

GENERAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLAN

Florida Chapter STC

April 2018

As a volunteer organization, the Florida Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) relies on leaders who offer their time and skills to sustain its success. Since the 21st century technical communication work environment provides fewer management opportunities than to previous generations, the Florida Chapter and its leaders are obligated to learn and evolve their leadership styles with the support and consent of the chapter membership. If trained leaders cannot be found within the membership, they must be grown, then must share their experience with those that follow.

The Florida Chapter Leadership Succession Plan seeks to accelerate the development of future leaders and to sustain a viable statewide chapter. This plan identifies characteristics and criteria such that members can become confident, responsible leaders who then contribute to identification and growth of their successors.

This practice is not self-serving but mutually beneficial. Technical communicators who understand teamwork principles, who learn motivational skills, who have basic financial understanding, and who become confident public speakers are known to be more successful in their work, whether as employees or independent business people.

Chapter Leadership Structure

The governance of the Florida Chapter is set out in the current revision of the chapter's Bylaws document. The number of leadership positions exceeds the minimum requirements of STC. The Administrative Council consists of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Each serves as a voting director of the Chapter and serves a one-year term. The Immediate Past President also serves as a voting director. The Chapter may have as many additional directors as the Administrative Council authorizes and the membership elects. All directors have the authority and exercise the duties specified by the Administrative Council, and all have voting privileges.

The intent of this structure is to provide for strategic planning, presentation of educational activities, implementation of ongoing activities, management of finances and obligations, and accurate recordkeeping on behalf of the chapter. The addition of the Immediate Past President and multiple directors to the Administrative Council has the intent to capture the experience and advice of previous leaders and to avoid repetition of adverse decisions and their consequences.

The Bylaws provide for the vice president to take on the responsibilities of the president in cases of incapacity. If a director position becomes vacant, the Administrative Council may act to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the vacating director's term.

Identification of Candidates

The primary characteristics of a successful chapter officer are interest and commitment. In a volunteer organization such as STC, these are balanced with ability and the capacity to serve. In return, chapter officers gain experience in management issues and technique, and demonstrate professional commitment that may increase their value in the eyes of an employer.

It is clear, therefore, that a member who has never attended a chapter meeting nor responded to any attempt at outreach cannot be seriously considered for a leadership office. In the same way, a member who deals with exceptionally difficult work demands or family responsibilities cannot be expected to commit the time and focus needed for successful leadership.

The Florida Chapter has developed a measurement tool to assist in the identification of interest and participation. Established in 2002, the chapter's Active Membership Program creates a point-based reward system so that those who accomplish the work of the chapter can be honored. It also allows a member's participation and interest to be quantified and made visible.

Over time, chapter leaders have used the Active Membership Program to identify replacement candidates for outgoing officers and to suggest which members might best contribute in a chairmanship, product-focused, or future role. Since the Active Membership Program provides metrics for all members of the chapter, it offers definitive rather than subjective results and enhances the vision of our nominating process.

The role of director-at-large reflects concern that valued experience and irreplaceable corporate memory could be lost to the chapter. These roles are more than ceremonial and given an equal vote. The intent is that STC Fellows, Associate Fellows, and previous chapter officers can be encouraged to stay involved with the chapter, provide guidance to new leaders, and fill gaps as needed.

Leadership Development

Other tools aid our selection process and support the development of strong leadership characteristics. The *Fast-Start Leader's Guide* captures the experience of longstanding leaders who have served the Florida Chapter and can potentially enhance judgment early in a new leader's tenure. It is based on decades of success in building and sustaining various volunteer organizations, and it includes steps that led to multiple STC Chapter of Distinction honors over several years.

We measure ourselves using the Chapter's published core values that include Caring, Education, Excellence, Teamwork, Vision, and Volunteering.

Beginning in 2018, a formal mentoring program has been initiated to pair developing leaders with veteran chapter leaders. This ensures a relationship that provides a

convenient resource and ongoing discussion that strengthen the decision-making capabilities of current officers.

Implementation

Using its identification resources and leadership maturation programs, the intent of the Florida Chapter is to provide for assessment, development, and sustainment of qualified leadership.

Elected members of the Administrative Council are positioned to identify interest areas and skills of chapter members through interaction with them. The Active Membership Program then serves as an objective measurement of participation and interest areas. As openings occur on the Administrative Council, consensus can be gained with relative ease regarding potential candidates.

Annually, a Nominating Committee, acting independently with support of the Administrative Council, develops a slate of confirmed candidates to lead the chapter the following year. The committee relies on its own insights, advice from Administrative Council officers, and the data in the Active Membership Program to identify members to approach as officeholders.

While a goal is to move leaders through a progression of offices to prevent burnout and create the openings in which new members can serve, the limits of volunteer energy and readiness require the Florida Chapter to recognize that it is often preferable to have existing officers remain in place for a subsequent term.

However, within the Administrative Council, it is essential for the officers to informally monitor each others' levels of stress, distraction, and decline. Succession planning and leadership development work best at a gradual pace. It performs less well during a changeover crisis, compounding the cost of declining officer performance and potential alienation of a valued teammate and member.