

Cross Training – Succession Planning

As the severity of the H1N1 pandemic progresses, the need for a more flexible workforce will become imperative in sustaining an agency's essential functions. With the possibility of facing an absentee rate of up to 40% in the coming months – due to sick workers, those who need to stay home and care for others, or from those with conditions that make them at higher risk for complications from influenza and may be worried about coming to work – agencies need to have employees cross-trained to perform essential functions even if key staff are absent. Employees need to be aware of how and when they may be called upon to assume different or additional responsibilities in order to assist their agency in sustaining essential functions.

Agencies are responsible for developing the necessary procedures for sustaining their essential functions and incorporating them into their agency specific pandemic plan. Agencies may opt for changing business practices if needed to maintain essential operations (e.g. identifying alternative suppliers, prioritizing customers, or temporarily suspending some operations).

When developing a pandemic plan, an agency should consider essential functions and the positions required to provide those functions. Agencies should establish a management line of succession plan, which provides a list of predetermined alternates for key positions in the agency.

1. The succession plan should be three employees in depth, where possible. When an employee is identified as part of a succession plan, the agency may want to consider appropriate cross-training and delegation.
2. The succession plan should clearly identify the names of designated personnel and their regular titles and how they can be contacted.
3. The names and order of succession of designated personnel should be communicated to division and work unit personnel.
4. The plan should clearly set forth the powers and duties that will be performed and by whom. Agencies should predetermine the individuals who will have the delegated authority to make decisions and communicate that these individuals will have that authority to division and work unit personnel.
5. If all of the personnel identified for the line of succession are unavailable – which may be the case in small work units where there is a limited number of leadership personnel – the agency should provide for alternate lines of succession that identifies other personnel who can assume the powers and duties outside of the work unit. The line of succession plan should be updated whenever a pertinent staff change occurs.
6. Agencies should determine if those in the line of succession may need to be cross-trained in advance and provide such training where needed. Advance cross-training for essential functions is imperative. The agency may provide resources to train employees to perform other functions (DVDs, outside trainers, procedures manuals, teleconferencing, consultants, etc.).
7. Agencies should construct a method by which those in the line of succession will have access to information and needed items (computer passwords, calendars, office keys, etc.) should they take over leadership responsibilities.
8. Succession plans should be documented by divisions and/or work units and forwarded to the department director.
9. Agencies should consider what positions and employees can be deputized or provided with delegations of authority. Agencies should review statutory authorities and identify those individuals with the proper credentials that are empowered by law to carry out those statutory provisions.

Agencies should make certain that all employees – even those not performing essential functions – are trained about how they will be expected to carry out the pandemic plans.