



The 72-hour transition

From campaign to governing enterprise



IN BRIEF

- **The morning after the election changes the job.** The organization that spent months trying to win an election now has 72 hours to begin operating like the team that will govern a state.
- **The people who win the campaign are not automatically the team required for the transition.** Many people and capabilities will transfer; others won't. The work has changed, and the team has to change with it.
- **The governor-elect cannot become the transition's bottleneck.** The team needs to know what it can decide, what needs to be escalated and which decisions actually require the governor-elect.
- **The first 72 hours have to be planned before Election Day.** The Transition Control Tower lays out what activates when the election is called, who owns what and how the operation moves from Election Night through Day 10.

First, the people ...

By now, hopefully all serious gubernatorial candidates have either determined their Transition Director or named them publicly. If not, the morning after is the time to release that name. It is also the time to put into motion a huge pivot, from campaign mode into the bridge period that precedes governing. And it's not easy. After a campaign win, the bond with the campaign team may feel incredibly strong and morale is at an all-time high. After all, this is the team that just went to war together and spent months in the trenches. It is tempting to want to take all of these wonderful people into the next chapter. It takes real mental clarity to recognize, much less say out loud, that some of the people who were instrumental to the campaign's success may not have the skills required for the work that comes next.

Successful campaigns evoke attention, emotion, enthusiasm and passion. They reward speed, message discipline, persuasion and competitive instincts. Successful administrations, including those in transition, must convey stability, consistency, competence and maybe even "business as usual."

Some campaign capabilities transfer directly, but the transition requires operating discipline, analytical depth, intergovernmental coordination, process management and the ability to work constructively with career government officials and an outgoing administration. Some of these skills might not exist in the campaign, or might not be robust enough for the task of transition.

Given the difference in skill set, it doesn't mean the campaign team is discarded on Wednesday morning. Many people and capabilities will transfer; others will not. The communications staff who wrote eye-popping texts or stump speeches may or may not be best suited to draft a State of the State address. However, someone who developed complex policy briefs may transition naturally into the next phase.

It is important to assess people against the work that now needs to be done, rather than assume that campaign success automatically translates into transition readiness. Ultimately, the work shifts, and the governor-elect has to decide who has the skills to be part of the next chapter and who may not – all while conveying enormous gratitude for their work that got the campaign to this point.

... then there's the machinery

As the people change, the machinery has to change with them. The transition will need to quickly establish a working relationship with the outgoing administration. That means having named points of contact on both sides and a clear process for requesting information, setting up interviews, and raising issues. Without that structure, it is easy to imagine dozens of people across the transition independently reaching out to agencies, asking different questions, and getting different answers.

The transition will also need a project charter that serves as the roadmap between Election Day and inauguration – with clear goals, milestones, deadlines and owners. The transition will want interviews with current agency leaders and a standardized set of data requests covering the budget, workforce, major contracts and initiatives, pending decisions and other information needed to understand the government the governor-elect is about to inherit. Together, this becomes the base of facts that will later inform policy and budget decisions.

Then, there is the question of how the transition itself will make decisions. Suddenly, everything will be happening at once, and the governor-elect cannot be the person everyone comes to for an answer. The governor-elect will need visibility into what is happening across the transition, but only the decisions that actually require that level of judgment or authority should make their way up. Transition directors and workstream leads need to know what they can decide on their own, what needs to be discussed with other parts of the transition, and what needs to be escalated. A steering committee or similar governance structure can help resolve those issues and make sure the governor-elect is weighing in at the moments when that input really matters.

Think of it as a control tower

Think about how an air traffic control tower works: the people in the tower aren't flying the planes; they know what is in the air, what is taking off and landing, where there may be conflicts, and when someone needs to intervene. Roles are clear, communication channels are established, and everyone is working from a common set of data. A well-run control tower shouldn't feel chaotic – even though many things are unfolding at the same time.

A transition needs to operate in much the same way. The goal isn't to route every decision through the governor-elect. It is to make sure the right people have

the information and authority to make decisions, while giving transition leadership visibility across the whole operation. When something does need to move up, everyone should know where it goes and who makes the call.

This is the idea behind the Transition Control Tower. It gives the transition team one view of what needs to happen on Election Night, in the first 72 hours and over the following week – along with who owns the work and where decisions need to be escalated. The governor-elect's view should be simpler still: Which decisions require my attention? What is at risk? Which milestones are coming next? And where is my time actually needed?



