



October 21, 2016

To: Board of Directors and Alliance Staff
From: Al Todd, Executive Director 
Subject: Executive Leadership Transition

I know this will come as a shock to some but the time has come for me to consider moving on and to focus on my my retirement. I am asking the Board of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to begin the process to replace me as Executive Director and plan for a transition to new leadership.

First, I am not leaving immediately and I plan to work closely with the Board over the next 12 months to recruit my replacement and to work with the Board, staff and new Executive Director to ensure a positive and productive transition of leadership.

Please know that I consider myself very lucky to have had the privilege of serving as the ED of the Alliance over these last 5+ years. During my tenure, I have been fortunate to work with strong and passionate Board Members, a creative, dedicated, young and inspiring staff, and a variety of very supportive partners. The combination of these elements along with lots of hard work have made it possible to overcome substantial organizational challenges and I believe reestablish the Alliance as a visible, respected, trusted, and confident organization with a clear mission and a portfolio of diverse and effective programs. To be a member of the Alliance staff, a part of its rich history and purpose, and immersed in the unique collaborative culture of this organization, has been one of the most positive and highly rewarding experience of my life.

But change is inevitable...and hard. This decision did not come lightly but I do believe there are many reasons why now is the right time for me and maybe for the Alliance. I will continue to support the Alliance as much as I can but it is time to make room for a new leader.

Building from the solid foundation we have created together over the past 5+ years, I am confident that the Alliance is in a strong positive position to weather a change in leadership and take advantage of the positive aspects of such a change: new vision, new energy, new ideas, new connections, and new talents.

Planning for Transition

Leadership is a critical element of any successful organization and periods of transition are not without risk. I admit that the overall statistics in the NGO world are a bit scary. According to studies, fifty percent (50%) of newly hired ED's fail or leave within the first 18-24 months. However, most leadership transitions occur unexpectedly, or with little pre-planning, and statistics also show that the success of leadership transitions can be greatly increased by taking the time to plan for succession in a deliberate and intentional way.

History of Leadership at the Alliance

Since its establishment in 1971, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay has only had 4 Executive Directors. This is unusual considering that the average tenure of an ED is about 5 years. For the Alliance, Fran Flanigan, Founder and first formal ED skews the average, having served for 24 years. Yet with its long history, and several changes in leadership, to my knowledge, the Alliance has never had a deliberate, planned and positive transition process. At this time we have the opportunity and time to ensure that such a process takes place.

Steps in the Transition Process

As a target for my transition, I think it is appropriate to have a new ED in place no later than the time of the 2017 Taste of the Chesapeake. I would fully expect that a new ED would be in place before that time, but this event will give us a great opportunity to publicly pass the baton and to show continuity, solidarity and support of the past and future leadership of the Alliance.

A. Ensure Communications

Change can create anxiety, concern, uncertainty and fear for some; maybe joy and excitement for others! Being transparent with everyone (partners, funders, staff, etc.) about our intent and process is a sign of confidence that the organization will manage this leadership transition with competence and patience. Most literature references recommend that some sort of announcement about a pending transition take place at least 6-12 months out. What we need to do:

- Inform Board and staff – taking place now
- Inform key partners/funders – have key meetings over the next few months (EPA, NFWF, KCF, CBT, USDA, key corporate sponsors (Altria, Dominion, Scotts, CBP Committees, etc.) and begin to publicly discuss the process this meeting.
- Make a formal announcement of the search process.

B. Conduct the Search

The Board will need to form a temporary committee to guide the search process and work with the Board Chair and Governance Committee to ensure a successful hiring process. The ED can serve as an ex-officio Member of the Search/Hiring Committee. The Committee will need to consider:

- Develop an up to date ED job description and identification of core competencies for use in recruiting candidates.
- Development of an Organizational “Profile” with history, goals, funding staff structure, key programs and future opportunities.
- Evaluate the option/need for hiring external search or transition support (consultants)
- A plan and timeline for recruitment, interviewing, selection and hiring
- Including process for staff involvement in candidate review
- Elements of recruitment (advertisement, social media, word of mouth, direct contact of potential candidates in the area, use of a recruiter, etc.)

C. Shore up areas of weakness

During the transition process, it is often desirable to take stock of what is going well and what elements of the organization's programs, management systems, and other strategic guidance may need review or shoring up prior to new leadership. While the refinement and clarification of internal management processes has been a major focus of my work over the past 5 years, there is still more to be done. Currently, we are working on several management areas:

- Employee Benefit Programs (long term plan)
- Grants management and tracking (substantial progress underway)
- Internal Coordination and Management Team Collaboration
- Comprehensive Development/Fundraising Planning (w/River Network)
- Better defining measures of performance (w/Program Committee)
- Improve legal contracting structure (model agreements)

The ED will work with Staff and consult with the Board Executive Committee to identify additional areas from the Strategic Plan and elsewhere that would benefit from increased review and guidance.

Mentoring/Advising/Program or Project Support

I would consider and welcome the opportunity to remain as a mentor to the new Director during the transition process and if they desire, after they are on the job. I think you know that I have a deep commitment to the success of the Alliance and would expect to be available to the new Director once they are in place.

I would also be interested in potentially assisting the Alliance as a special project or program advisor on where my experience, knowledge, or skills might be considered an asset either as a part-time or intermittent employee or as a contractor. Who knows, perhaps someday, I would join you on the Board.

Closing

Please accept my sincere gratitude for affording me the opportunity to serve for these last 5+ years and for your consideration of my request and proposal for transition. I remain dedicated to ensuring that the Alliance thrives. The Alliance will remain the best organization I know working for the future of the Chesapeake!