

January 17, 2024 – Leadership Transitions. Is there anything you can learn from MWCC’s recent experience with our Executive Director transition? One way to find out. Join MWCC Board Chair Zach Owen and any other board member he can drag in to share our experience leading up to our previous ED’s departure, our nearly four months without an ED, and our hiring experience.

- How did we plan for the transition?
- ED advance notice was huge for us. ED let us know months ahead of time that he was looking, and we had a little over month notice that he was leaving. Once he announced he was leaving, we put together a transition team. We ran through everything that came to mind on how to get institutional knowledge out of ED, how to advertise the job, interviews, selection.
- Did things run smoothly without an ED?
- Surprisingly yes. Due to the advance planning. ED played a huge role in this.
- How’d the hiring process go?
- Pretty well. We made a lot of on-the-fly decisions, some better than others. “Open until filled” was a decision we regretted. Advertising beyond our network was a sound decision, but didn’t produce good results. Nearly every one of our “qualified” candidates came from within our network.
- How can you avoid disaster?
- Planning. Convening the right people. Who are the right people? Anyone who cares about a smooth transition and finding a quality candidate. Anyone curious about a transition process, without rigid ideas about how it “should” go and what’s “right”. We had Executive and Governance Committee members meet right after ED’s announcement, and we talked about what needed to happen, started laying out a plan.
- Our team worked with the outgoing ED on a task list, sort of a work flow. What needs to happen daily or weekly? Monthly? What are upcoming hard deadlines? What can wait until after the new hire? Daily/weekly/monthly tasks delegated to transition team members or staff as appropriate. This turned out to be very helpful for the new ED, also.
- Be ready for disagreement. It was amazing how strongly some team members felt in opposition to ideas other members thought were great, and progressive. Respecting different opinions. Respectful disagreement. Be prepared, depending on the personalities involved, to question everything. Try not to be lazy and do things “because that’s how it’s been done.” There are a lot of assumptions buried in how things have been done, many of them incorrect or outdated. Be curious. If you have a very outside-the-box idea, be sure to shop it around, and check labor laws etc. Take the time to do it right

the first time. Otherwise, at best you'll get lucky in your hire, or be doing the whole thing over again sooner than later, at worst you're stuck with a bad fit.

- What resources are available to help?
- MNA Transition Toolkit has been released!! Resources all over the internet. Some contradictory.

To top everything off, our only other full time employee was on sabbatical during our time without an ED, and the planning for their absence was happening alongside our ED transition planning and hiring process.