counted

Anyone who has watched a crew race knows the violence of the standing start. A crew already in motion has an advantage: the rowers are matched, the rhythm is established and momentum already exists. A gubernatorial transition works much the same way. The goal of pre-election planning is not to cross the line before the race is called. It is to avoid spending the first weeks after Election Day building the basic machinery of a transition from a standstill.

The first approach produces a standing start, while the second produces a rolling one.

This is the choice in gubernatorial transition planning. A campaign can treat Election Day as the moment to begin building the machinery of government, or it can reach Election Night prepared and moving: a transition leader named, legal and ethical guardrails in place, an operating cadence established, a personnel process teed up, a common agency-review template developed and a disciplined way to translate promises into executable choices.

Why good campaigns arrive flat-footed

The hesitation is understandable. Campaigns are consumed by the immediate demands of winning an election. Candidates do not want to look entitled. Staff worry that naming a transition lead or designing an appointments process will be read as “measuring the drapes.” Preparing to govern can feel like a distraction from the work required to win.

The complexities of today (global conflicts, technology advancements, AI, tariffs, pandemics, etc.) demand using every minute post-election as wisely as possible. This requires a disciplined approach to determining what you can decide now, what you can design now and what needs to be deferred intentionally.

A preemptive approach requires the following discipline: decide only what creates control, design what will remove delay and defer what properly belongs to the governor-elect after the election.

THE PRE-ELECTION DISCIPLINE



Decide now



Design now



Defer by design

Leadership and guardrails

- Name a trusted transition lead
- Set campaign-transition boundaries
- Define confidentiality and escalation

Processes and evidence

- Build the work plan and decision calendar
- Create appointment and agency-review templates
- Assemble the data and fact base that serves as a foundation for decision-making

Outcome-dependent choices

- Final cabinet selections
- Final policy portfolio
- Irreversible commitments

A transition is an operating system, not a binder

Most transition plans look impressive from a distance. They contain workstreams, timelines and lengthy lists of questions. The test is what happens on a difficult morning: Who can make the call? Which facts are trusted? What must be escalated? What can wait? Who owns the handoff?

The strongest transitions reduce ambiguity before pressure arrives. They establish clear decision rights, a common operating cadence, and shared ways of working across the various workstreams (personnel, policy, budget, communications and agency review, etc.). When Election Day arrives, the transition team shouldn't be deciding how to work together. It needs to already be working together, enabling smooth engagement with the outgoing administration, and career state employees.

From concepts to evidence: the rolling start readiness score

When evaluating transition readiness, a team shouldn't ask whether a campaign has discussed transition planning. It should ask whether evidence exists on who is accountable and how the process will function under pressure.

The rolling start readiness scorecard allows campaign and transition teams to take an evidence-based, objective review of current state readiness and what



needs to change immediately. The assessment is organized along eight key dimensions that span organization and personnel, to budget and legal.

As campaigns evaluate their readiness using the scorecard, we recommend the following rules to help ensure they are being honest about the final score.

- **No evidence, no credit.** A meeting, a promise or a person's confidence is not proof of readiness. Count artifacts and tested mechanisms.
- **Averages can hide a critical vulnerability.** A high total does not offset a zero in legal and ethics, budget, organization or continuity. Any zero in a dimension triggers immediate action.

SCORING RUBRIC

0 Not started	1 Concept	2 Built	3 Tested
No owner, no artifact and no agreed next step.	An owner is identified and intent is documented, but the mechanism is incomplete.	A usable artifact or process exists, with roles and decision rights defined.	The process has been tested or challenged; gaps have owners and due dates.

EIGHT-DIMENSION SCORECARD

Dimension	Readiness test	Evidence to look for	Score
1 Organization	Can the transition operate independently of the campaign?	Named lead, charter, decision rights, secure tools and launch checklist	0 1 2 3
2 Personnel	Can the team move from getting campaign talent to getting governing talent?	Priority roles, role profiles, sourcing map and vetting and ethics workflow	0 1 2 3
3 Policy to delivery	Have promises been translated into governable choices?	Commitment inventory, authority and funding map, sequencing and accountable owner	0 1 2 3
4 Communications	Can the new administration communicate with one voice?	Spokesperson, announcement sequence, approvals and outgoing-team protocol	0 1 2 3
5 Agency review	Will every agency be assessed on a common basis?	Standard request, baseline data, issue log, synthesis and escalation method	0 1 2 3
6 Budget and fiscal baseline	Can leaders see the inherited fiscal position, limitations and trade-offs?	Baseline request, fund restrictions, budget calendar and rough-order cost ranges	0 1 2 3
7 Legal and ethics	Can the transition withstand scrutiny from day one?	Counsel, firewall, disclosure and conflicts process and records rules	0 1 2 3
8 Continuity and resilience	Could the incoming team manage a first-week disruption?	Authorities, chain of command, critical contacts, continuity plans and tabletop scenario	0 1 2 3