Activation, not design

Wednesday, November 4 is not the day to be thinking about any of this for the first time. By then, the plan should be ready to activate: a transition director ready to step forward, people who know their roles, a process for engaging the outgoing administration, initial information requests ready to go and clear rules for how decisions will be made.

There will be plenty the transition team cannot know before Election Day and plenty it should not decide. However, the basic machinery of the transition can be designed in advance. When November 4 arrives, the team should be activating that machinery, not designing it for the first time.

This is the second article in our multi-part gubernatorial transition series. Our first, "Ready to lead with the rolling start readiness score," focused on what candidates can prepare before Election Day while preserving the decisions that properly belong to the governor-elect. Next, we'll look at "Building the team that will run the state," – looking at how to design the leadership system the administration will need to execute its priorities.

TRANSITION CONTROL TOWER - ELECTION NIGHT TO DAY 10

THE PURPOSE				Maintain control of the transition without becoming the bottleneck.
TRANSITION WORKSTREAMS	ELECTION NIGHT/DAY 1 Activate	FIRST 72 HOURS Establish and coordinate	DAYS 4-10 Operate and deepen	DECISION FLOW (Who decides what/when)
PEOPLE Build the right team with the right capabilities	- Publicly name Transition Director - Confirm immediate leadership (core team) - Secure key campaign staff for short-term activation - Begin initial campaign-to-transition talent assessment	- Confirm workstream leads - Decide critical campaign staff who will transition - Identify capability gaps - Launch priority searches - Communicate expectations for the next chapter	- Launch broader transition teams - Initiate leadership interviews - Finalize interim staffing plan - Onboard key external advisors and subject matter experts	Workstream lead <i>Can the workstream lead decide within agreed authority?</i> Yes Decide and log No ↓ Transition director <i>Cross-workstream issue or material departure from plan?</i> Yes Resolve or escalate No Decide and log Steering committee <i>Requires enterprise trade-off or senior alignment?</i> Yes Resolve/recommend No Return for workstream action Governor-elect <i>Only for decisions requiring the governor's authority, judgment or political mandate.</i> Decision made <i>Communicate, document, implement, track</i>
GOVERNANCE Create the operating system for the transition	- Activate decision protocols - Confirm decision rights framework - Establish secure communication channels - Schedule first Steering Committee meeting	- Stand up Steering Committee (membership and cadence) - Confirm workstream charters and owners - Establish escalation rules - Activate Transition Director as single point of coordination	- Test decision flow and refine as needed - Assess workload and adjust cadence - Ensure documentation and issue tracking are current	
OUTGOING ADMINISTRATION Establish a professional, productive interface	- Initiate formal contact with outgoing governor - Confirm transition liaisons on both sides - Communicate collaborative transition posture	- Launch leader-to-leader call - Confirm schedule of briefings - Issue initial information and data request list - Agree on logistics, access and protocols	- Conduct agency leader briefings - Begin structured agency engagement - Resolve access or information issues quickly	
FACTS AND INFORMATION Build the enterprise fact base	- Activate secure systems and document repository - Confirm data security and confidentiality protocols - Compile existing intelligence and research	- Issue standardized data requests to agencies - Launch fact-finding interviews - Request key fiscal, workforce, operational and contract data - Establish issue and risk log	- Receive and track incoming data - Synthesize initial themes and issues - Identify data gaps and follow up	
PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS Set the tone for stability and competence	- Deliver victory speech with governing message - Announce Transition Director and core priorities - Signal gratitude to campaign team and supporters	- Communicate transition plan and timeline - Sequence key stakeholder and constituent communications - Establish media and message protocols	- Maintain regular updates - Begin visible governing posture (listening, learning, preparing) - Reinforce continuity of services and commitment to results	

THE GOVERNOR-ELECT'S VIEW		A snapshot at at any moment		
DECISIONS DUE What decisions require my input or approval? - Items awaiting me - Deadline	ISSUES ESCALATED What issues need my attention? - Escalated items - From where/why	CRITICAL RISKS What could derail our transition or early term? - Top risks - Mitigation status	NEXT MILESTONES What happens next on our timeline? - Upcoming milestones - Key dates	GOVERNOR TIME REQUIRED Where does my time create the most value? - Meetings/events - Decisions

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

- Review daily with your transition director
- Keep the board current – status changes fast
- Insist on disciplined escalation and documentation

KEY CONTACTS (example)

Transition director _____ Cell: _____
 Steering committee chair _____ Cell: _____
 Outgoing admin liason _____ Cell: _____

AUTHORS

Reach out to a team member below to request a sample template of what this plan could look like for your state.



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