TOTAL SCORE INDICATES YOUR OVERALL READINESS LEVEL

0-7 Standing still	8-15 Catching the water	16-20 Building speed	21-24 Rolling start
Critical foundations are absent. Name a lead, establish guardrails and create a 14-day recovery plan.	Pieces exist, but they do not yet operate as one system. Prioritize seams and dependencies.	Core processes are usable. Test the weakest dimensions and close owner/date gaps.	The operation is aligned and tested. Protect optionality, rehearse handoffs and keep facts current.

The finish line is public trust

- On a final note: While transition planning is a race against the calendar, the deeper risk is a preventable loss of trust. Administrations can struggle to bounce back from an appointment that collapses in vetting, a promise announced before legal authority is understood, a budget commitment made without a baseline or an early crisis that was not prepared for.
- Citizens do not experience a transition plan. They experience service (dis-)continuity, whether leaders appear in control, and whether the new administration can turn promises into action. Preparation is not to make the transition team look sophisticated; it is to make government feel steady and effective through leadership changes.
- This is why the crew analogy works. Speed is not one rower pulling harder; but rather it is a team pulling in coordinated sequence, sharing a rhythm, with a coxswain who knows how and when to call for power and when to hold course. A transition reaches governing speed the same way: shared facts, clear roles, disciplined decisions and practiced coordination.
- This article is the first in the EY multi-part approach that governors and their teams can use to prepare for leading. Stay tuned for our next article – The 72-hour transition.

AUTHORS



Doree Keating

EY Americas Government & Public Sector Industry Group, Vice Chair
Ernst & Young LLP
doree.keating@ey.com



Mike Slattery

EY-Parthenon Americas Government & Public Sector Industry Leader
Ernst & Young LLP
mike.slattery@parthenon.ey.com



James Dolan, PhD

Principal, EY-Parthenon
Ernst & Young LLP
james.r.dolan@parthenon.ey.com



Jon Hughes

Managing Director
Ernst & Young LLP
jon.hughes2@ey.com



Nita Bhat

Senior Manager, EY-Parthenon
Ernst & Young LLP
nita.bhat@parthenon.ey.com

EY | Building a better working world

EY is building a better working world by creating new value for clients, people, society and the planet, while building trust in capital markets.

Enabled by data, AI and advanced technology, EY teams help clients shape the future with confidence and develop answers for the most pressing issues of today and tomorrow.

EY teams work across a full spectrum of services in assurance, consulting, tax, strategy and transactions. Fueled by sector insights, a globally connected, multidisciplinary network and diverse ecosystem partners, EY teams can provide services in more than 150 countries and territories.

All in to shape the future with confidence.

EY refers to the global organization, and may refer to one or more, of the member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. Information about how EY collects and uses personal data and a description of the rights individuals have under data protection legislation are available via ey.com/privacy. EY member firms do not practice law where prohibited by local laws. For more information about our organization, please visit ey.com.

Ernst & Young LLP is a client-serving member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited operating in the US.

About EY-Parthenon

Our unique combination of transformative strategy, transactions and corporate finance delivers real-world value – solutions that work in practice, not just on paper.

Benefiting from EY's full spectrum of services, we've reimaged strategic consulting to work in a world of increasing complexity. With deep functional and sector expertise, paired with innovative AI-powered technology and an investor mindset, we partner with CEOs, boards, private equity and governments every step of the way – enabling you to shape your future with confidence.

EY-Parthenon is a brand under which a number of EY member firms across the globe provide strategy consulting services. For more information, please visit ey.com/parthenon.

© 2026 Ernst & Young LLP.
All Rights Reserved.

US SCORE no. 32472-261US
2609-10069-CS | ED None

This material has been prepared for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be relied upon as accounting, tax, legal or other professional advice. Please refer to your advisors for specific advice.

ey.com